

# Russia's illegal war against Ukraine increases risk of trafficking: UK statement to the OSCE

The armed conflict in Ukraine, caused by the unprovoked invasion by Russia, has created an increased risk of human trafficking across Europe. The number of girls and vulnerable women who find themselves unaccompanied or separated creates significant risks of gender-based violence, and child protection and trafficking risks. Difficulties in accessing basic goods and services and lack of access to safe shelter have rendered women and girls extremely vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

The seriousness of the situation makes it all the more regrettable that Russia refused to support the renewal of the Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine's mandate, whose office was doing excellent work with local authorities and social services on mechanisms to help victims of human trafficking.

Madam Chair, given the number of refugees vulnerable to exploitation, we must continue to mitigate the risk that Ukrainians are either trafficked into our countries for onward exploitation, or exploited after arriving via a safe and legal route. This requires an end-to-end response.

There are various actions States can take to help those most vulnerable to the effects of Russia's illegal invasion. For the UK's part, our [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#) allows individuals, charities, community groups and businesses in the UK to bring Ukrainians to safety – including those with no family ties to the UK.

To address the risk that the scheme may be used for trafficking, sponsors are subject to criminal and accommodation checks soon after, or prior, to the guest arriving. These checks are enhanced in the cases of children. We also ensure that law enforcement bodies are involved in the scheme and that local authorities are aware of who to work with, on the ground, to help mitigate those risks. Our National Crime Agency generates, disseminates and acts upon intelligence through our International Liaison Officer or ILO network, as well as with multilateral partners such as Europol and Interpol.

Also, civil society groups have collated resources to help inform displaced people arriving in the UK of their rights, entitlements and essential services to further mitigate risks of exploitation.

As Russia's invasion continues, global drivers of serious organised crime strengthen, as organised crime groups seek to exploit the mass movement of people. In countries neighbouring Ukraine, UK ILO officers are introducing and participating in multi-partner hubs involving Ukrainian and in-country officers, NGOs and refugees. We are sharing UK best practice and materials to displaced Ukrainian law enforcement on the ground in Poland, as well as to

local law enforcement partners in Romania, Moldova and in Ukraine.

Madam Chair, we commend the work of the OSCE in its efforts to respond to the heightened risk of trafficking brought about by President Putin's illegal war against Ukraine, including documenting the testimony of those who have fled. But the responsibility to end this threat lies with Russia, and Russia alone. It must immediately cease its invasion and withdraw its forces. To delay doing so simply continues to create more displacement, more uncertainty, more anguish and more misery.

Thank you.