

## **BULGARIA (Tier2)**

Bulgaria is a source, transit, and, to a lesser extent, a destination country for men, women, and children from Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Lebanon, and Uzbekistan trafficked to and through Bulgaria to Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, Turkey, Belgium, France, Spain, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Macedonia for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Approximately, one-third of the trafficking victims identified are Roma women and children. Roma children are trafficked within Bulgaria and to Austria, Italy, and other West European countries for purposes of forced begging and petty theft.

Around 20 percent of identified trafficking victims in Bulgaria are children. Officials reported an increase in the number of Bulgarian victims trafficked internally, primarily to resort areas along the Black Sea coast, and in border towns with Greece, for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.

The Government of Bulgaria does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The Government of Bulgaria made substantial progress during the reporting period. In June 2007, the government appointed a new secretariat to the National Anti-Trafficking Commission, boosting the ability of the country's anti-trafficking coordinating agency to develop and implement a transnational victim referral mechanism; to maintain and analyze victim data for use in policy development; and to implement the annual National Anti-Trafficking Strategy. In early 2008, local commissions were established in three towns identified as 'high-risk' for victims of trafficking. The Commission also launched a public awareness campaign targeted at potential victims and customers of sex tourism. The Minister of Interior and Prosecutor General publicly rejected efforts to legalize prostitution in Bulgaria, a strong effort to reduce the domestic demand for commercial sex acts.

**Recommendations for Bulgaria:** Continue to improve data collection and methods for assessing trafficking law enforcement statistics; provide funding to service providers for victim assistance efforts; sustain efforts to investigate, prosecute, convict, and sentence trafficking offenders; and vigorously investigate, prosecute, convict, and sentence government officials complicit in trafficking.

### **Prosecution**

The Bulgarian government demonstrated strong anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts over the last year. Bulgaria prohibits trafficking for both sexual exploitation and forced labor through Section 159 of its criminal code, which prescribes penalties of between one and 15 years' imprisonment. These penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. In 2007, police conducted 179 sex trafficking and 22 labor trafficking investigations, compared to 202 sex trafficking and six labor trafficking investigations in 2006. In 2007, authorities prosecuted 78 offenders on trafficking charges, a decrease from 129 in 2006. Courts convicted a total of 73 trafficking offenders in 2007—71 convicted for sex trafficking offenses and two for labor trafficking offenses—compared to 71 convictions obtained in 2006. In 2007, five traffickers were sentenced to 5 to 10 years' imprisonment and 33 traffickers were sentenced to 1 to 5 years' imprisonment; 48 percent—35 of 73 convicted traffickers—received suspended sentences or had their sentences reduced to less than one year. During the reporting period, Bulgaria extradited 29 persons requested by other countries for prosecution on trafficking charges. Bulgarian police worked closely with law enforcement counterparts in Italy and Greece, investigating cases of Bulgarian victims trafficked for labor exploitation. There were continued reports of generalized corruption; during the reporting period, the government investigated one border police official allegedly involved in trafficking.

### **Protection**

Bulgaria sustained its significant victim assistance and protection efforts during the reporting period. The government provided rehabilitative, psychological, and medical assistance to child trafficking victims in three child-trafficking crises centers located throughout the country. In 2007, the Commission began implementing a revised national referral mechanism for victims of transnational trafficking, building on already strong referral efforts. In 2007, the government identified 288 victims of trafficking; 124 victims received assistance from IOM or NGOs. All victims in Bulgaria are eligible for free medical and psychological care provided through public hospitals and NGOs. Victims are encouraged to assist in trafficking investigations and prosecutions; victims who choose to cooperate with law enforcement investigators are provided with full residency and employment rights for the duration of the criminal proceedings. Foreign victims who choose not to cooperate with trafficking

investigations are permitted to stay in Bulgaria for one month and 10 days before they are repatriated. Victims were not detained, fined, or otherwise penalized for unlawful acts committed as a result of their being trafficked.

### **Prevention**

Bulgaria demonstrated increased efforts to prevent trafficking during the reporting period. In October 2007, the Commission organized a national awareness campaign, which included funding the production of more than 1,000 posters to advertise the campaign, and distribution of the posters throughout the country—mostly in schools and other public buildings. The Commission also published and began distribution of 1,000 posters and 5,000 brochures for an NGO-run awareness campaign focused on child trafficking. The National Border Police continued to actively monitor airports and land border crossings for evidence of trafficking in persons; however Bulgaria's accession into the European Union in 2007 and subsequent visa free travel within the EU has challenged border officials' ability to identify potential victims. The Commission adopted Bulgaria's current National Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in June 2007. In 2007, the Commission made efforts to reduce domestic demand by launching an awareness campaign targeting consumers purchasing commercial sex acts. The law provides that Bulgarian citizens who participate in certain crimes abroad, including child sex tourism, can be prosecuted and convicted in Bulgaria.