

BULGARIA (Tier 2)

Bulgaria is a source, transit, and destination country for men and women trafficked from Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and Armenia to Bulgaria and through Bulgaria to Spain, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Macedonia for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Men and women from Bulgaria are trafficked to Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Roma children are trafficked within Bulgaria and to Austria, Italy, and other West European countries for purposes of forced begging and petty theft. Approximately 20 percent of identified trafficking victims in Bulgaria are children.

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. Bulgaria improved its victim assistance infrastructure by opening a government-run child trafficking shelter and continued to demonstrate increased law enforcement efforts. However, Bulgaria's National Anti-Trafficking Commission could not effectively monitor and improve national and local efforts due to inadequate staffing. Bulgaria should improve support for the Executive Secretary of the Commission and ensure implementation of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy, which was adopted in February 2005. The government should focus serious and sustained efforts to develop its crime statistics database. Bulgaria should also take steps to reduce the domestic demand for commercial sexual exploitation.

Prosecution

The Bulgarian government significantly improved its 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. Penalties prescribed for trafficking under Section 159 range from 1 to 15 years' imprisonment, are sufficiently stringent, and are commensurate with punishments for other grave crimes, such as rape. In 2006, police conducted 202 sex trafficking and 6 labor trafficking investigations, a significant increase from 134 sex trafficking and 7 labor trafficking investigations in 2005. In 2006, 129 persons were prosecuted, an increase from 63 in 2005. Convicted traffickers numbered 71, up from 34 convictions in 2005. During the reporting period, Bulgaria extradited 33 persons on trafficking charges at the request of other countries. There were reports of low-level law enforcement officials involved in trafficking; one police officer was convicted for trafficking in 2006.

Protection

Bulgaria made adequate victim assistance and protection efforts during the reporting period. In September 2006, the government opened two crisis centers that provide rehabilitative, psychological, and medical assistance specifically tailored to address the needs of child trafficking victims; each shelter has capacity for 10 children. These centers assisted approximately 20 children from September 2006 through March 2007. The government referred repatriated Bulgarian trafficking victims and foreign victims trafficked to Bulgaria to NGOs for legal, medical, and psychological assistance. All victims in Bulgaria are eligible for free medical and psychological care provided through public hospitals and NGOs. In 2006, 11 victims gave testimony in support of trafficking prosecutions, but none was protected under the full witness protection program. 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 in trafficking investigations are permitted to stay in Bulgaria for 1 month and 10 days before they are repatriated. Victims generally were not detained, fined, or otherwise penalized for unlawful acts committed as a result of their being trafficked.

Prevention

Bulgaria demonstrated diminished efforts to prevent trafficking during the reporting period. The government relied exclusively on NGOs and the international community to fund and execute public awareness campaigns about the dangers of trafficking. The National Border Police actively monitored airports and land border crossings for evidence of trafficking in persons.