

INTRODUCTION

(SLIDE 1)

The report was prepared in coalition of 3 Russian NGOs: SafeHouse Foundation, Russia Behind Bars Foundation, and Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre.

The Russian Government did not conduct any consultations regarding the submission.

The submission focuses on the current situation of human trafficking in Russia, the regulatory and administrative flaws in this area as well as the situation of forced labour in Russian prisons.

(SLIDE 2)

ISSUE 1. HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Previous recommendations and current situation

In the previous cycle, eleven countries made recommendations to the Russian Federation to step up their work against human trafficking. They included:

- To develop a national action plan;
- To strengthen the relevant legal framework;
- To ensure effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators;
- To provide assistance to the victims.

(SLIDE 3)

Developments

Russia essentially disregarded these recommendations. As a result, this year Russia ranks eighth in the Global Slavery Index, while in 2018 they ranked 64. Estimated almost 2 million people live in a state of modern slavery in Russia, mostly migrant workers from Central Asia and women and girls. Many factors have led to this extreme degradation.

(SLIDE 4)

Inadequate criminal legislation

First, Russian criminal legislation is not in line with international law. It does not stipulate that a victim can be forced not only physically, but also by other means such as threats, abuse or debt bondage. Furthermore, it does not state that a consent given under coercion is invalid. Consequently, the law enforcement fail to address trafficking cases and perpetrators evade responsibility.

(SLIDE 5)

Lack of preventive measures

Russia did not introduce a relevant national action plan or comprehensive legislation. Coordination among responsible authorities in the area is absent, as well as data collection and specific law enforcement trainings. Specialised NGOs are stifled as "foreign agents" and their assistance to irregular migrants is criminalized.

(SLIDE 6)

Ineffective investigations

Consequently, the investigation and prosecution of forced labour is ineffective. According to official statistics, from 2018 to 2022, an average of only 16 convictions for human trafficking and 2 for forced labour were recorded annually.

(SLIDE 7)

Lack of victim protection

Russia established no mechanisms for victims' identification and assistance. They receive no specific material, legal or medical aid. There is no system of shelter services. Moreover, trafficking victims and survivors risk punishment for crimes they were forced into.

(SLIDE 8)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Bring the criminal legislation in line with international law, in particular, include means as a constituent element of human trafficking; establish irrelevance of trafficking victims' consent;
- Adopt anti-trafficking law and national action plan that would provide for, in particular, national coordination mechanisms, data gathering and specific trainings for state officials;
- Set up a framework for trafficking victims' identification, their material, medical, legal and shelter assistance.

(SLIDE 9)

ISSUE II. EXPLOITATION OF PRISONERS

General situation

Unfortunately, during the third review cycle, no recommendations were given in that regard.

Yet, prisoners endure harsh conditions, often working up to six days a week, 12-16 hours a day with one 10-15 minute break to have meals or use restrooms. They receive miserable wages, which can be as low as 1-4 euros per month. Prisoners are under total control of the prison administration and have no effective complaint mechanisms. Attempts to voice dissent or refuse to work are met with punitive measures.

(SLIDE 10)

Military exploitation

Prisoners are vulnerable and are an easy target for military exploitation. Both the Ministry of Defence and private military companies, such as Wagner, are reported to have recruited tens of thousands of prisoners. Many are coerced, tortured or threatened into joining the army.

Likewise, thousands of other individuals were forcibly mobilised regardless of their consent, health, or family situation. Conscientious objectors are prosecuted for not willing to fight in Ukraine.

(SLIDE 11)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Repeal legislation allowing forced labour in prisons and imposing punishment on prisoners refusing to work;
- Ensure that prisoners work in decent conditions and are paid no less than the federal minimum wage;
- Institute legal safeguards against compelled recruitment and mobilization for prisoners and conscientious objectors and conduct thorough investigations into reported cases.