

MOLDOVA (Tier 3)

Moldova is a major source, and to a lesser extent, a transit country for women and girls trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. It is estimated that slightly more than one percent of the approximately 750,000 Moldovans working abroad are trafficking victims. Moldovan women are trafficked to Turkey, Russia, the U.A.E., Ukraine, Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Albania, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Italy, France, Portugal, Austria, and other Western European countries. Girls and young women are trafficked within the country from rural areas to Chisinau. Children are also trafficked for forced labor and begging to neighboring countries. Labor trafficking of men to work in the construction, agriculture, and service sectors of Russia is increasingly a problem. The small breakaway region of Transnistria in eastern Moldova is outside the central government's control and remained a significant source and transit area for trafficking in persons.

The Government of Moldova does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. While the new government has shown initial political will very recently, it was insufficient to make up for inadequate action in the remainder of the March 2007—March 2008 reporting period, particularly the lack of follow-up on cases of alleged complicity of government officials in trafficking in persons cited in the 2007 Report. While there were a few modest positive developments over the past year—the number of trafficking investigations increased, the government hired social workers to focus on vulnerable populations, and a pilot program for the referral of trafficking victims to protective services continues to develop—the government's lack of visible follow-up on allegations of government officials complicit in trafficking in persons greatly offset the aforementioned gains. The government approved a 2008-2009 anti-trafficking national action plan on March 19, 2008, and while it allocated funds for 2008 and sustained cooperation with NGOs during the reporting period, it did not demonstrate proactive efforts to identify trafficking victims.

Recommendations for Moldova: Demonstrate vigorous investigations and prosecutions of public officials complicit in trafficking; improve data on investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and sentences for traffickers, including greater specificity with respect to the particular punishments imposed for different crimes, the number of charges reduced from trafficking to pimping, and which prison sentences are reduced or vacated by amnesties; disburse increased resources for victim assistance and protection; boost proactive efforts to identify trafficking victims; and adopt measures to prevent the use of forced or child labor by trafficking offenders.

Prosecution

Reports of Moldovan officials' complicity in trafficking marred anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts during the last year. The Government of Moldova prohibits all forms of trafficking through Articles 165 and 206 of its criminal code. Penalties prescribed range from seven years' to life imprisonment, which are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes. The Prosecutor General's Office reported that authorities initiated 507 trafficking investigations in 2007—including 17 criminal investigations under the child trafficking statute—which is an increase from 466 investigations in 2006. Moldova's Center to Combat Trafficking in Persons (CCTIP) reported 250 trafficking prosecutions and at least 60 convictions of traffickers. While the government's statistical system still does not provide complete statistics on length of sentences for trafficking convictions, CCTIP reported that at least 50 traffickers convicted in 2007 are serving seven- to 10-year prison sentences. The government has not prosecuted or criminally punished any government official allegedly complicit in trafficking. The government has also not informed the international community whether investigations of some government officials dismissed in August 2006 have yielded sufficient evidence to permit a prosecution. With respect to allegations of complicity of a former high-level CCTIP official, the government states that prosecutors investigated the allegations and found no evidence of a crime. There were several victim reports that border guards and police officers were complicit in trafficking. Moldovan law enforcement authorities reported eight bribery attempts by suspects seeking to have cases dismissed. Prosecutors noted that poor-quality investigations and corruption may have resulted in light or suspended sentences for traffickers.

Protection

The government provides no funding to NGOs for victim assistance, although it has allocated \$44,000 in its 2008 budget for victim rehabilitation center operating costs, and cooperated with NGOs and international assistance programs providing legal, medical, and psychological services for trafficking victims during the reporting period. Moldova's Ministry of Internal Affairs signed a memorandum of

collaboration with IOM to ensure that victims of trafficking repatriated through IOM are not apprehended by border guards but allowed to travel unhindered to the IOM Rehabilitation Center, the only comprehensive victim assistance facility in the country. While proactive identification of victims remained lacking, the government hired and paid the salaries of 547 social workers and assisted 162 persons through the nascent pilot project on referring victims to protective services, which started in five districts in 2006 and extended to seven more in 2007. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with IOM, launched a project in January 2007 to develop the capacity of consular department personnel at Moldovan embassies abroad in assisting Moldovan victims and potential victims of trafficking. Moldovan law exempts victims from criminal prosecution for illegal acts committed as a result of being trafficked; however, in practice, some victims were punished for such acts. Moldova currently does not permit temporary residence status for foreign-national victims of trafficking, nor does it provide legal alternatives to deportation to countries where victims may face retribution or hardship. The government claims that it encourages victims to assist in investigations and prosecutions of traffickers; however, insufficient measures were in place to provide for victims' safety.

Prevention

The government approved the 2008-2009 National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons in March 2008, but there was none in place prior to that date, because the previous plan expired at the end of 2006. For most of the reporting period, the government's national anti-trafficking committee remained without a leader; however, the government appointed a chair at the Deputy Prime Minister level, as required by Moldovan law, in February 2008. The CCTIP operated a hotline for trafficking victims during the year. The government acknowledged, both publicly and privately, that trafficking was a problem; however, the government continued to rely on NGOs and international organizations to provide the majority of public awareness campaigns. CCTIP, with NGOs and international organizations, developed and conducted seminars for high school students, teaching staff from schools and universities, priests, local authorities, and local law enforcement officials. CCTIP leadership provided TV interviews to update viewers on anti-trafficking operations and increase awareness regarding the consequences of human trafficking. The Moldovan government provides free air time for anti-trafficking campaigns.