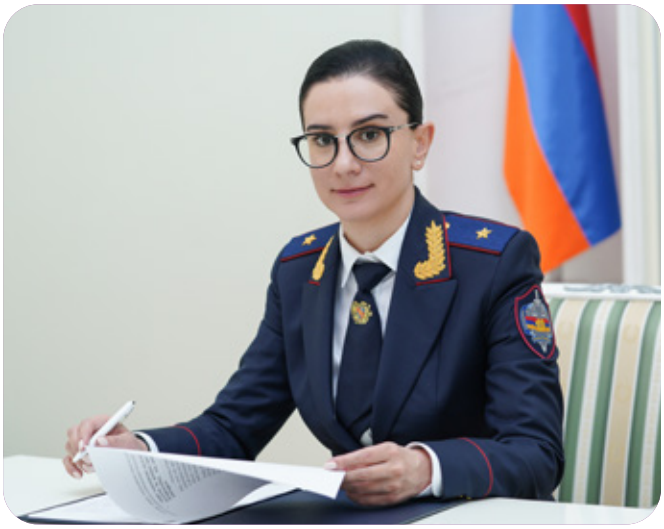
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Trafficking in Persons: Evolution of Legal and Practical Frameworks in Armenia

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Human trafficking is considered as one of the world's fastest-growing crimes. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime of 2024[1] revealed that after the decrease in the detection of victims during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of victims detected globally in 2022 increased sharply again and even surpassed pre-pandemic levels, rising by 25% compared to 2019.

Armenia ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime[2] on 1 Jul 2003 and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings[3] on 14 August 2008, which envisage criminalization of human trafficking and developing anti-trafficking laws in line with these instruments' legal provisions. In the recent years several positive legal changes were made in the Armenian legislation aimed at identify trafficking as a specific and serious criminal conduct and ensuring that perpetrators are duly punished under the law. These positive legal develo-

References

[1] URL: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html

[2] The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 55/25 on 15 November 2000 and entered into force on 25 December 2003.

[3] The Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 3 May 2005 and entered into force on 1 February 2008.

pments include, among other things, adding new provisions on trafficking in human beings in the new Criminal Code of 2022[4] as well as a definition of "compulsory or forced labour" in 2022 in the Labour Code[5]. In addition, the terms and conditions governing investigations into human trafficking have evolved following the entry into force of the new Criminal Procedure Code in July 2022.

The 2026 report of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings[6] (GRETA) evaluated the progress made by Armenia during the period of 2022-2025 in countering trafficking in human beings . The statistical data illustrated in Table No. 1 confirms that the number of victims of trafficking identified in Armenia has increased over the years and the investigation and prosecution of the cases on human trafficking has also improved as shown in Tables Nos. 2 and 3 below[7].

Table No. 1- number of persons that were granted the status of victim of trafficking

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total for 2022-2025
Number of persons:	6	25	25	34	90[8]

Table No. 2- Investigations

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total for 2022-2025
Number of cases:	8	19	36	27	90

Table No. 3- Prosecutions

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total for 2022-2025
Number of cases:	3	5	5	9	22

[4] Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia adopted on May 5, 2021, and implemented starting July 1, 2022, Chapter 26.

[5] Labour Code of the Republic of Armenia adopted on November 9, 2004. Article 3 supplemented by HO-360-N of 5 October 2022, amended, supplemented by HO-160-N of 3 May 2023.

[6] Fourth Evaluation Round: Measures to prevent and detect vulnerabilities to human trafficking Evaluation Report Armenia available at URL: https://rm.coe.int/greta-fourth-round-evaluation-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-coun/48802c1758

[7] Ibid, at pages 11, 37-39.

According to the report of GRETA, labour exploitation has become the predominant form of exploitation amongst identified victims in Armenia. There has been an increase in the number of foreign victims, including migrant workers, which among other things, raises the importance of cross-border cooperation.

The evidence confirms, that in practice, in Armenia the crime of trafficking in persons often intersects with the commission of a different other crimes, which include kidnapping, assault, fraud. This Article however will discuss one of the recent landmark cases prosecuted in Armenia related to sexual exploitation and confiscation of illegal assets, that were earned as a consequence of sexual exploitation. It was for the first time in the practice of Armenian law enforcement, that the prosecution of a human trafficking case intersected with a confiscation of property of illicit origin.[8] This case also demonstrated a very good example of interdepartmental cooperation within the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO).

The analyses of the prosecuted cases on human trafficking in Armenia during 2026 showed, that in the cases of sexual exploitation, the victims who primarily provide sexual services and the perpetrators normally know each other and are engaged in dealings, e.g. taxi services, "security" arrangements, commercial dealings and etc. Hence, the exploiters capitalize on the persons' vulnerability to create financial obligations under various pretexts, thereby plunging them into a state of debt.

In one of the recent cases, perpetrator G.V. with the aim of exploitation of four women for the purpose of establishing coercive control and dependency, gave them golden items, which he valued at twice the market price, with the intention to be exchanged for cash at the time to address basic social needs. He also gave them cars for rental, again at rates exceeding market prices. The trafficking victims were compelled to accept G.V.'s offer and used the resulting cash proceeds to cover their social needs. Subsequently, by adding fictitious amounts to the debts they already owed, G.V. subjected them to sexual exploitation (one of the victims was also subjected to physical violence) and demanded a total of approximately 47,000,000 AMD (≈ 129230,94 USD) from them between 2020 and 2021.

Further on, within the framework of the confiscation of illegal assets, the Anti-Corruption Court of the Republic of Armenia partially satisfied the claim of the PGO against G.V. and in favour of the Republic of Armenia, as a result of which 128,031,111AMD (≈ 352000,00 USD) and 4 cars will be confiscated from G.V.

These patterns confirm that traffickers use all means to recruit and exploit their victims by different means and the criminal justice response should be capable of addressing both the crime of human trafficking and all intersected crimes.

[8] Amongst the 90 victims, there were 31 women, 37 men and 22 children amongst the victims.