

BULGARIA (TIER 2)

Bulgaria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and girls trafficked from Romania, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Lebanon, and Central Asia to and through Bulgaria to Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Kosovo, and Macedonia for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Roma children were trafficked within Bulgaria and abroad for purposes of forced begging and petty theft. In 2005, Austrian authorities identified 700 Roma children trafficked from Bulgaria to Austria for forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation. The Ministry of Interior noted an increase of men and boys trafficked for purpose of labor 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. Bulgaria took several steps to improve its law enforcement efforts in 2005. The government amended its Constitution to allow for the extradition of Bulgarian citizens for crimes committed abroad, including human trafficking; the government also adopted asset forfeiture legislation to serve as a further trafficking deterrent. Although Bulgaria partially implemented its witness protection legislation and protected some trafficking victims in 2005, a number of victims that cooperate with police still received only partial protection. Bulgaria continued to make progress in its anti-trafficking efforts, although corruption and a failure to fully separate human trafficking from human smuggling continued to be challenges. The government should continue to strengthen its statistics collection system and segregate trafficking data from trafficking-related statistics. Police should vigorously investigate, trafficking related corruption among government officials.

Prosecution

The Government of Bulgaria made considerable progress in its law enforcement efforts to combat trafficking. Authorities conducted 134 sexual exploitation investigations and seven labor exploitation investigations in 2005. Sixty-three traffickers were formally indicted in 2005, up from 27 in 2004. In 2005, courts convicted 34 traffickers, an increase from seven in 2004. Convicted traffickers generally served the full sentences mandated by the court; the punishment for trafficking in Bulgaria ranges from one to 10 years in prison. In 2005, the Bulgarian Border Police cooperated in 20 investigations with law enforcement authorities of several destination countries. Corruption among border guards and customs officials remains a concern; one police officer was indicted for forced prostitution.

Protection

The Bulgarian Government continued to provide a high level of victim assistance and protection during the reporting period. All victims in Bulgaria are eligible for free medical and psychological care provided through public hospitals and NGOs. Foreign victims who choose to cooperate with trafficking investigations are provided with full residency and employment rights until the end of the criminal proceedings. Foreign victims who choose not to cooperate in trafficking investigations are permitted to stay in Bulgaria for one month plus 10 days before repatriation to their country of origin. The government does not offer legal alternatives to the removal of victims to countries where they face retribution or hardship. Although the government does not provide funding to NGOs and international organizations, it collaborated with them on identification, referral, and assistance to trafficking victims. Police routinely refer victims to NGOs for assistance.

Prevention

The government and local authorities provided support to the IOM and Bulgarian Red Cross to conduct the "Open Eyes" campaign that aimed to increase awareness of trafficking among high-risk communities using posters, brochures, and commercials on television. Materials were also distributed in more than 950 schools, at major youth events, at all border check points, labor bureaus, and government embassies and consulates. Local education officials allowed NGOs to screen trafficking awareness films in schools and distributed anti-trafficking materials to students. The government adopted a National Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in 2005.