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**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
52ND SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
FOR THE 52ND SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Estonia (Estonia) for the 52nd session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Estonia is a country located in northeastern Europe and has a population of approximately 1.3 million people.¹ The majority of the population is nonreligious. Approximately 58% of the population identifies with no religion, 16% identifies as Orthodox Christian, 8% identifies as Lutheran, and 5% identifies as other.²

3. Estonia's last review was held on May 4, 2021.³ As a result of the review, Estonia received 274 recommendations, 192 of which it supported.⁴ It was recommended by the Philippines, and supported by Estonia, that the government "[i]ntensify capacity-building for law enforcement officials and other duty bearers to improve identification, referral and handling of cases of trafficking in persons, especially women and girls."⁵ In our last report on Estonia, we also detailed the problem of human trafficking in the country and commended its efforts to provide assistance to victims. There were no recommendations made regarding religious freedom.

Legal Framework

4. Under Article 29 of the Constitution of Estonia:

No one shall be compelled to perform work or service against his or her free will, except service in the armed forces or alternative service, work to prevent the spread of an infectious disease, work in the case of a natural disaster or a catastrophe, and work which a convict must perform on the basis of and pursuant to procedure established by law.⁶

5. Human trafficking is criminalized under Article 133 of the Penal Code of Estonia. Under Article 133:

Placing a person, for the purpose of gaining economic benefits or without it, in a situation where he or she is forced to marry, work under unusual conditions,

¹ Arno Artur Koorna et al., *Estonia*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia> (Oct. 7, 2025).

² *Id.*

³ *Universal Periodic Review – Estonia*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ee-index>.

⁴ *Infographic – Estonia*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Infographics-ESTONIA.pdf>.

⁵ OHCHR, UPR of Estonia (3rd Cycle – 38th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/UPR38_Estonia_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx.

⁶ CONSTITUTION OF ESTONIA 1992 art. 29, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Estonia_2015.

engage in prostitution, beg, commit a criminal offence or perform other disagreeable duties, and keeping a person in such situation, if such act is performed through deprivation of liberty, violence, deceit, threatening to cause damage, by taking advantage of dependence on another person, helpless or vulnerable situation of the person, is punishable by one to seven years' imprisonment.⁷

6. Additionally, the government passed the Victim Support Act on December 14, 2022. Under § 15 of this Act:

(1) The purpose of victim support services is to ensure social, psychological and emotional support (hereinafter *psychosocial support*) to persons who have been harmed due to a crime, violence or event of crisis in order to contribute to the preservation or restoration of their sense of security and ability to cope and to prevention of further damage.

(2) Victim support services are:

- 1) basic victim support service;
- 2) psychosocial support in the event of crisis;
- 3) women's support centre service
- 4) sexual violence crisis support;
- 5) service for victims in human trafficking;
- 6) restorative justice services;
- 7) support for abandonment of violence;
- 8) mental health assistance in support of recovery from trauma.⁸

7. Estonia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁹ Article 8 of the ICCPR states that “[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”¹⁰

8. Estonia is also a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹¹ Under Article 9 sec. 1 of this Protocol:

1. States Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:

(a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and

⁷ PENAL CODE OF SINGAPORE art. 133, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/tolge/pdf/502012024009>.

⁸ VICTIM SUPPORT ACT § 15, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/503042023004/consolide>.

⁹ *Ratification Status for Estonia*, OHCHR,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=157&Lang=EN.

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 8, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹¹ *Chapter XVIII Penal Matters 12. A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, U.N. TREATY COLLECTION, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18.

(b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children,
from revictimization.¹²

Human Trafficking

9. Estonia is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking.¹³ As a destination country, traffickers traffic individuals from other countries throughout Europe and Asia. As a source country, Estonians are trafficked to countries in Europe, including Finland, Germany, and the UK.¹⁴ For example, in May 2023, the National Bureau of Investigation and the National Criminal Police of Estonia investigated potential cases of human trafficking.¹⁵ The traffickers targeted Estonians, Ukrainians, and Latvians, and exploited them for labor in Finland.¹⁶ Authorities identified twenty-one victims and arrested eight individuals.¹⁷

10. Foreign workers remain the most vulnerable to human trafficking.¹⁸ The vast majority of human trafficking cases in Estonia involve foreign workers who are forced to work in cleaning services, massage parlors, and in construction.¹⁹ For example, in March 2025, authorities identified six human trafficking victims who were trafficked and exploited by a cleaning company.²⁰

11. Since Estonia's last UPR, the number of registered cases related to human trafficking has increased. For example, in 2022, there were forty-six registered cases related to human trafficking and eighty-four in 2023.²¹ The increase in registered cases of human trafficking can be attributed in large part to the increase in awareness campaigns throughout the country.²² Awareness and education campaigns are extremely important in the fight against human trafficking, this is because a large number of potential human trafficking cases go unreported.²³ This is in part because victims often do not see themselves as being exploited and victims of human trafficking. As awareness and education increases, and people become more knowledgeable about human trafficking, they are able to report these cases to the authorities,

¹² Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 § 1, Nov. 15, 2000, G.A. Res. 55/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/55/25, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.

¹³ *Estonia*, GLOB. ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX, (2023), <https://ocindex.net/country/estonia>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *NBI Conducted an Investigation Into Suspected Aggravated Human Trafficking in Construction Industry*, POLISI (May 2, 2023), <https://polisi.fi/en/-/nbi-conducted-an-investigation-into-suspected-aggravated-human-trafficking-in-construction-industry>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Malicious Employers Exploit People: Human Trafficking in Estonia*, TÖÖELU (Apr. 18, 2024), <https://www.tooelu.ee/et/uudised/1213/pahatahtlikud-tooandjad-kasutavad-inimesi-ara-inimkaubandus-eestis>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Koit Brinkmann, *Six Victims Identified in Cleaning Company Human Trafficking Case*, ÄRIPÄEV (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://www.aripaev.ee/uudised/2025/03/13/koristusfirma-inimkaubanduse-kriminaalasjas-on-leitud-kuus-kannatanut>.

²¹ *Crime in Estonia 2023*, JUSTIITSMINISTEERIUM (2023), <https://www.justdigi.ee/kuritegevus2023/inimkaubandus/>.

²² *Annual Report 2022 on Migration and Asylum in Estonia National Report 2*, EUROPEAN MIGRATION NETWORK (2022), <https://www.emn.ee/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/arm-2022-part-ii-estonia-final-1.pdf>.

²³ *Malicious Employers Exploit People: Human Trafficking in Estonia*, TÖÖELU (Apr. 18, 2024), <https://www.tooelu.ee/et/uudised/1213/pahatahtlikud-tooandjad-kasutavad-inimesi-ara-inimkaubandus-eestis>.

who can then investigate. In 2024, authorities received 800 tips on potential cases of human trafficking and exploitation.

12. However, these investigations are ultimately meaningless if authorities are not able to prosecute these cases. Despite registering many cases of human trafficking between 2022 and 2023, only four individuals were convicted of human trafficking during that period.²⁴ The low number of convictions is extremely concerning given the number of registered cases during that same time period. Contributing to its low number of convictions is a lack of dedicated prosecutors to handle human trafficking cases. For example, the prosecutors' offices are split into four regions, north, south, east, and west.²⁵ In the Northern Prosecutor's Office, there is only one prosecutor tasked with handling human trafficking cases.²⁶

13. In our last UPR on Estonia, we commended its efforts to provide aid and assistance to victims of trafficking. Since its last UPR, not only has Estonia continued to help victims, but it has also enhanced its efforts to do so. In 2023, the new Victim Support Law took effect.²⁷ This law provides victims with basic support services, creates women's support centers, provides mental health assistance, and other essential services for victims of human trafficking and domestic violence.²⁸ In 2024, authorities provided counseling services for 146 potential victims of human trafficking.²⁹

Recommendations

14. While Estonia has done a commendable job identifying cases of human trafficking and providing aid to the victims, we are concerned about Estonia's lack of human trafficking convictions. Estonia must commit resources, especially for prosecutors, to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking in a timely manner.

15. Additionally, we commend Estonia's continued efforts to combat human trafficking and provide aid for the victims, as is required under the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. We want to encourage Estonia to continue its efforts, as they are showing to be effective. However, we want to remind Estonia that, to fully combat human trafficking, it must convict perpetrators of human trafficking.

²⁴ *Human Trafficking*, JUSTIITSMINISTEERIUM (2023), <https://www.justdigi.ee/kuritegevus2023/inimkaubandus/>.

²⁵ *General Information: Situation on Trafficking in Human Beings*, EUROPEAN COMM'N, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/estonia_en.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Estonia Comprehensive National Review Report*, UN WOMEN (Aug. 2024), https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/b30_report_estonia_en.pdf.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Social Insurance Board Yearbook 2024*, SOTSIAALKINDLUSTUSAMET (2024), <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sotsiaalkindlustusameti-aastaraamat-2024/inimkaubanduse-ohvrid>.