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**Report to the Permanent Council by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (SR/CTHB)**

**22 October 2026**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Delegates,**

I am pleased to address the Permanent Council and to report on the work of my Office. This is an opportunity to review what we have achieved together, examine the changing threats facing participating States, and explain how we are responding to your call for a streamlined, focused, and effective OSCE.

Trafficking in human beings is a **direct security concern**. It sustains criminal networks, generates illicit profits, exploits vulnerabilities, and undermines the rule of law. Its growing convergence with financial crime, cybercrime, and drug trafficking makes the consequences extend well beyond individual cases. Effective responses must therefore combine targeted prevention, victim protection, and the investigation and prosecution of those who profit from exploitation.

This year also marks the **twentieth anniversary of Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/06**, which strengthened the mandate of the Office as a **cross-cutting structure** within the OSCE. That decision continues to guide our co-ordination role across the Organization's three dimensions. Our role is to support participating States in implementing their commitments, identify emerging challenges, facilitate co-operation, and provide policy advice and practical assistance adapted to national needs and circumstances.

After three years in this role, my priorities remain consistent: an approach that addresses all forms of trafficking, including emerging ones; policies and practices informed by victims and survivors; and stronger connections between prevention, protection, and prosecution. The following key objectives guide our work: 1) we need to change the cost-benefit calculation for criminals so they face a higher price and risk of detection than the extraordinary amounts of money they make through exploiting others; 2) criminal accountability for traffickers is more effective if victims are identified early and receive the care they need and when digital and financial tools are used to combat the crime and protect victims; and 3) we need to punish the criminals behind the exploitation, not the victims. This report explains how those priorities and objectives have shaped our work in 2026 and how we intend to sustain them under increasingly difficult operating conditions.

## Keeping the Office focused on core priorities

A focused OSR/CTHB is one that directs its resources towards areas where participating States need assistance and where the OSCE can make a distinctive contribution. I have organized our work around support to national institutions, dialogue and co-operation, the identification and analysis of emerging trafficking risks, and practical tools and technical assistance to address them. Our research, capacity-building, country visits, and other high-level engagements serve these purposes together rather than as isolated activities.

Throughout 2026, the Office conducted more than 100 activities in 42 participating States between January and October alone. These encompassed 9 research paper launches[1], 40 national and regional training workshops, and 43 contributions to OSCE policy dialogue and international partners' events. In addition, since my last report to the Permanent Council, I have conducted two country visits (the Netherlands and Albania), and two follow-up visits (Italy and Mongolia), along with nine official visits to participating States and a Partner for Co-operation, to help strengthen national anti-trafficking policies. These activities reflect the range of assistance requested from the Office.

Across these activities, national ownership is central, emphasizing the importance of connecting political commitments with operational practice. Trainings develop skills, curricula, and professional networks that participating States can sustain. Research helps authorities adjust their policies and target their resources. Country visits provide a basis for continued dialogue and practical follow-up, as well as identifying promising practices. Partnerships make these functions stronger by combining expertise and ensuring synergies.

## Using evidence to guide priorities and national responses

The 2026 Survey Report, launched this March, provides an important basis for prioritization. With record input from 55 participating States, it offers a progress assessment against earlier survey benchmarks and identifies progress in national frameworks, alongside persistent gaps in implementation.

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[1] National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator: A leading role in State's anti-trafficking response; Following the money 2.0 - A collaborative approach to human trafficking investigations involving virtual assets; Trafficking into cyber scam operations: Implications for the OSCE region; The human cost of crime - The harrowing link between drug trafficking and human trafficking; Survivor and Trauma-Informed Model Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) Guidance for Frontline Responders to Identify Victims and Cases of Trafficking for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation; Survey report 2026 - Tracking implementation of the OSCE commitments and recommended actions to combat trafficking in human beings; Report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Kari Johnstone, following the country visit to the Netherlands - 27-31 October 2025; From policy to protection - Promising practices and lessons from OSCE country visits (2021-2025).; Integrating crisis-related provisions into anti-trafficking National Action Plans (NAPs).

The publication From policy to protection - Promising practices and lessons from OSCE country visits (2021-2025), released in September, complements the landscape by examining promising practices and lessons from country visits. It brings national experience into a wider discussion of prevention, victim protection, and prosecution. Its purpose is to help participating States learn from approaches already being applied elsewhere and adapt those approaches to their own institutional and legal settings.

Country visits remain an essential part of this process. The country visit to Albania in March was accompanied by engagement on labour trafficking and the role of labour inspection. Follow-up country visits to Italy in January and Mongolia in June, as well as official visits to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in February, allowed us to examine progress against earlier recommendations and discuss continuing challenges, as well as areas to deepen partnership and technical assistance. The report on the Netherlands country visit, published in September, provides another basis for sustained engagement with national authorities. In November, a planned country visit to Montenegro and a follow-up visit to Denmark will provide further opportunities to review implementation of OSCE anti-trafficking commitments and identify priorities for tailored support to national authorities.

**Addressing forced criminality as a security and protection concern**

Trafficking for exploitation in criminal activities, or forced criminality, has become a major focus of my Office this year because it is growing fast with devastating impact and significant complexity. People compelled to commit offences may first encounter authorities as suspected criminals, rather than victims. Exploitation can therefore remain hidden within investigations into drug offences, fraud or other crimes, while those directing the activity avoid accountability. Recognizing this possibility is essential to both effective law enforcement and victim protection.

The 26th Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference, held in April, focused on the rise of forced criminality and the security gaps it creates. The conference brought together governments, practitioners, civil society, international organizations, private-sector actors, and experts with lived experience to examine identification, protection, and criminal justice responses. Its discussions brought renewed focus on the need for consistent application of the non-punishment principle. Authorities need to identify when an offence has been committed as a consequence of trafficking and ensure that the person's exploitation is properly considered. A stronger response to organized crime depends on directing investigations towards those exercising control and receiving the profits, while providing appropriate protection and access to justice for victims.

The Office's publications help States and partners put these goals into practice. The Human Cost of Crime examines the relationship between drug trafficking and human

trafficking, including the exploitation of vulnerable people in criminal roles. Our research findings highlight an urgent need for more coherent and co-ordinated response across the OSCE region, one that bridges drug policy, anti-trafficking efforts, and social protection systems. Through its engagement in the Council of Europe's Pompidou Group, the OSCE now brings an anti-trafficking perspective into drug policy discussions, helping strengthen links between drug control, victim protection, and responses to forced criminality. To assist national authorities, we also developed the survivor- and trauma-informed model standard operating procedures to guide frontline responders in effectively identifying victims and cases of trafficking for criminal exploitation. Together, these tools connect analysis of criminal methods with the practical responses by law enforcement and service providers.

Work on trafficking into cyber scam operations provides a further example of criminal convergence. The Office's exploratory assessment, published in April, showed growing implications for the OSCE region with at least 40% of participating States affected by human trafficking in scam operations; and it warns authorities to examine recruitment methods, commercial structures, exploitation, and financial flows together. Our regional workshop in Montenegro in June, with the support of four OSCE Field Operations and ODIHR, was also an opportunity to examine both cyber scam operations in the Western Balkans and the misuse of apparently legitimate business arrangements.

Building on our findings on trafficking into cyber scam operations, the Office established a new partnership with the Global Anti-Scam Alliance (GASA) through engagement in its Europe Summit in Lisbon in June and America Summit in San Francisco in September. This partnership brings an anti-trafficking perspective into the broader response to scams, emphasizing the identification and protection of people coerced into conducting them. We are now seeking to develop this co-operation further through targeted joint activities.

Prevention must also reach people before recruitment or exploitation takes place. The youth resilience training in Sarajevo, organized in September with the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the Secretary General, helped participants recognize fraudulent job offers and use open-source verification tools. Young people worked with practitioners and lived experience experts to formulate innovative proposals for participating States, including peer-to-peer prevention content. This connects the Office's analysis of emerging threats with practical knowledge that young people can share within their own communities as we believe young people are the most effective advocates with their peers.

These multiple facets of forced criminality were also brought to different audiences through partnerships with the Bali Process Ministerial Conference in January, the Second Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the Fight Against Organised Crime in the OSCE Region

in May, and the OSCE Group of Friends on Youth and Security in June. Co-operation with the Council of Europe also addresses the critical importance of timely victim identification and consistent application of the non-punishment principle, including in complex cases and detention settings. Further joint guidance with the Council of Europe on the non-punishment principle is in progress as a priority for the coming months.

**Strengthening financial investigations**

Financial investigations are central to disrupting trafficking networks. They help authorities identify the people who organize and profit from exploitation, uncover connections between apparently separate cases, and gather evidence that can corroborate victim testimony. Used effectively, financial intelligence can also reveal exploitation earlier, support the identification of people who have not yet been recognized as victims, and prevent further harm.

This year, we advanced this work through Following the Money 2.0 - A collaborative approach to human trafficking investigations involving virtual assets, published in March. It examines the misuse of virtual assets in trafficking-related financial flows and offers a six-step approach, including red-flag indicators, for financial institutions, financial intelligence units, and criminal justice practitioners. It connects the digital and financial footprints of trafficking with practical opportunities for detection and investigation. This is increasingly important as criminal networks operate across jurisdictions and use digital services to conceal their activities.

Our joint side event at the Global Fraud Summit in Vienna brought together OSR/CTHB, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, and the Transnational Threats Department. It examined the misuse of virtual assets in scams, trafficking, and related financial crimes, with contributions from law enforcement, financial intelligence units, international organizations, and the private sector. This provided a concrete example of how expertise across the Secretariat can support a coherent response to criminal convergence. The Office also brought the financial dimension of trafficking into discussions at the Munich Security Conference and major anti-financial crime forums and platforms such as the European Anti-Financial Crime Summit of the Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Intelligence, the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS), and the Nasdaq Verafin's Global Financial Crime Report. This close and strategic engagement has contributed to prioritizing anti-trafficking efforts within the broader anti-financial crime agenda, highlighting human trafficking as a major predicate offence that generates large illicit financial flows. The increasingly frequent inclusion of financial intelligence units (FIUs) and financial-sector actors in anti-trafficking efforts is another promising development. Together, these steps provide a stronger basis for translating commitment into co-ordinated action to detect

exploitation earlier, disrupt illicit profits, and break the business model that allows trafficking networks to thrive.

In September, we contributed to the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague and the Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Crypto Assets in Luxembourg. These targeted outreach opportunities connected anti-trafficking expertise with actors whose regulatory, investigative, and commercial decisions can help detect and disrupt illicit financial flows.

Country-specific engagement with financial-sector stakeholders, including in Montenegro together with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro and the Ministry of the Interior, has complemented our policy outreach. This practical dimension remains essential. Raising awareness at the international level must be followed by stronger information exchange and usable indicators at the national level. Our continuing priority is to help financial and criminal justice authorities recognize trafficking-related risks and work together on cases, while ensuring that the protection of victims remains part of the response.

**Responding to technology facilitated trafficking**

Digital technologies affect recruitment, advertising, control, exploitation, and the movement of criminal proceeds. Social media, online job portals, gaming platforms, messaging applications, and subscription-based content platforms create opportunities for traffickers to reach potential victims and obscure their activities. Artificial intelligence can make deceptive content easier to produce and scale. At the same time, responsible use of technology can assist detection, analysis, and prevention of the crime and help identify and protect victims.

Our work in this area combines research with practical support to national stakeholders. In 2026 alone, 11 activities brought together more than 330 participants from 20 participating States. For example, in February, the Office delivered national training-of-trainers activities on proactive online investigations in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In June, inspired by the success of these events, Kazakhstan requested a further training, gathering participants from different institutions and organizations, to address online indicators, the misuse of technology - including artificial intelligence, open-source intelligence techniques, and ways to incorporate the Office's model curriculum into police education.

These three national training-of-trainers activities illustrate our emphasis on sustainability. Training academy instructors can help maintain expertise within national systems and make it available to successive groups of practitioners. The intended result extends beyond the individuals attending a workshop: it supports a stronger institutional capacity to understand emerging methods, recognize digital evidence, and respond to technology-facilitated exploitation.

Policy engagement accompanied this operational work. A parliamentary roundtable in Kyrgyzstan in February examined legislative responses to technology-facilitated trafficking and options for national follow-up. The two-day workshop in Mongolia in June brought together participants and combined parallel discussions on technology and supply chains with a joint examination of trafficking into cyber scam operations. This format helped participants examine the same criminal activity from regulatory, investigative, and protection perspectives. The Office also engaged civil society and frontline responders. The Warsaw workshop in March in partnership with ODIHR considered how digital environments affect recruitment, control, and exploitation in the context of displacement from Ukraine[2].

This work builds on earlier partnerships since 2020 with Tech Against Trafficking, the Bali Process Regional Support Office, and INTERPOL, bringing diverse expertise to tackle trafficking in the digital era.

Over the past six years of implementation of the technology extrabudgetary project, we have made contributions to more than 30 legislative initiatives, the development or revision of 21 standard operating procedures or equivalent guidance, 11 new multi-stakeholder partnerships, and the integration of technology-facilitated trafficking into training curricula by 11 institutions. We have also mapped more than 4,000 online platforms presenting a high risk of exploitation. Nineteen participating States have also reported taking on this initiative and mapped online platforms with high risks of trafficking in human beings. The OSCE mapping has also triggered a trafficking investigation in the Netherlands and informed national research and policy in Spain and Scotland. To give you another illustration of our impact, the UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's 2026 report "Behind the Profile," on sexual exploitation and trafficking through adult services websites, was developed drawing on the list of at-risk online platforms provided by my Office. The Commissioner's report produced concrete regulatory change: following the concerns it raised, Ofcom, the UK's online safety regulator, recognised third-party control of adult-services adverts as a trafficking indicator.

The impact monitoring carried out by my Office over the past two years records further national developments. This includes 40 States proposing to incorporate technology-facilitated trafficking into national action plans, nine initiating policies or laws, five drafting criminal-code amendments, and three drafting legislation addressing online platforms.

[2] Workshop for CSOs and frontline responders on identifying and responding to technology-facilitated trafficking in Context of Ukraine

Looking ahead, the proposed third project phase of our technology extrabudgetary project, starting in 2027, would bring digital and financial investigations more closely together. It envisages evidence-based research, practical training and tools, and regional co-operation adapted to new methods of exploitation. We will also continue examining risks in gaming environments and approaches to prevention that involve young people. One key takeaway from our 2026 Survey Report is the growing digital divide many participating States reported between criminals' misuse of technology and States' own capacities. Our purpose is to help national institutions maintain and build their capacity as technologies and criminal practices change rapidly.

**Turning partnerships into operational results**

At the same time, my Office fully leverages effective, impactful partnerships. We consistently seek to complement, connect, and add value. This is particularly important for CTHB because no single institution can address trafficking alone.

Operation CyberProtect III demonstrates the value of combining policy expertise, international police co-operation, and private-sector knowledge. Co-organized with INTERPOL in Lyon in May, the operation brought together 14 law-enforcement officers from seven European countries to examine trafficking and sexual exploitation facilitated through subscription-based content platforms. The operation resulted in the identification of 34 suspicious cases, 18 suspect profiles, and 27 potential victims. These provide concrete evidence of what a focused collaborative exercise can produce. The operation also helped participants examine how recruitment, control of online accounts, the misuse of artificial intelligence, coercion, payments, and platform architecture interact. It illustrated the importance of looking beyond individual advertisements and connecting information across websites, social media, and messaging services, and strengthening information-sharing among law enforcement bodies. Our engagement with INTERPOL builds on earlier CyberProtect activities and targeted seminars. This partnership continues to develop through Operation Storm Maker IV, targeting scam operations, which is under way in Tashkent as I present this report. At INTERPOL's invitation, the OSCE is partnering in the operation, providing expert contributions and financial support for participants from Central Asia. This co-operation combines INTERPOL's operational capabilities and international police networks with the OSCE's anti-trafficking expertise and regional outreach. It also builds links between Central Asian participating States, South East Asia, and East Asia, supporting the exchange of knowledge and information needed to address scam operations and their associated trafficking risks across regions. The OSCE–UNODC Joint Action Plan for 2026–2028 similarly identifies areas of strategic alignment, including emerging criminal convergence, gender-sensitive training, and safeguards in supply chains. Such frameworks help us

move from occasional co-operation to a more consistent programme of complementary assistance, while respecting each organization's mandate.

**Preventing labour trafficking in supply chains**

Labour trafficking in supply chains requires action across the recruitment and employment process. Exploitation can be obscured by subcontracting, recruitment intermediaries, and weak oversight. Workers may face deceptive terms, recruitment-related debts or barriers to accessing assistance. Prevention therefore needs to connect labour inspections, migration procedures, business responsibility, and criminal justice responses.

Through policy support, capacity-building, and international co-operation, our work places particular emphasis on responsible recruitment, ethical sourcing, labour migration, and human rights due diligence. The Office will soon release a third compendium that brings together more than 250 reference materials and promising practices, including legal frameworks, training resources, and toolkits that can be adapted to different stages of the supply chain. This year, my Office has also focused on responsible recruitment with the upcoming publication of a handbook to strengthen understanding of recruitment-related risks, including deceptive recruitment practices. Such resources can help authorities and businesses identify usable safeguards throughout their supply chains to be translated into procedures and monitored in practice.

Our country-level engagement in Albania, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina supports this approach, promoting responsible recruitment practices and supporting States in embedding anti-trafficking safeguards into labour migration and procurement frameworks and enhancing the capacities of labour inspectorates. This work also seeks to strengthen institutional capacity and encourage co-operation among public authorities, businesses, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. For example, the March roundtable in Albania, together with the OSCE Presence in Albania, focused on strengthening the role of the State Labour Inspectorate in detecting, preventing, and referring labour trafficking. The April seminar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, co-organized with the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, assessed labour migration and hospitality-sector risks, including recruitment intermediaries and seasonal employment. The May roundtable in Moldova co-organized with the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the Danish Institute for Human Rights brought together representatives from other OSCE participating States and civil society to share good practices and lessons learned from the development and implementation of National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights to inform Moldova's development of its plan.

We also continue to ensure that the OSCE's own procurement reflects the standards we encourage participating States to apply. This year, we welcomed a new joint post with OSCE Secretariat's procurement unit, ensuring that OSCE operations themselves do not contribute to trafficking, while also modelling practices for participating States and other international organizations. Through this role, the OSCE contributes to integrating anti-trafficking protections into public purchasing and using institutional purchasing power to promote responsible business practices. In September, OSR/CTHB and the Department of Management and Finance also organized the first All-OSCE Procurement Anti-Trafficking Action Plan Workshop in Istanbul. Procurement colleagues from executive structures, ODIHR, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities exchanged experience, examined implementation challenges, and identified opportunities to strengthen safeguards against labour trafficking in the goods and services the OSCE purchases. This internal work is complemented by the Office's role in the UN procurement task force addressing trafficking in supply chains. It provides a channel for sharing experience and encouraging consistent safeguards among international organizations.

Looking ahead, the next phase of our work will focus on high-risk industries, particularly tourism and sectors relying heavily on labour migration. At the same time, evolving labour migration trends are creating new vulnerabilities for migrant workers, reinforcing the need for accessible information, responsible recruitment practices, and effective safeguards against trafficking. We will continue to support participating States in building institutional capacity, as well as developing and implementing integrated National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights.

**Sustaining simulation-based training and national capacity**

Simulation-based training remains one of the Office's principal methods for strengthening multidisciplinary co-operation in practice. It brings together law enforcement, prosecutors, migration authorities, social services, labour inspectors, financial investigators, and civil society organizations to work through realistic situations together. Participants test procedures, identify gaps, and understand each other's roles in a controlled learning environment.

Over ten years, the programme's cumulative reach has included 26 simulations involving more than 1,500 practitioners from 55 participating States and seven Partners for Co-operation. These figures illustrate the breadth of an established methodology. The 2026 external evaluation has provided insights into the project's impact as well as ways to further strengthen national ownership through skill retention and enhanced knowledge networks in focus of the next phase of the extrabudgetary project.

As illustrated with our recent co-operation with Romania and International Justice Mission (IJM), we have pursued the move towards exercises developed with national authorities and partners. The objective is to adapt scenarios to national legislation, institutional responsibilities, and operational needs. Shared design can make exercises more relevant to practitioners and support wider use of the methodology within national training systems. This makes them more sustainable, eventually independent of the OSCE.

In Central Asia, we are preparing the third regional simulation exercise, provisionally planned for 2027, with a moot trial component for the first time, to help connect identification and investigation with the evidentiary and procedural requirements of prosecution.

Our capacity-building initiatives also extend beyond simulations. An April seminar in Turkmenistan examined multidisciplinary victim identification and access to assistance. In September, the Office delivered sessions at the 42nd Border Management Staff Course in Bari, helping border professionals better understand emerging trafficking trends and their role in detecting cases. Co-operation with specialist training institutions, including CEPOL (European Police College), helps embed anti-trafficking expertise within broader professional education.

**Addressing trafficking risks in crises and Ukraine recovery**

The war in Ukraine and the resulting displacement remain major concerns related to CTHB mandate. Trafficking risks change over time: the needs of people in immediate flight differ from those of people in prolonged displacement or returning to communities undergoing recovery. Anti-trafficking responses must therefore remain updated and adapt to humanitarian protection needs, reconstruction, and institutional preparedness.

Since the start of the war, our wider crisis-response work has involved engagement with Ukraine and nearly 40 participating States hosting Ukrainian refugees, alongside civil society, international organizations, and private-sector partners. Cumulative programme reporting records over 110 workshops, trainings, and consultations reaching more than 6,000 professionals, a range of professions responsible for identification, referral, protection, detection, and prosecution, as well as policy development.

We also continue leveraging non-traditional partnerships to deliver better impact. Following our engagement with International Union of Railways (UIC) and the workshops for Polish railways security guards in 2025, the Office partnered with two major Polish railway companies and the Ministry of Interior and Administration of Poland as the National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator, to conduct a country-wide “Be Safe” awareness-raising campaign on human trafficking risks for Ukrainian refugees. The campaign spanned more than 30 key railway stations and platforms across Poland, including border crossing points and station premises, reaching over 600,000 passengers daily, and

involved regional and municipal authorities, police premises, labour inspectorates, social support centres, and educational and vocational facilities. To date, about 60,000 users benefited from a "Be Safe" digital awareness campaign, while overall the campaign reached over 25 million people, including over 3 million Ukrainians. This work was acknowledged as a positive practice in the Recommendations for Combatting Human Trafficking on the Railways issued by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and International Union of Railways (UIC), with substantial contributions from my Office.

Our policy work encourages States to incorporate crisis provisions into national anti-trafficking action plans and anti-trafficking safeguards into emergency response plans. Planning in advance can clarify responsibilities, maintain referral pathways, and help authorities anticipate heightened risks when regular systems come under pressure. The lesson extends beyond one crisis and is relevant to conflict, large-scale displacement, and other emergencies. In this regard, the Issue Brief on Integrating Crisis-Related Provisions into Anti-Trafficking National Action Plans that we recently released, highlights positive scalable practices to enhance preparedness of the national anti-trafficking mechanisms based on lessons learned from previous crisis situations.

A major development was the launch of the "Recovery & Empowerment Systems To Overcome Risk and Exploitation" (RESTORE) Ukraine Alliance at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdańsk in June. At the initiative of Austria, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Ukraine, and with expert input from my Office, the RESTORE Ukraine Alliance brings governments, international organizations, businesses, donors, and civil society together to prevent trafficking and exploitation during reconstruction. Aligning our crisis-response work with the need to protect people during recovery, the RESTORE Ukraine Alliance's priorities include safeguards in procurement and supply chains, responsible recruitment, victim identification, and oversight of high-risk sectors. Its purpose is to assess risks and integrate prevention and protection at an early stage, when reconstruction arrangements are being designed, rather than respond only after exploitation has occurred. Participating States and partners are already using this platform to link their recovery commitments with practical measures protecting workers and communities.

**Placing protection and survivor expertise within national systems**

The Office continues to promote the social path to identification and long-term assistance, under which access to support does not depend on a victim's willingness or ability to participate in criminal proceedings. In 2026, the February workshop in Italy, March international online roundtable, April seminar in Turkmenistan, and May Western Balkans online dialogue supported national authorities and practitioners to apply this approach. The Western Balkans online dialogue brought together anti-trafficking authorities, social protection actors, criminal justice practitioners, and NGOs from

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. It allowed institutions with different responsibilities to consider practical arrangements for identification and assistance. Such discussions address a recurring problem: people may require protection before they are ready to provide evidence, and some may not be able to participate in a prosecution.

Over the past three years, this work has progressed from dialogue towards actionable national measures to strengthen victim protection. Following the reviews of national and operational frameworks in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, and Latvia, recommended steps and measures were shared with national anti-trafficking co-ordinators for implementation. Two further workshops are planned in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Tajikistan in November this year, with practical recommendations to follow. The objective is to help participating States translate protection commitments into accessible support for all victims of trafficking.

Asylum and reception authorities are also often among the first institutions to encounter victims of trafficking, making their ability to recognize THB indicators and initiate referrals essential. The Office has therefore partnered with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) to promote better co-ordination and cohesion between anti-trafficking systems and asylum and reception procedures. By bringing our respective networks of anti-trafficking, asylum, and reception authorities together, we support participating States in strengthening early detection and improving multidisciplinary co-operation, so that potential victims can be identified and referred to appropriate protection services at the earliest opportunity.

Survivor expertise helps institutions understand where policy and practice work, and more importantly, where they fail. People with lived experience can identify barriers to assistance, explain recruitment and control methods, and assess whether procedures support recovery or expose people to further harm. Their involvement should be meaningful, ethical, and systematized, with appropriate attention to safety, consent, and remuneration. National advisory mechanisms can provide a sustained channel for participation in policy development, service design, and evaluation, rather than limiting survivor involvement to occasional conferences or telling their stories.

In this regard, our work complements ODIHR's engagement with the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC) and advocacy on national survivor advisory structures. Together, we have continued to promote survivor engagement and connect it with the quality of national responses. This year's Alliance Conference included lived experience perspectives in discussions of forced criminality and featured two of our major publications released this year, co-drafted and reviewed by experts with lived experience experts. Survivor-informed research and training help ensure that guidance reflects the realities encountered by victims rather than institutional assumptions alone.

As we prepare for joint guidance with the Council of Europe on the application of the non-punishment principle and criminal record and administrative fine relief, we held the first consultations with survivors/experts with lived experience, together with ODIHR and ISTAC, to ensure their input from the very initial stage of our research.

**Maintaining dialogue and co-operation across institutions and international organizations**

The activities described above demonstrate the important role of the OSCE Field Operations and Institutions in combating trafficking. Through our network of anti-trafficking focal points, we help connect national knowledge with specialized tools and policy expertise. This network remains particularly valuable as resources and institutional presence change.

Anti-trafficking also remains an area where participating States can find common ground. The challenges in combating the crime extend across borders and unite the OSCE region. Whatever broader political differences may exist, there is a shared interest in disrupting exploitation and protecting victims. The Office's convening role helps turn that common interest into exchanges among institutions that do not work together routinely.

The tenth annual meeting of National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinators and Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms, co-organized with the Council of Europe in Vienna in September, brought together more than 160 representatives from national authorities and partner institutions. It examined the integration of anti-trafficking responses into organized crime strategies, the role of local and regional authorities, and victim identification and non-punishment in detention settings. A regional roundtable for Central Asian representatives on the margins also provided space to discuss common challenges and opportunities for enhanced sub-regional co-operation.

Engagement with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is another important channel. The inter-parliamentary conference in Rome in May and the Winter and Autumn Meetings in Vienna and Andorra brought trafficking concerns into discussions of organized crime, migration, and legislative responses.

Beyond the OSCE, co-operation with the Council of Europe, UNODC, INTERPOL, European Union, and other international organizations enables us to combine different areas of expertise. Our leadership in the Alliance Experts Co-ordination Team (AECT) and the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) helps amplify the OSCE's regional experience into joint international guidance for States. Our work within the ICAT has contributed to address an often-overlooked reality: trafficking also occurs within national borders and requires sustained attention alongside cross-border cases, providing recommendations to help States recognize domestic patterns of exploitation and ensure that anti-trafficking systems reach victims whose exploitation may remain

hidden within their own communities.[3] Through our partnership with a broad coalition of partners, including 30 UN entities and other relevant international and regional organizations, we have also extended our collective impact to mobilize international attention against exploitation in cyber scam operations and other criminal activities, including drug trafficking, theft, and financial crime. These joint efforts reinforce participating States' responses with coherent and co-ordinated guidance and support.

**Improving communication and public understanding**

Communication supports prevention when it helps people recognize trafficking risks and understand how exploitation occurs. Through the *Human Trafficking Explained* initiative and wider communication efforts, we have worked to make the Office's expertise accessible. This complements policy and capacity-building work by reaching audiences beyond specialist institutions and encouraging a more informed public discussion.

The journalist training organized in April, in partnership with IJM, on the margins of the Alliance Conference, brought together 15 journalists from 9 participating States, to strengthen investigative skills and promote ethical, trauma-informed reporting. It examined trafficking indicators, forced criminality, survivor interviews, consent and safeguarding, and ways to avoid harmful stereotypes and re-traumatization. Better reporting can support recognition of exploitation and reduce the risk that victims of forced criminality are presented solely as offenders.

Our work on youth engagement has a related purpose. The June meeting of the Group of Friends on Youth and Security examined young people's exposure to digital recruitment and their role in prevention. The Sarajevo training in September and the upcoming Bishkek training in December bridge this policy discussion with practical verification skills and peer-to-peer content. Such activities are most useful when young people help shape the messages and tools intended for their communities.

**Priorities for the coming period**

Throughout the year, we have listened to your priorities. Resources are constrained, institutions face competing demands, and participating States expect practical assistance that makes a difference. Our response has been to concentrate on the mandate entrusted to us; strengthen national ownership; and use partnerships to connect expertise, share costs, and sustain results. The work I have outlined in this report demonstrates how a relatively small Office under significant financial and staffing constraints continues to support national institutions while bringing a comprehensive

[3] ICAT Issue Brief n.15: Addressing Internal Trafficking in Persons

security perspective to increasingly interconnected forms of trafficking and organized crime.

If we take inflation and purchasing power into account, our operating budget is in effect 70% less than ten years ago. To adapt, we have combined activities where appropriate, increased online delivery, reduced interpretation, and sought partner support and cost-sharing for training and events. The Office has also placed greater emphasis on internal monitoring and external evaluation so that decisions about future work draw on evidence of relevance and results.

In the long-term, these constraints will, however, affect the assistance we can offer and the continuity needed for work that develops over several years. Some work has had to be postponed, including initiatives to exploitation in sport, trafficking in persons belonging to minorities including national minorities, trafficking for organ removal, and the nexus between trafficking and corruption. These remain relevant needs. Our ability to advance our mandated work will depend on available expertise and resources.

Our direction is, however, clear. We will remain anchored in the mandate entrusted to the Office and concentrate on assistance that participating States can use in practice. This means linking research with policy and training, supporting national ownership, and maintaining channels through which authorities can exchange experience and co-operate across borders.

We will continue connecting digital and financial investigations, deepen victim-centred and trauma-informed law enforcement in practice, and pursue practical co-operation with INTERPOL and UNODC, drawing on the Joint Action Plans and the experience of collaborative operations and training.

We will support victim identification, non-punishment, and equitable access to assistance, including in detention and crisis settings. Survivor/lived experience expertise will remain part of research, training, and policy dialogue. Continued work on responsible recruitment and supply chains, including through RESTORE Ukraine, will connect prevention with employment and recovery systems.

Simulation-based training will develop with national partners and institutions. Our convening platforms will continue to bring together anti-trafficking authorities, parliamentarians, practitioners, civil society, and international partners. Their value will be measured by the practical co-operation and institutional follow-up they help sustain.

I thank the Chairpersonship, the Secretary General, and colleagues across the OSCE for their support and partnership. I am grateful to all participating States for their engagement, to donors for their extra-budgetary contributions (Austria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Spain,

the United Kingdom, the United States, and Thailand), and to governments seconding staff to the Office (France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the United States). I also thank our international and civil society partners, lived experience experts, and the dedicated OSR/CTHB team, whose commitment has sustained and elevated this work under difficult conditions.

We have heard your call for an Organization that is streamlined, focused, and fit for purpose. My Office will continue responding through clear priorities, national ownership, and practical partnerships. With your support, we can sustain and improve the capacity needed to identify and protect victims, strengthen accountability for traffickers, and reduce the opportunities on which exploitation depends.

Thank you.