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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
FOR THE 54TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) was founded in 1998 and 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 Moldova (Moldova) for the 54th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

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Status of Human Rights in Moldova for the 54th Session of the Universal Periodic Review

Background

1. Moldova is a country located in the Balkan region of Europe and has a population of approximately 2.4 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 95% of the population identifying as Orthodox, 3.2% as other Christian, 1.7% as atheist, and 0.1% as Muslim.²

2. Moldova's last review was held on January 28, 2022.³ As a result of the review, Moldova received 209 recommendations, 186 of which it accepted.⁴ It was recommended by Albania, and supported by Moldova, that the government "[f]urther strengthen efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking and gender-based violence, including by providing accessible and inclusive support and assistance to victims."⁵ No recommendations were made regarding religious freedom. In our last report, we discussed the problem of human trafficking in Moldova.

Legal Framework

3. Under Article 44 of the Constitution of Moldova, "[f]orced labour shall be prohibited."⁶

4. Under Article 165 of the Penal Code of Moldova:

(1) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, sheltering or fostering of a person, with or without consent thereof, for the purpose of commercial or noncommercial sexual exploitation, by forced labor or services, for beggary, in slavery or slavery-like conditions, for use in armed conflicts or criminal activities, removal of organs or tissues, performed by:

a) threat with the use or the use of physical or mental violence not dangerous to life and health of the person, including by kidnapping, seizure of documents and by servitude, in order to return a debt whose size is unreasonably established, as well as by threat of disclosing confidential information to victim's family or to other persons both physical and legal entities;

b) fraud;

c) abuse of vulnerability or abuse of power, giving or receiving of payments or benefits in order to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, shall be punished with imprisonment from 6 to 12 years, with deprivation of the right to hold certain positions or to practice a certain activity for a term of 2 to 5 years, whilst a legal person shall be punished with a fine of 3000 to 5000 conventional units, with the deprivation of the right to exercise a certain activity or with the liquidation of the legal person.⁷

5. Moldova is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁸ Under Article 8 of the ICCPR, "[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."⁹

6. Moldova 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.¹⁰ Under Article 9, section 1 of this Protocol:

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

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

(b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.¹¹

Human Trafficking

7. Since our last report on Moldova, and despite ongoing efforts by the government, human trafficking remains a significant concern. Many Moldovans, particularly women and children, are targeted by traffickers and lured abroad with false promises of employment and then are subjected to forced labor and sexual exploitation. In recent years, traffickers have utilized social media to target women and girls, coercing them into sending compromising photos that are then used for blackmail and exploitation.

8. Moldova has faced new challenges resulting from regional instability and demographic changes. Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, more than 100,000 Ukrainian refugees remain in the country and they are particularly vulnerable to being targeted for human trafficking.¹² In response to the massive influx of refugees, Moldovan authorities coordinated a large-scale humanitarian effort that included housing, social services, and cooperation with international partners. These measures significantly reduced the risk that displaced persons would become victims of human trafficking.¹³

9. Since its last review, labor trafficking has emerged as a growing problem in Moldova. Over the last three decades, approximately 40% of the population has emigrated. Now, between 35,000 and 40,000 Moldovans leave the country every year.¹⁴ Even with the recent influx of refugees from Ukraine, large-scale emigration of Moldovans has created a labor shortage, and employers have increasingly recruited foreign workers, which has created opportunities for exploitation.

10. Additionally, there are gaps in Moldova's ability to effectively combat human trafficking. Labor inspectors have limited capacity to conduct unannounced inspections, and there is no separation between labor inspection and immigration control. This means victims could be identified as migrant workers instead of human trafficking victims.¹⁵ Further, the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) lacks critical funding and training to detect human trafficking.¹⁶

11. Also hindering Moldova's ability to combat human trafficking is corruption in the law enforcement and judiciary sectors. Even though the government has implemented some measures to combat corruption like increasing transparency and vetting candidates for the judiciary, corruption still remains an issue. For example, in 2023, a district attorney/ elected mayor was investigated and charged for trafficking children for forced labor. Further, in 2022, the government investigated six labor trafficking cases that involved complicit government employees.¹⁷

12. Further hindering Moldova's ability to combat human trafficking is staffing shortages among police and prosecutors. This problem worsened in 2023, following a hire freeze. This made investigating human trafficking cases more difficult as authorities were already suffering from understaffing and low salaries. This has led to a decrease in the number of human trafficking prosecutions. In 2023, authorities prosecuted sixty-four human traffickers, a decrease from 109 in the previous year. Further, only six human traffickers were successfully convicted in 2023.¹⁸

13. Labor trafficking is not the only form of trafficking that exists in Moldova. Moldova has also become a hub for sex trafficking. Women and children are targeted and sexually exploited in Romania and throughout western Europe.¹⁹ Traffickers lure their victims with promises of good-paying jobs and prey upon victims who are poor and want a better life.

14. Below, we have highlighted some recent examples of both labor and sex trafficking.

15. In March 2026, authorities uncovered a human trafficking operation that was sexually exploiting seven girls. The seven girls were all between the ages of fifteen and twenty and were promised economic opportunities. The victims were forced to provide sexual services to clients and were manipulated and psychologically coerced by their traffickers.²⁰

16. In February 2026, a forty-five-year-old man was sentenced to prison for eleven years and ordered to pay a fine of €3,070. The man had trafficked a teenage girl and two young women to be sexually exploited. He had promised his victims jobs as cosmetic saleswomen.²¹

17. In January 2025, a fifty-two-year-old man was arrested for exploiting a minor for forced labor. The trafficker exploited his victim for more than a year on his farm.²²

18. In November 2025, authorities searched two homes belonging to individuals who were suspected of being involved in human trafficking. Authorities discovered that the individuals had recruited and trafficked three individuals between November 2024 and July 2025. The three victims were trafficked to an animal farm where they were subjected to physical and psychological violence. One of the victims committed suicide.²³

19. In March 2024, Moldovan authorities worked with Greek authorities to identify a transnational organized crime group that was trafficking people and sexually exploiting them. Authorities arrested seven individuals and rescued nine women who were taken back home to Moldova. The women had been sexually exploited in brothels in Athens.²⁴

20. To strengthen its response to human trafficking, Moldova adopted the National Program for Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2024-2028. The plan was approved in 2023 and was implemented in 2024. The program provides a comprehensive framework for addressing trafficking through prevention, victim protection, prosecution of offenders, and improved coordination among government agencies. The program also emphasizes identifying and supporting vulnerable populations, including children, migrant workers, and refugees, while enhancing data collection, monitoring, and cooperation with civil society and international organizations.

21. This plan has shown promising early results through the continued implementation of anti-trafficking measures, improved coordination among stakeholders, and increased investigation capacity. However, the program remains in its early stages, and human trafficking

continues to be a serious problem in the country. While there is evidence that Moldova is making progress, it is premature to characterize the program as a success.²⁵

22. Further, in January 2026, Moldova, with support from the International Office for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, established a new Passenger Information Unit (PIU) headquarters in Chisinău. This strengthens the ability of authorities to detect and prevent cross-border crimes, including human trafficking. Additionally, the PIU brings together personnel from the Border Police, National Police, Customs Service, and Security and Intelligence Service to improve information sharing and coordinate responses. This reflects Moldova's ongoing efforts to strengthen border security, combat human trafficking, and align its law enforcement practices with European and international standards.²⁶

Recommendations

23. We ask that Moldova provide increased resources for the SLI and prioritize training for labor inspectors to identify victims. Moldova must also increase staffing in order to investigate cases of human trafficking and ensure that all traffickers are convicted. Further, Moldova must also strengthen anti-corruption efforts and eradicate corruption within its law enforcement and judiciary sectors.

¹ Keith Arnold Hitchins et. al., *Moldova*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova>.

² *Id.*

³ *Universal Periodic Review – Republic of Moldova*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/md-index>.

⁴ *Infographic – Republic of Moldova*, OHCHR,

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session40/md/2022-12-23/Moldova.pdf>.

⁵ OHCHR, UPR of Republic of Moldova (3d Cycle – 40th Session) *Thematic List of Recommendations*,

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session40/md/2022-09-22/UPR40_Moldova_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.doc.

⁶ CONSTITUTION OF MOLDOVA art. 44,

https://www.constcourt.md/public/files/file/Actele%20Curtii/acte_en/MDA_Constitution_EN.pdf.

⁷ PENAL CODE OF MOLDOVA art. 165, https://www.antitrafic.gov.md/public/files/Codul_penal_ENGL.pdf.

⁸ *Ratification Status for Republic of Moldova*, OHCHR,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=142&Lang=EN.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ *Status of Treaties: 12. A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* art. 9 § 1 (Nov. 15, 2000), https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg_no=xviii-12-a&chapter=18.

¹¹ *A 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, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.

¹² *Evaluation Report Republic of Moldova*, GRETA, 6, <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-council-of-europe/1680b613f3> (June 10, 2025).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Emptying Moldova: The Four Waves of Moldovan Emigration*, GLOBAL VOICES (July 10, 2025), <https://globalvoices.org/2025/07/10/emptying-moldova-the-four-waves-of-moldovan-emigration/>.

¹⁵ *Evaluation Report Republic of Moldova*, *supra* note 12 at para. 64.

¹⁶ *Id.* at para. 106.

¹⁷ *Prosecution of Human Trafficking in Moldova (TIP 2024)*, AMICI DI LAZZARO (2024), <https://www.amicidilazzaro.it/en/trafficking-and-exploitation/prosecution-of-human-trafficking-in-moldova-tip-2024/>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Moldova*, GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX, <https://ocindex.net/country/moldova>.

²⁰ *Sexual Exploitation Network Dismantles, Six Suspects Arrested*, POLICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA (March 2, 2026), <https://politia.md/ro/politia-actiune/retea-de-exploatare-sexuala-destructurata-sase-suspecti-arestati>.

²¹ *Landmark Sentence in Moldova: 11-Year Prison Term for Cross-Border Human and Child Trafficking*, RADIO MOLDOVA (Feb. 16, 2026), <https://radiomoldova.md/p/69859>.

²² *Case of Labor Exploitation of a Minor Uncovered by INI Officers. The 52-Year-Old Suspect – Risks Imprisonment*, POLICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA (Jan. 3, 2025), <https://politia.md/ro/politia-actiune/caz-de-exploatare-prin-munca-unui-minor-descospiat-de-ofiterii-ini-suspectul-de-52>.

²³ *Donduseni: 11 Searches and Two Suspects Detained in a Human Trafficking Case*, POLICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA (Nov. 14, 2025), <https://politia.md/ro/politia-actiune/donduseni-11-perchezitii-si-doi-suspecti-retinuti-intr-un-dosar-de-traffic-de>.

²⁴ *Organized Crime Group Dealing with Trafficking Human Beings Dismantled*, SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN LAW ENFORCEMENT CENTER (July 10, 2025), <https://www.selec.org/organized-crime-group-dealing-with-trafficking-in-human-beings-dismantled/>.

²⁵ *National Report on the Implementation of the Policy to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking in 2025*, COMITETUL NATIONAL PENTRU COMBATEREA TRAFICULUI DE FIINTE UMANE (May 21, 2026), <https://www.antitrafic.gov.md/doc.php?l=ro&idc=30&id=1489&t=/Rapoarte/Nationale/Raportul-National-de-realizare-a-politicii-de-prevenire-i-combatere-a-trafficului-de-fiinte-umane-in-anul-2025>.

²⁶ *Moldova Opens New Unit to Help Curb Human Trafficking, Terrorism and Cross Border Crimes*, IOM (Jan. 16, 2026), <https://www.iom.int/news/moldova-opens-new-unit-help-curb-human-trafficking-terrorism-and-cross-border-crimes>.