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Episode title: Human rights crimes spiking with war in the Ukraine

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In this special edition of the Thomson Reuters Market Insights Podcast, we welcome guest host Heather Fischer, a Senior Advisor for Human Rights Crimes at Thomson Reuters Special Services. We share our podcasting microphone with Heather for this episode for her interview with Valiant Richey, Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings at the organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and a human trafficking expert. The pair discussed the growing problem with human trafficking, particularly as it relates to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the resulting refugee crisis. We are so pleased to be able to share our platform with Heather and Val for this important conversation.

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Heather Fischer: As the conflict in Ukraine has escalated, the world has witnessed a growing refugee crisis as millions of refugees, primarily women and children, flee Ukraine in search of safety, food and shelter. Yet all too often the danger doesn't end there. Once refugees are over the border, they face another threat, this time in the form of sex traffickers and predators seeking to take advantage of these individuals at their most vulnerable moment. As a result, there is an urgency to take concrete action to protect women and children helping victims and tackle the criminals undertaking this terrible crime. To discuss this issue, I'm so pleased to be joined by the honorable Valient Richie, from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe or the OSCE. Val has extensive expertise in the arena of human trafficking. He is the OSCE's Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. In this capacity he represents the OSCE at the political level on anti-trafficking issues. He also assists the 57 OSCE participating states in the development and implementation of anti-trafficking strategies and initiatives. Val's office also serves as the coordinating function among the OSD structures and institutions involved in combating trafficking in human beings. Finally, before joining the OSCE, Val worked for 13 years as a lead prosecutor in Seattle, handling sexual assault, child exploitation, and human trafficking cases. Val welcome, thank you for joining me today. I wanted to start by asking you, can you provide us a level set for our audience and share what human trafficking is and why it's such a pressing global issue?

Val Richey: Well, Heather, it's great to be here. Thanks so much for inviting me and for giving some attention to this important topic. I really appreciate it. You know, human trafficking is an interesting concept because it sounds complicated or it sounds like something that we hear out of movies, but really, at its core, it's just about exploitation. It's about taking advantage of people for commercial gain or for other reasons. Now, there's some complicated legal definitions of it, but at the end of the day, what those definitions say is that if you recruit a person, or if you transport a person, or if you harbor a person using coercive means, like using threats or force, and you're doing it for the purpose of exploiting them for labor or for sex or for their organs, or even to force them to commit crimes, you're committing traffic. And the really interesting part about this is that the international law around human trafficking is focused on making sure that we hold everyone accountable who supports and facilitates this. So, it

could be the driver, the pimp, the trafficker, who first recruited the person. In some cases, it could even be the person paying for services from the traffic victim. So, it's a really designed to make sure that we get everybody who touches this issue, but here's what I really want to talk about, not legal definitions. I want to talk about the scale of this problem. It is such a massive problem in the world today. Some 25 million people are estimated to be victims of trafficking and forced labor and the industry generates about \$150 billion a year. Now, let's put that into perspective that is more than the Apple Corporation's profits each year. That's how big of an industry and an institution the exploitation of human beings is in our world. And so that means it's a really pressing social issue. It's an issue that affects every aspect of our modern life. And we really need to address it at the scale that it occurs.

Heather Fischer: Thank you for providing some insights into what's happening in the shadow economy. I'm curious of why are Ukrainian refugees particularly vulnerable to traffickers right now?

Val Richey: Well, there's a number of reasons and they all compile into a toxic cocktail of vulnerability. Those reasons include things like the fact that these are some now 5 million people who left their homes with little to no preparation. I went to the borders of Ukraine in several different countries, and I saw Ukrainians crossing the border, often carrying nothing more than a bag or a duffel bag or a backpack. Usually, it was women with a few children, maybe an old man, but they had very little time to prepare. They had very little social support and so they're coming across into a situation where they probably don't speak the language. They don't have a lot of financial resources. They don't have their support network from home. They may not have shelter or accommodation. And they're coming into this situation with a lot of vulnerability. They may have trauma from the war that's ongoing. They may have injuries. They may have very little in the way of support, and so if you take all those factors together and you put them into a situation, you can imagine how difficult it would be for one of us to be in that moment. Now, all of this is made worse by the fact that traditionally women and girls constitute about 90% of identified victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Most of the people leaving Ukraine right now are women and children. So, if you put those two factors together the risks go up even more. And finally, historically Ukrainians are exploited at a very high rate in Europe, and so there's pathways of organized crime, there are traditions of already trying to exploit this population in various places in Europe and now all of a sudden, they're being presented with a whole host of vulnerable people that they can take advantage of. So, when you put all these factors together, I get really nervous about the risks of exploitation.

Heather Fischer: I do too, and I know we've been working together to provide sort of a snapshot of information to help inform governments and policymakers on what we think is happening right now and the Thomson Reuters analysis does indicate that Western demand is actually fueling trafficking amongst Ukraine refugees, and can you tell me a bit more about how you interpret these findings?

Val Richey: Yeah, I'm so grateful that you brought this up because I just spent the last couple minutes talking about the vulnerabilities of people coming from Ukraine to exploitation, but now let's talk about the other side of it, which is that most of the time exploitation is done for the purpose of commercial gain, profits. Traffickers, do what they do because they want to make money and there's people who are paying that money and that's the demand side, right? And so, what was so interesting here is that Thomson Reuters pulled together some great, very insightful data about what happened in the days after the conflict started. And what we saw from the data that you provided is that there was immediate spikes in search terms for Ukrainian women, including things like Ukrainian women for sex, Ukrainian

pornography, Ukrainian escorts. Almost immediately there were these spikes, and they weren't small blips. They were spikes of 200% to 600% over the course of the weeks following, which shows that there was a massive interest in men accessing Ukrainian women for sex right as the conflict broke out and traffickers know this, and traffickers will see in that an opportunity to make money. And I find it very disturbing as a man in particular, that one of the first measurable reactions to the conflict was a spike in increased male desire to access sexually accessed Ukrainian women who we all know in this situation are incredibly vulnerable. That is a very disturbing fact to me and the fact that Thomson Reuters found a way to quantify and to look at that as a measurable reaction to the conflict was very disturbing, but very useful from a policy response perspective.

Heather Fischer: Well, we were glad to partner with you on that effort and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about your role as Special Coordinator in the impetus for the research and the recommendations that you and your team undertook. How do you translate and make that into useful information to the governments that you work with?

Val Richey: Well, I think, you know, as you said during the introduction, I worked for some years as a prosecutor, and I had the benefit in that position of seeing a lot of men who were trying to exploit vulnerable women. And one of the guys that I prosecuted during his conversations with other sex buyers made the comment that war is great for the sex trade and that quote stuck with me because it really highlighted how men who are interested in predatory behavior related to women will take advantage of crises to exploit people. And so that's that quote stuck with me and years later here we are in a crisis, a war involving millions of refugees and I see the same thing happening now. And we heard early on in the crisis we heard reports from police in some of the countries we work with that we're seeing this spike in searches for Ukrainian women, and so we wanted to figure out a way how to turn that sort of gut feeling that something was going on here into actionable data. And that's where we started working with you and Thomson Reuters and we got the data that stood behind the gut feeling. And that data tells us some really important things and what it tells us is that when we want to stop exploitation, we don't only need to work on preventing vulnerability of Ukrainian women and children crossing the border, we also need to work on that demand that is fueling trafficking, that is incentivizing trafficking and we need to address that in some way to really try to reduce the financial incentive of human exploitation. And if we can figure out a way to do that, then I think we can make real progress in reducing exploitation of these very vulnerable people.

Heather Fischer: Now, you've given us a really good high-level view and I'm curious in light of the risk you've identified of human trafficking among refugees. What can be done on the ground right now to help protect them from traffickers and to support victims?

Val Richey: Well, I talked about the sort of, let's call it and I don't want to be cynical here, but let's call it the supply side. The people who are the vulnerable people who are most likely to be exploited and I've talked about the demand side. And if those are the two sort of engines of exploitation, then our response needs to address both of those. So, on the first part of it what we need to do is take steps to reduce vulnerability and to prevent people from falling into exploitative situations. And there's a number of very important things that governments and communities can do to accomplish that. The first is to make sure that people's immediate needs are met. As I described, Ukrainian women and children coming across the border need food, accommodation, health care. They need access to education, childcare, labor. They need language classes. They need things like communication devices.

SIM cards, access to the Internet, basic things that we take for granted every day, but they now no longer have access to because they've been forcibly displaced. They need those things so that they are stable, so that they have access to support and security and safety. And if countries aren't providing those things, they're going to be much more vulnerable to exploitation. Let me give you an example. I was just in Moldova a few weeks ago. Prior to the conflict, Moldova had a huge shortage of childcare, prior to any of this happening. In the span of a few weeks, Moldova saw 400,000 people come from Ukraine to their country. It was 10% of their population in the span of a month and a half. Can you imagine that in the United States it would be 40 million people in six weeks? It would be incredible. 10% of their population came. 100,000 of those people stayed, half of which are children. So, they took a crisis of lack of childcare and lack of good access to education, and they added 50,000 children to that crisis. Most of the people coming out are women and children. How can women get access to the labor market if they don't have access to childcare? And so, this creates a cascade of challenges where women can't then get the income, they need to be stable and safe and healthy because they can't get the childcare because there's a shortage of services in that country. This highlights the complexity of the challenges that we're facing, so let's talk about the other side, on demand. I just spoke about how buyers will misuse technology platforms to achieve their goals of exploiting people, so they will use search engines. They'll use sexual service websites. They'll use social media; they'll use all of those things to try to perpetuate the marketplace. So, what we can do is we can flip the script and use those same platforms in a positive way to discourage demand. And this includes things like online awareness campaigns. And I don't just mean general awareness campaigns like you might see in the airport, "hey, human trafficking is bad. Don't do it". there's nothing wrong with those, but I'm talking about really concrete targeted awareness campaigns to men who are going online to try to exploit people discouraging them from taking that step and steering them towards services instead, things like that. We can also use online search engines, for example to generate positive messages instead of funneling people to exploitative services. We can also take more broad initiatives. Things like early childhood education. A lot of sex buyers start when they're under 25. We should be talking with young boys, young adults, young men about gender equality about exploitation and about exploitative behaviors about everything from domestic violence, sexual harassment to buying sex, and why that isn't healthy behavior for anybody, and why it creates risks of exploitation. If we can do things like that, I think we can really impact it. From the private sector perspective, there's a whole bunch of things they can do. One of the most effective interventions we've seen is employer codes of conduct that discourage employees from engaging in potentially risky or exploitative behavior, has nothing to do with being arrested, but it means this is not acceptable behavior and you shouldn't be doing it here, and if you do you might lose your job. That's very compelling to people who are attempted to take bad steps. And finally, we need to hold people who do bad things accountable. And that means that they need to - if they are buying services from trafficking victims, if they're exploiting people, they need to be prosecuted and they need to be held accountable. And we can't do that if we're not if law enforcement is not engaged on this topic, so that's another area where there's an intervention.

Heather Fischer: I think you know that I'm a big believer in investing in prevention education for children and youth, so it's great to hear you talk about that aspect. And these are a great set of recommendations on how to tackle the demand aspect, so thank you. Thinking more about governments and how they can work together in a more connected fashion through bilateral or multilateral engagements to tackle human trafficking, can you give us a view into how you think there could be more coordination or partnership really relative to the crisis in Ukraine right now?

Val Richey: Yeah, it's a really important question because traffickers don't respect boundaries, right? They don't say, "Sorry, the city line is here I only operate here", that's not how it works, right? So, they don't do that with country boundaries or city boundaries or anything, and so what's crucial in places like Europe, where there are smaller countries that have a lot of migration across them, movement of people across them, there needs to be a lot of cooperation. This can take a number of different forms. For example, joint investigative teams where police from different countries work together to try to work on cases. This is fundamental because the victim might be in one country in a perpetrator at another country, and the evidence for that case in another country. For example, the bank records. It's really important then that the countries figure out a way to cooperate on this, and the same thing is true for services. A victim might be identified in country "A" receive initial services but then be moved back to the victim's home country, it's really important that there be a continuity of care for that victim, who then moves back to a certain area if, for example, they're exploited in the United Kingdom, but then they go back to Romania, Romania needs to be ready to continue the care and make sure that they have stability. All of this is true and made even more difficult online. So, a lot of as I've discussed already, a lot of trafficking is now happening online. And it's really important that police be able to gather the e-evidence they need to prosecute the case. They need to be able to share that evidence across borders. They need to be able to capture it from companies that might be an entirely different continent, and so in that respect again cross-border communication and cross-border collaboration between public sector and between the public sector and the private sector is really, really important.

Heather Fischer: Those are all terrific points, Val, and I know you are a former prosecutor, so do you think that there is more that could be done to support law enforcement and help train and equip them to take on these trafficking criminal networks?

Val Richey: Yes, in fact I do and let me give you an example of what kind of information has informed me about this. We've been gathering together institutions that do training of law enforcement and other entities on trafficking and talking about what are they training on, who are they training, where are they training. And what we learned from those meetings was that a lot of institutions hardly any are training on technology facilitated trafficking. Yet, tech facilitated trafficking represents a huge share of the exploitation that's happening, so this shows a gap between what's actually happening, the criminal conduct and between the response. And so, we think that there is a great need for and an opportunity for better training of law enforcement and prosecutors and judges on technology facilitated trafficking and how to respond to it. And this can include everything from e-evidence to sharing of information to presenting information in a compelling fashion, to judicial authorities and so forth. We also can't forget about victim needs. And one of the biggest pieces of this is to really emphasize for anti-trafficking stakeholders. The multi-agency approach here, and what do I mean by that? Law enforcement's job is not to take care of and to meet victims' immediate needs like housing, shelter, medical, psychological care. Law enforcement's job is to try to keep the victims safe and to prosecute or investigate the case. So, it's important that law enforcement works together with social services so that they can provide comprehensive support to a victim and a robust criminal justice investigation. And so, we do a lot of training around multi-agency approach is making sure that the different entities all work together in understanding and responding to a criminal case, and I think there's a lot of opportunity there. Let me make this last point. You can't do any of these things if you don't have the right policy environment, right? Law enforcement can't be taught how to seize e-evidence if there's not a law that allows them to seize e-evidence or to use it in court. And yet many countries I visit don't have those laws, so it's really

crucial that parliaments and legislatures get involved in this conversation as well to make sure that the policy framework is there to support the action on the ground. And this is a crucial piece of it.

Heather Fischer: You've talked a bit about how demand can fuel trafficking, and the OSCE has written an important paper on technology facilitated trafficking and you've touched on the role that technology plays in this, but how can tech be used to combat exploitation? And are there ways that tech companies can go on the offensive to help support these anti-trafficking efforts that you're spearheading?

Val Richey: Definitely, the first thing is that tech can be used to capture and to monitor and to assess and to measure exploitation online. This is something that shouldn't be missed. For example, there's some great scraping and mapping tools that can be used to see what are the websites where exploitation is happening, what scale is that happening at, can we look at the sexual service advertisements and use technology to try to understand who might be exploited in those advertisements? And there's just a host of tools that can be used to try to take the business model that traffickers are using and use it against them, right? And to capture that evidence and to use it, but there's also a whole host of tools that can be used to support victim response, law enforcement response and the general anti-trafficking framework. And what I mean here are tools like case management for victim service providers, interpretation tools that can be used with victims who are foreign and may not speak the language. There's a whole bunch of tech tools that can be used around supply chain management to make sure that your risks of exploitation in your subcontractors at tier 1, 2,3,4 are all that that that the contractors are following the rules that they should be that they're taking efforts to manage risk and so forth. We captured the scope of what positive use of technology looks like in a paper that we published about a year and a half ago called Leveraging Technology. And we published this paper, it's an assessment of about 300 different tools that are being used to combat trafficking. We compiled all of these and took a look at them, and we found that there is a tremendous opportunity through using technology to combat trafficking. It's a first compendium of its kind and it led us to a couple conclusions. One is, there's a huge opportunity to use technology to combat trafficking. There's already been a ton of development in this area, so one of the things that we should be focusing on is not necessarily more development, but measuring, monitoring, and scaling up existing technology that's already out there. The other thing that we looked at is that most of the technology that's being used right now to combat trafficking was developed by the private sector. Governments are taking a very, very weak role in using tech in a positive way and that was a big recommendation of ours was to for government to take a bit more of a proactive role in developing and using technology in a positive way. So, those are just a few of the observations from the paper, but the overwhelming conclusion is that tech has a really important role to play in combating exploitation.

Heather Fischer: I think we would agree with you there. Certainly, Thomson Reuters is trying to do our part to help support law enforcement and prosecutors illuminating the networks of bad actors. So, it's been really great to be a part of this advancement and technology really going on the proactive side, but any final thoughts that you would like to share with our audience on the future of stopping human trafficking and protecting refugees that are fleeing Ukraine?

Val Richey: You know, I think that the situation in Ukraine is a terrible tragedy. It also provides us an opportunity and what I mean by that is we can sit back and be horrified, or we can step up and try to take action. And it's a chance to look at the situation in Ukraine as a case study of what happens when you mix vulnerability with a marketplace and with toxic demand, and with traffickers who are motivated

to exploit people for profit. It also is a case study on how we can react to those situations. And so, what I described earlier was that we're seeing an online demand that's very concerning. We're seeing a ton of vulnerability among people coming out of Ukraine, and you put those two things together and I think we're on the cusp of having a real problem of exploitation. On the other hand, in response to this crisis, I have seen more awareness an attention and publicity around risk of exploitation that I've seen in any crisis before. It's fantastic in the sense that it's raised awareness around through the media, through companies, through governments about exploitation at a time when we can actually do something about it. Most of the time, these conversations happened two years after the fact where everyone assesses the situation and says, "Wow there was a ton of bad things that happened during that crisis and we should have done better", but for once, for once we are ahead of the curve, we're having conversations about prevention instead of response. And I think this is really positive, so I guess my final thoughts are is this is an opportunity to demonstrate and to develop and to implement a response that actually makes sense that's effective and it deploys all of the good tools that we've been developing over the last years from our laws and policies to our tech tools, to our training and our expertise on the ground to our partnerships between NGO's and government authorities. This is the time to implement all those and to really look for an opportunity to shut down exploitation before it goes, it gets out there.

Heather Fischer: Valiant Ritchie, thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you for taking time out of your very busy schedule attending to these matters, we really look forward to following your work. I look forward to working alongside of you and I just really want to thank you for your leadership.

Val Richey: Thanks a lot Heather. It was a pleasure talking with you and I should say the same. Thanks a lot to you for all your work on this issue, but also to Thomson Reuters for its engagement. I think you've really set the standard for how private sector has a lot it can do in this area, and how, with a little bit of ambition, a little bit of engagement and will, great things can happen from all segments of society, so thanks so much to you and to your company.

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