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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Delegations

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Subject: Analysis of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings in the context of the war in Ukraine

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Delegations are invited to respond to the questions set out in this document. The discussion paper will form the basis of the planned discussion following the presentation by the Polish National Expert. Delegations are requested to **submit their responses in writing by 21 February 2025**. A comprehensive analysis of the written comments received from delegations will be presented by the Presidency at the LEWP-P meeting on 11 March 2025.

Furthermore, we would like to inform you that, as the Presidency, we have conducted a comprehensive analysis of the issue of trafficking in human beings, including children, from a European perspective. Through the Secure Information Exchange Application (SIENA), we have sent questionnaires to Member States and other states on the abovementioned topics (SIENA No 2398408-3-1). The questionnaires addressed the following issues:

- legislation,
- organisational structures,
- a general overview of trafficking in human beings online where the victims are minors in Member States and selected European countries with which the European Union cooperates,
- a general overview of trafficking in human beings where the victims are minors in EU Member States and selected European countries with which the European Union cooperates.

## Introduction

Human trafficking is a serious violation of human rights involving the exploitation of people for profit through the use of force, fraud or coercion. It is a form of modern slavery that encompasses a range of activities leading to the exploitation of victims for economic, sexual or other purposes.

Trafficking in human beings, including children, is one of the most serious crimes in the modern world. It is a crime that not only transcends national borders, but also evades traditional methods of law enforcement and prevention. In particular, the development of new technologies, including the internet and social media, has created new challenges in combating this form of crime. The problem affects both adults and minors, who, as a particularly vulnerable group, are exposed to specific forms of exploitation, such as the production and dissemination of child sexual abuse material, grooming or sexual exploitation.

The phenomenon of trafficking in human beings, including minors, requires an international approach that takes into account the diversity of legislation, cultures and socioeconomic challenges in different states. Within the European Union and its associated countries, numerous actions are being taken to harmonise legislation, coordinate law enforcement activities and support the victims of these crimes. Many of these activities stem from the need to implement EU directives and international conventions, such as *Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims* or the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*.

Contemporary challenges in the fight against trafficking in human beings, including minors, are linked to the dynamics of a changing world that affect the nature of this crime. Various factors, including military conflicts such as Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, contribute to an increased risk of exploitation of migrants, including children, who are often victims of trafficking and smuggling. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased criminal activity on the internet, where victims are often recruited and manipulated on an unprecedented scale.

## New technologies

New technologies are playing an increasing role in human trafficking crimes, both facilitating the activities of criminals and creating new challenges for law enforcement. Criminals use the internet, social media, communication applications and other digital tools to identify, recruit, control and exploit their victims. Social media platforms, advertising portals and dating apps have become key tools for contacting potential victims, often under the pretext of false job offers, education or the promise of a relationship. The anonymity afforded by digital technologies enables criminals to effectively hide their identities through fake profiles or encrypted communication. The internet makes it possible to carry out criminal activities on a large scale. Criminals often use the ‘darknet’ and cryptocurrencies to carry out illegal transactions and conceal financial flows. At the same time, the development of surveillance technologies, such as GPS or tracing apps, enables criminals to control their victims and limit their ability to escape. The forced dependence of victims on digital technology allows criminals to track their activities and maintain constant surveillance.

## Challenges

Trafficking in human beings, including minors, is a global challenge that requires international cooperation and the constant adaptation of legal and technological tools.

- **Raising public awareness** by undertaking preventive actions to educate the public on threats related to human trafficking and methods used by criminals (e.g. recruitment methods).
- **Development of innovative technological tools** to help monitor networks and identify criminals for successful prosecution.
- **Targeting the most vulnerable groups**, with a particular focus on minors, refugees, migrants and the economically disadvantaged.
- **Strengthening national support systems for victims** to provide comprehensive assistance and support to enable victims of human trafficking to return to their normal lives and to create a safe environment in which they choose to cooperate with law enforcement in order to more effectively bring perpetrators to justice.
- **Organising training for law enforcement officers** so they can better identify and combat human trafficking crimes, particularly in the digital space.

## Questions for delegations

1. Do you agree with making the full responses to SIENA Questionnaire No 2398408 available to the LEWP (Police and Customs) community?
2. In your opinion, is the risk of exploitation of displaced nationals from Ukraine, in particular women and children (whether in care or not), likely to increase if funding to support this social group is reduced?
3. What are the main challenges your country faces in terms of cross-border cooperation in the fight against trafficking in human beings? What measures could be taken to improve coordination between Member States?
4. Are there areas where international cooperation in the fight against trafficking in human beings could be strengthened, particularly in the context of transnational crime?
5. What actions does your country consider to be key to continuing the fight against trafficking in human beings, including minors, online? How can the EU support the implementation of these priorities?
6. What new trends do you see as posing the greatest threat to the fight against crimes related to trafficking in human beings, including children?