
Abstract:

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND EXPLOITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UKRAINE WAR -

An Investigation from the Perspective of Specialised Counselling Centres on the Situation in Germany

It is estimated that more than 7.8 million people have fled to safety in the European Union and other neighbouring countries since 24 February 2022 as a result of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. In Germany, they have been offered leave to remain legally in the country, accommodation, benefits, healthcare and access to the labour market and education, all with minimal red tape. Volunteer, family and diaspora networks as well as organised civil society groupings are continuing to provide accommodation, food and integration assistance.

In the experience of the specialised counselling centres that are members of the KOK network, individuals fleeing war zones are especially at risk of becoming targets of crime. Women and children, who are in need of special protection, represent the majority of the people fleeing Ukraine. Many of the individuals fleeing are already physically and mentally exhausted as a result of the war and are particularly vulnerable as a result. Once they have arrived in their destination country, uncertain residence prospects, unstable accommodation and employment conditions as well as a lack of support services further increase this risk.

A range of measures are being taken in response to those factors that enhance the risk of refugees becoming subject to trafficking in human beings and exploitation. For example, specialised counselling centres have launched new projects and stepped up their preventive education and awareness-raising work. To date, the number of cases of trafficking in human beings and exploitation in connection with the war in Ukraine reported by specialised counselling centres in Germany stands in the lower double-digit region. The enormous increase in cases predicted by many media outlets has failed to materialise. This largely aligns with the experience of the specialised counselling centres, who report that cases of trafficking in human beings and exploitation often go unreported and that it is difficult to obtain reliable figures.

However, it is clear that the numerous measures taken at both political and civil society level could reduce the risk of trafficking for the majority of refugees leaving Ukraine. As a result, they should be extended beyond the current context of the war and continued in the long term.

Even though it may seem too early to properly appraise the situation in relation to trafficking in human beings and exploitation in Germany in connection with the conflict in Ukraine, KOK is calling for lessons to be learned from current and past migratory flows and for long-term arrangements to be made for responding to temporary and permanent refugee influxes.

In particular, KOK is calling for:

- the legal advantages conferred upon Ukrainian refugees to also apply to third-country nationals and refugees from other countries;
- the establishment of safe and legal escape routes;
- the creation of long-term integration strategies for new arrivals;



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- the bolstering of the rights and protection of hard-to-reach trafficked persons in private households (in particular in the area of accommodation and 24-hour care);
 - comprehensive training and awareness raising for all relevant stakeholders in the support system, in particular regarding the protection of particularly vulnerable groups;
 - a permanent increase in the human and financial resources of the specialised counselling centres so that they can support trafficked persons as needed, even in crisis situations;
 - the expansion and guaranteeing of a comprehensive, needs-oriented support and referral system for those affected by all forms of trafficking in human beings and exploitation.

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