

Editorial

Here is the special issue on human trafficking, enslavement and conflict-related sexual violence, written by practitioners, and with a specific focus on the war in Ukraine. This war started on 24 February 2022 when Russian military forces invaded Ukraine, which led to millions of Ukrainians fleeing, people being killed and becoming (potential) victims of sexual violence and human trafficking. Actually, the impact of instability and occupation has been felt in Ukraine since 2014, with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. As of today the war in Ukraine is still ongoing.

The first contribution 'Preventing Human Trafficking of Refugees from Ukraine: A Rapid Assessment of Risks and Gaps in the Anti-trafficking Response' sets the stage with the description of the situation in the immediate aftermath of the start of the war. It is authored by Suzanne Hoff (La Strada International) and Eefje de Volder (Impact: Center against Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence in Conflict) and based on the (same titled) report published in May 2022 after careful (field and desktop) research and interviews with relevant stakeholders in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. The contribution discusses the trafficking risks (and at-risk groups) related to the outflow of Ukrainian refugees in Eastern and Central Europe, the extent to which these risks are being addressed by the agencies involved in the humanitarian response, and the identification of the possible roles for anti-trafficking organisations. To address the gaps and needs identified in the anti-trafficking response in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries (Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Slovakia) several recommendations are made, addressing governments/international organisations, anti-trafficking NGOs and donors. The recommendations aim to reduce the vulnerabilities to trafficking, ensure the identification of trafficked persons and the accountability of perpetrators, and to ensure adequate referral and assistance to trafficked persons.

The second contribution, 'A Survey of Immigration Models and Refugee Protection Schemes and their Consequences: The Case of Ukrainian Refugees', written by Catherine van Kampen (American Bar Foundation), Elizabeth M Zechenter (Emory University), Sophia Murashkovsky Romma (New York City Bar Association) and Robert Jeffrey Powell, Esq (Pro Bono Connect) builds on the assessments in the early stages of the war and the impacts on risks of trafficking and exploitation in destination countries for refugees fleeing the Ukrainian conflict. The authors discuss how in some countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, the private sponsorship requirement for Ukrainian refugees (ie, to find a private sponsor who accepts financial responsibility for the refugees during their stay in their host country) is potentially increasing the risk of human trafficking for an already at-risk population. The authors argue that the unintended consequences of private sponsorship demonstrate that such a requirement in a wartime scenario is ill-conceived, inappropriate, and a dangerous public policy, which is unnecessarily jeopardising the safety of refugees and further stripping them of their human dignity, and

even potentially exploitative. By contrast, Ukraine's neighbours, including Poland, with notably less economic and fiscal resources than either the UK or the US, have no private sponsorship requirement. The authors call for reconsideration of the private sponsorship requirement to protect refugees from Ukraine from exploitation and abuse.

The third contribution is written by Jitske Rullmann, a clinical psychologist and leader of the team of expertise of sexual violence and exploitation at ARQ Centrum⁴⁵ in the Netherlands. In her contribution 'How to Maintain Mental Health as a Professional Working with Survivors of Human Trafficking and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence' she addresses a still underexposed issue amongst professionals in the counter trafficking and CRSV field. While these professionals provide support to traumatised persons in stressful settings, particularly in war affected areas, there is little space, time, and recognition of the impact on their professional functioning. As a professional, witnessing details of interpersonal atrocities can cause psychological problems (also referred to as 'vicarious trauma'), such as emotional exhaustion, burn-out, secondary traumatisation or compassion fatigue. In order to be able to continue to work effectively and facilitate the healing of survivors, Rullmann underlines that it is crucial that professionals maintain their own mental health, which is even more challenging while working in conflict areas, such as Ukraine. Some suggestions of staying mentally healthy for such professionals are highlighted in this article, such as peer support and self-awareness.

The final short practitioners' contribution offers a reflection by anti-trafficking organisations in Ukraine and Moldova on the local impact of the rapid assessment of risks and gaps in the anti-trafficking response to prevent human trafficking of refugees from Ukraine (responding to the contribution of Hoff and De Volder in this issue) and on the challenge and importance of maintaining mental health of professionals in conflict-affected areas (responding to the contribution by Rullmann in this issue). The piece is written by Tatiana Fomina (La Strada Moldova) and Katya Cherepakha (La Strada Ukraine) and shows the existing challenges in operating in war-affected areas.

We hope you will enjoy reading this special issue on a timely and important issue.