

**Statement by Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
at the “Conference on Addressing Human Trafficking and All Forms of Sexual Exploitation: Measures to Strengthen Responses of Destination Countries”**

Well, first of all, most of the people crossing the border are women and children. And over 90% of all identified victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women and girls. So when you put those two things together, the math is really bad on this and the risks are high. But second, we know that there is a strong market for exploiting these women and children. Since the end of February, and I think some of this data was mentioned last year, or yesterday rather, but since the end of February across Europe, there has been a significant spike in online searches related to buying sex from Ukrainian women in countries of destination, such as Germany, Spain, Denmark, United Kingdom. Searches for Ukrainian women, Ukrainian pornography, Ukrainian escorts have surged dramatically, some 200 to 600 per cent. In other words, and this is what I find perhaps most disturbing, one of the first measurable reactions in Europe to the crisis were the attempts by men online to identify and have sex with women and girls fleeing the conflict.

Not only are sex buyers aware of the vulnerability that that conflict creates, but they are actually taking action, they are really taking steps, to exploit this situation for their own benefit. I think yesterday it was mentioned, in Sweden, for instance, 30 out of 38 buyers who were recently arrested were actually seeking specifically to meet Ukrainian women.

Meanwhile in Ireland, escort site actively encouraging purchasing sex from Ukrainians to live out what was referred to as “war-inspired fantasies”. So you can see that they are turning this situation into a selling point. This desire of men to pay for sex with Ukrainian women and girls is certainly known to traffickers and represents an incredible pull factor in encouraging the recruitment and exploitation of Ukrainians.

So this is a case study for what we are talking about with regard to this conference: sexual exploitation, prevention and victim support. So how do we stop it?

Well, countries of destination can take steps to prevent women and girls from being sexually exploited, and let me mention just a couple of those, because I think sometimes countries can use a little bit of input on this.

First, we need education programs in schools. Research shows the majority of sex buyers first buy sex when they are under the age of 25, meaning, this is a habit they pick up when they are young. To counter this, we need to educate young men and boys on harmful forms of masculinity, particularly, like the ones we are seeing now online, related to Ukrainian women.

Second, and related, we need impactful and targeted public awareness campaigns using online tools to reach young men and boys. Social media sites such as TikTok and Instagram are increasingly being used as a means to advertise sexual services to young men. So let’s flip the script on that and discourage them from making exploitative decisions, through those same platforms. Targeted awareness campaigns can help do that.

Third, we need effective criminal justice response. Effective criminal justice response to demand is important to hold buyers accountable for the harm that they cause and to set a strong norm against the activity. Research has shown that countries that implement such laws see less violence. And that’s the key here: Less violence. So for countries that don’t have laws that means enacting statutes such as strict liability that hold those accountable who buy sex from trafficking victims regardless of whether that’s what they were looking for. For states that do already have such laws, they need to be implemented. My office’s 20/21

study on demand that Tatiana mentioned found that States were hardly using their laws at all, giving total impunity to the sexual exploitation market place. In Germany, for instance, the government's own review of the law found that there was only one case pertaining to the knowing use of sexual services from a trafficking victim despite many, many trafficking instances. One case in a three-year period. That level of criminal justice response is not going to work and significant investment to implement the law is needed.

Countries of destination must also seek to prevent trafficking where it is increasingly occurring: online. 75% of trafficking victims today are advertised online, making the internet the main conduit by which the exploitation of women, men, boys and girls is facilitated. Targeted ads and chat bots to communicate with potential sex buyers can have a large detour effect. Data from *childsafe.ai* showed a 58% decline in the number of respondents to its ads in 2019 despite the fact that they doubled their postings during that period. It works to use these tools. Applying this technology to the rising number of online searches for Ukrainian women can have an immediate positive impact. Another message could be to replace search ads for potentially exploited Ukrainians with ads discouraging such risky or exploitative behavior. But combating technology-facilitated trafficking also means regulating the online market place as the EU has just announced intentions to do. My office released comprehensive policy recommendations on how to respond to technology-facilitated trafficking. Beyond deterrence and disruption, we need state-led regulatory frameworks that include robust mandatory obligations on the platforms who operate these sites that facilitate this conduct. In particular, online platforms should be required to conduct proactive monitoring for exploitative materials and misuse. It should be implementing age and consent verification mechanisms for individuals depicted in online material. And they should be conducting regular due diligence of their operations and systems, based on concrete standards to identify risks. This, by the way, can also help lead to identification and a connection to the NRMs, which will be discussed in just a couple of moments. It takes whole of society approach here, and these steps can help prevent online spaces being misused for trafficking.

If we are serious about moving from combating trafficking to ending it, then taking measures to discourage demand and disrupt technology-facilitated trafficking are two core pillars. We must improve our response on both of these angles if we are to achieve success.

Recent materials produced by my office have been included in the chat in case of interest and we stand ready to support states in their efforts to take action. Thanks so much, Tatiana, for the opportunity to join you all today, and I look forward to the discussion on NRMs.