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**Report to the Permanent Council by Mr. Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative  
and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human beings (SR/CTHB)**

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*The address to the Permanent Council will be excerpted from the following report*

- The OSCE is faced with an unprecedented level of human exploitation, fuelled and accelerated by a series of existential crises. However, the OSCE's expertise, composition and reach ideally position it to meet these persistent and emerging challenges and to support States in tackling the growing scourge of trafficking in human beings. This report provides a snapshot of the broad range of actions carried out in 2022 by the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator, their rationale and the strategies behind them.

**The war against Ukraine: risks of a trafficking crisis**

- Much of this year has been defined, for the OSCE in general but also with regard to trafficking in human beings in Europe, by the **war against Ukraine**. Millions of Ukrainian people, mostly women and children, are now abroad and are very vulnerable to trafficking: the money they had when they left has fast started to dissipate, and the pressure is now on finding a job, a more stable accommodation, basic services. For the most part, the humanitarian crisis stemming from the war galvanized European societies, as communities banded together to support the **people fleeing Ukraine**. The SR/CTHB's official visits to Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Latvia and Romania recorded unprecedented outpouring of support and efforts by governments. It was particularly encouraging to see strong and comprehensive policy responses such as the activation of the EU temporary protection directive.

- However, while many were working to support the refugees, something else was happening. Thanks to data from Thomson Reuters, the OSCE discovered a significant **spike in online searches** – across multiple languages and countries in Europe - for explicit content and sexual services from Ukrainian women and girls. For example, global search traffic for “Ukrainian

escorts”, “Ukrainian refugee porn” and “Ukrainian rape” increased by 200-600% since the end of February. One of the early, measurable reactions in Europe to the humanitarian crisis were the attempts by men to sexually access the women fleeing the conflict. This is the manifestation in data of a **highly gendered and toxic demand** for sexual services extracted from vulnerability.

- Because human trafficking is a financially motivated crime, this spike in demand serves as a strong incentive for traffickers to recruit and exploit Ukrainian women at scale. They see a business opportunity, and they act on it. The OSCE has been monitoring some of the chats and social media channels used by Ukrainian refugees to find jobs or shelter in Europe and it recorded **numerous attempts to recruit** women and girls, including openly underage, who just needed to “talk to men”, “be friendly”, maybe “in front of a camera”, and “accompany” clients in “the best clubs” in Europe. This is where traffickers operate and thrive: right at **the intersection between vulnerabilities and demand**. The humanitarian crisis created by the war against Ukraine showed clearly both elements, and is in some tragic sense is **a microcosm of the growing challenge of human exploitation** facing the OSCE region and the whole world.

- To respond to this situation, the SR/CTHB and his Office worked on multiple fronts. The mentioned visits to **bordering and neighbouring countries** were instrumental to assess the situation and promote crucial anti-trafficking measures. Some of these visits were conducted in partnership with OSCE Parliamentary Assembly leadership, to maximize the efforts on the political front and utilize to the fullest the rich OSCE toolbox.

- The Office issued two sets of **policy recommendations**. The [first one](#), more comprehensive, covered immediate prevention measures and responses to pressing needs of persons seeking refuge as well as medium-term policy and legislative measures to protect these people, prevent and mitigate their vulnerabilities to trafficking and to enhance the preparedness of anti-trafficking mechanisms. The [second set](#) looked in detail at the risks of trafficking in the **digital sphere**, and provided recommendations on how to combat the growing phenomenon of online recruitment, advertisement and exploitation of victims.

- Prevention takes many forms, and one of them is equipping at-risk populations with tools to avoid traffickers’ tricks and dangers. In partnership with Thomson Reuters, the OSR/CTHB set up **a website containing critical information**, in Ukrainian and Russian, about how to spot the warning signs of traffickers, how to minimize risks and how and where to get help

depending on the country. The website was launched with a digital campaign - the “[BeSafe](#)” **campaign** that was supported by a number of high-level officials from numerous OSCE participating States, international organizations and the anti-trafficking community.

- With the war continuing and vulnerabilities compounding, risks of trafficking will only grow worse, particularly in a time of economic uncertainty. To respond to the growing needs for support from OSCE participating States, the Office set up a major **extra-budgetary project**, designed to assist States scale-up their response to trafficking in this challenging humanitarian situation. The Project is operational in several countries already, with workshops to support progress on implementing the OSR/CTHB policy recommendations.

- From an anti-trafficking perspective, this crisis demonstrates that when countries want, when the **political will** to protect vulnerable people is there, they can serve vulnerable people at the level and at the scale that is required. Governments across the region put impressive efforts into accommodating and protecting millions of people in need. In addition, progress and growing commitment are registered in many other areas, from prevention of labour exploitation in supply chains to ensuring better criminal accountability for traffickers. The single greatest ingredient against the growing problem of trafficking in human beings today remains **political will**. When governments prioritize the fight against trafficking and exploitation, they can be ambitious and effective. This is the level of response that is needed all the time for every vulnerable group.

- At the same time, despite these great efforts, the **OSCE area is still not** combating human trafficking and exploitation at the scale that is required. The current anti-trafficking framework is too modest (in ambition, resources and policies) to adequately cope with the growing problem of trafficking today. While the current humanitarian crisis witnessed a much stronger policy and programmatic response, it also shed a light on this harsh reality, providing a snapshot of the crucial and largely-unaddressed issues that must be prioritized across the OSCE area: **demand** as a pull factor; **technology** as a facilitator; the need for adequate **protection measures**; and, as cases start to emerge, the need to ensure **criminal accountability** for perpetrators and justice for victims. These four areas remain the main challenges in the global fight against trafficking in human beings, and central anti-trafficking priorities of the OSCE going forward. This is particularly relevant when considering that the problem of trafficking in human beings keeps growing, in the OSCE area and worldwide. Just few weeks ago, the International Labour Organization published its newest report, indicating that the number of

victims of trafficking or forced marriage globally went up from 40 to 50 million people in just 5 years, which means that 1 out of 150 people in the world today is basically a slave. This demonstrates the need to double-down on efforts and investments.

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- The key areas mentioned above (demand, technology, protection, prosecution and political will) also emerged as crucially important from the [Survey Report of efforts to implement OSCE anti-trafficking commitments](#) the Office published in July (later, “the Survey”). The Report provides a comprehensive snapshot of where the OSCE region is making progress on implementing common anti-trafficking commitments, where it is falling short, and what areas need urgent attention.

### **Technology-facilitate trafficking**

- One such area is technology. In a decade, **technology** has become the single greatest facilitator of human trafficking, serving as a crucial tool for traffickers to recruit, advertise, control and exploit their victims. In the previous section of the report, it emerged clearly how traffickers and users misuse technology at the cost of vulnerable populations. This problem is particularly dangerous for children: 2021 was the worst year on record for online child exploitation, and the number of child abuse images and videos being commercialized online is skyrocketing year after year. Against this backdrop, **policy action** has been slow: the Survey showed that only 7 OSCE participating States have taken the crucial step of making **technology companies criminally liable** for knowingly facilitating or supporting human trafficking, and only 14 States require those companies to report trafficking cases on their platform. This is far too little compared to the scale of the problem today.

- To support States scale up their response, earlier this year the Office published a first-of-its-kind [paper on policies](#) for States to keep pace with the **growing misuse of technology**. It contains extensive analysis of the problem and policy recommendations on how to tackle it. The Office is now working to turn this analysis into practice through workshops and consultations with legislative bodies and anti-trafficking authorities across the OSCE region. And it is working on a **report on high-risk websites** identified within the OSCE region, as

well as a training curriculum and **handbook for law enforcement** to effectively investigate these crimes.

## **Demand**

- Another key persisting challenge is the reduction of the **demand fostering exploitation**. Traffickers profits increased five-fold in the last 15 years to \$150 billion per year. To help put this number into perspective: if human trafficking was a country, it would be the 55<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. In the OSCE area, human trafficking profits are larger than the whole national economy of 33 OSCE participating States. Every day, individuals, businesses and governments pay, knowingly or unknowingly, for goods and services extracted from trafficking victims. It is time to confront this demand fueling trafficking: we must **stop paying for trafficking**.

- This is an area where the OSCE has gained a leading role in the global anti-trafficking work. On the **labour exploitation** side, in 2022 the Office continued strengthening its advocacy work and support to States. It organized numerous national and regional workshops and conferences (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and in Uzbekistan) to foster approaches that advance **human rights due diligence** in supply chains. There is great interest across the OSCE region on these innovative approaches, and the progress States are making on this front was also shown by the Survey, which highlighted that 30 OSCE States have now policies on **public procurement** (twice the number in 2015). The frontier is now to require private companies to take action on forced labour in their supply chains. The Survey shows that today, only 5 States in the OSCE region do that. This is the future of the fight against labour exploitation - the scale of the problem is such that States are not going to prosecute their way out of this problem; what's needed is to supplement prosecution efforts with strategic approaches that look at and leverage **market-size forces**.

- When it comes to trafficking for the purpose of **sexual exploitation**, the approach must be similar – if we want to stop trafficking, we need to **stop paying for it**. As noted above, demand is a principal driver of sexual exploitation. The time has come to address the collective passive acceptance of the huge market for sexual exploitation worldwide: nearly \$100 billion a year comes from sexual exploitation alone. This equates to about 2,000 transactions every minute with trafficking victims - with women and girls (and men and boys) who – by definition - did not choose to be there.

- Fifty-six OSCE participating States have an international legal obligation to address demand, however, in analysing the OSCE landscape on this, we could find no criminal justice or prevention initiatives to discourage the demand that fosters sexual exploitation in at least 19 OSCE participating States. And in many of the others, action is still **falling well short of the scale** of the problem. The result? The ILO global estimates showed a **31% increase** in the number of victims for sexual exploitation compared to only five years ago. It is time for a broad, societal, historic, **change in approach**: it is time to implement ambitious programs and policies - from education to awareness to criminal justice measures - that will start reducing those numbers and the harm hidden behind those numbers. Last year the Office published the definitive [paper on demand](#) and it is now bringing its insights and recommendations to States to help improve their responses.

## **Protection**

- Another major persisting challenge in anti-trafficking efforts today is insufficient **protection** systems for victims of trafficking: starting from low victim identification to lack of tailored services for rehabilitation and reintegration. To counter these challenges, particularly in the wake of the humanitarian crisis that was unfolding in Europe, the Office held its annual **Alliance conference on protection** last April. As highlighted in the [Conference report](#) that was circulated two weeks ago, the event took stock of existing protection systems and their capacity to provide comprehensive assistance to **all victims of human trafficking**. It addressed the myriad vulnerabilities that must be accounted for to ensure State protection efforts are inclusive and effective; it outlined persisting gaps in State identification and assistance mechanisms; and proposed potential solutions for filling these gaps.

- A few key persisting points when it comes to protection. First, States are still not doing a good enough job at **identifying and protecting victims of trafficking** when one considers that less than 1% of all trafficking victims is ever identified, and too few of those who are identified receive the services and support they need. Second, there is a growing need to separate **assistance to victims** from their **cooperation** with **criminal justice** investigations, as this remains a major obstacle to effective identification and protection. The Office is now working on a specific paper on the “**social path**” of identification to help States tackle this challenge. Third, on **children**: trafficking in children continues to be on the rise. In 2004, 13% of identified victims of trafficking were children. By 2018, that number had risen to 34%, with

the COVID pandemic pushing for a further increase. Yet our Survey Report concluded that in the last 5 years, very little policy action has taken place in this area. Clearly, vigorous measures against all forms of **child exploitation offline and online** must be taken. This year, the Office continued working on this, partnering with the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children to gather anti-trafficking authorities and child protection agencies to discuss the consequences for children of the humanitarian crisis unfolding as a result of the war against Ukraine.

### **Prosecution**

- In concert with protection is the topic of **prosecution** - the need to ensure criminal accountability for the harm traffickers inflict on their victims. In 2022, the Office continued implementing the **prosecution strategy** it launched at the 2020 Alliance, focusing on equipping criminal justice practitioners with the tools and skills they need to conduct effective investigations (including **financial investigations**) and prosecutions. And it continued engaging with the **judiciary** through education events and development of a training module for judicial academies to help foster greater understanding about key elements in trafficking crimes (such as victims' trauma, for example) that too often result in low or suspended sentences.
- Prosecution and protection are **two sides of the same coin**. Protection is not only an obligation related to the rights of victims, but also an effective law enforcement strategy to ensure strong evidence for a case. Likewise, prosecution is not only about enforcing the law but also an important avenue for the protection of victims' rights. This is why the OSR/CTHB views these two topics as deeply intertwined, and is designing its activities accordingly. In 2022, the Office supported **national simulation-based trainings** in Georgia, in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan to foster **victim-centred approaches** among prosecution and protection professionals and to help them work together. And it organized a series of Peer-to-Peer events to foster gender-sensitive approaches, putting last year's [paper on this topic](#) into practice to ensure anti-trafficking practitioners across the OSCE region are equipped to serve and assist all victims in a way that fully respects their needs and circumstances.
- After years of decline, for the first time in years in 2021 there was an **increase in the number of prosecution** of trafficking cases in the OSCE area. It is still a drop in the ocean, but that drop is slowly growing, and the OSR/CTHB remains committed to **further assist OSCE**

**participating States** strengthen their criminal justice system in order to deliver justice to victims.

### **Partnerships**

- This year, the SR/CTHB visited a number of countries, and enjoyed **ever greater cooperation** and partnership from States' anti-trafficking and political authorities. Since the last report to this Permanent Council, he had **official visits** (or full-fledged 'country visits') to Hungary, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, U.S., and Uzbekistan. He also exchanged more and more with **members of Parliaments** across the region, including through a growing and fruitful cooperation with the OSCE PA and its leadership, and he had the opportunity to provide expert advice on some the [most crucial areas](#) in urgent need for legislative changes, participate in hearings or offer tailored support on anti-trafficking legislations.

- The increasing and positive exchanges with participating States' political and anti-trafficking authorities indicate that the governments in the OSCE region are ready to significantly step up and **turn the tide in the fight against trafficking** in human beings. In order to do this, anti-trafficking authorities need three crucial things: **resources, adequate policies and laws, effective structures**. Next year, the Alliance Conference will focus on these elements, to support the paradigm change that the fight against trafficking globally is experiencing: from a law enforcement-only approach to a whole of society approach that recognizes this as one of the major challenges of our time: ending exploitation, and granting freedom and justice to tens of millions of people who continue to enjoy neither.

- In closing, sincere thanks go to the **Chair in Office** for its unwavering and precious support, and the **Secretary General** for her powerful anti-trafficking advocacy and for leading on important internal reforms – including on OSCE procurement and staff instructions against sexual exploitation - that have placed the OSCE in a prominent role among international organizations in 'leading by example'. Thanks also go to Cyprus, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, UK, US, for generously seconding staff to the Office and for donating to the its extra-budgetary projects. The **collective support** of OSCE participating States, in Vienna as well as in capital, is most appreciated and useful in allowing the Office to operate at the ambition level the growing challenge of trafficking requires.