

COUNTERING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS: THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION CHANGE AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

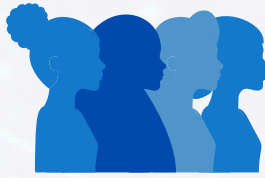
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FUNDEA



Introduction

Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) is a transnational serious organised crime with diverse dynamics that violate the fundamental rights of individuals. In 2021, in the EU, the number of registered victims of human trafficking was 7, 155, a 10% increase compared with 2020 (6 534) THB occurs in both the online and physical world, thus posing significant challenges for many EU countries that need to combat THB simultaneously with smuggling and other criminal activities. Despite EU and worldwide efforts to combat THB, there are still significant shortcomings regarding the early identification of victims, effective criminal investigations and the prosecution of perpetrators, due to the numerous challenges underpinning this multifaceted crime.

Perceptions can also play a huge role, since idealised images of what a trafficking victim and perpetrator look like, can often hinder early identification and prosecution. This fact sheet highlights some of the latest trends in THB in order to sensitize readers to this ever, evolving heinous crime. It will further provide concrete recommendations to help counteract THB including the need for co-created awareness campaigns with survivors, LEAs and other frontline practitioners, in order to reflect the true reality of this multifaceted crime.



Women are also perpetrators in human trafficking

It is important to recognize the role of gender, since female suspects are often in charge of the more essential roles including recruitment (e.g. posting enticing job advertisements); grooming the victims and presenting themselves as examples of success stories; receiving the victims upon arrival, and introducing the rules of the prostitution services to them; managing the victims' online advertisements and communicating with customers;

administering the regular payments of subscription fees for the upload and maintenance of online advertisements; setting the tariffs for sexual services and keeping accounts of the victims' earnings; and transferring proceeds from the victims to the ring leaders.

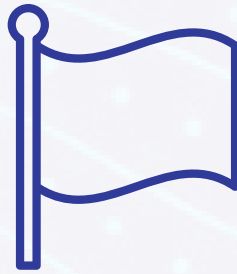




E-trafficking is on the rise

Technology is increasingly used by traffickers since it allows them increased anonymity, the ability to take part in real-time yet encrypted communications, the possibility of reaching a broader audience (in terms of victims and clients), geographical mobility and the ability to control victims from a distance. The rise of cyber-trafficking has also increased due to individuals increased reliance on technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly influencers like Andrew Tate who purport narratives of toxic masculinity have been accused of human trafficking in the continued form.





Nationality is also an issue

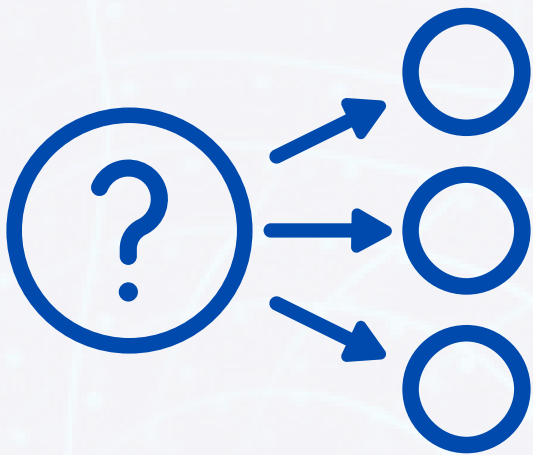
Many traffickers are often of the same nationality as their victims. They often use the advantage of speaking the same language and knowing the culture to trick victims into moving abroad for fake employment opportunities. They can also trick victims into falling in love with them, offering them fake promises which often turn out to lead to exploitation for sexual purposes.



EU Citizens are also trafficked

More than half of the victims of trafficking in the EU are EU citizens, and a significant number of them are trafficked within their own country.

Victims are trafficked for multiple reasons



Human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation is on the rise in Europe, affecting an increasing number of women, men and children who are forced to work servitude in many sectors including the domestic, tourist and agricultural sectors. Other less common known motives include human trafficking for purposes of forced marriage, criminality (i.e., stealing goods for criminal gangs to be sold in other countries, spotting for drug gangs and dealing drugs), and begging. Sometimes practitioners and even LEAs are unsure when to intervene in so termed “grey areas” of human trafficking including forced begging and forced criminality.

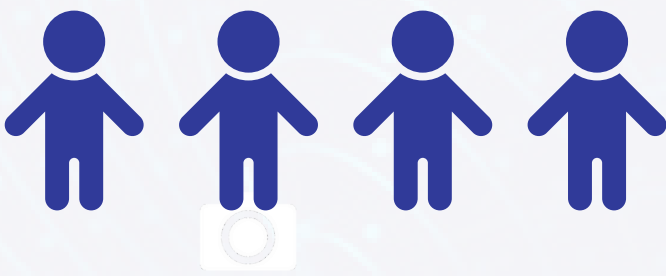
Asylum seekers are often victims

Asylum seekers are often vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking due to the lack of safe legal routes and humanitarian corridors. There has been a risk of trafficking during the Ukrainian crisis- especially for those with limited labour opportunities who fled the war in Ukraine but remain outside the temporary protection regime. Many asylum seekers are trafficked from so termed places of safety such as hotels, reception centres and camps in countries of destination with traffickers often using phone trackers and social media to locate them.



Child victims often know their traffickers¹

Globally, over 50% of child trafficking victims are recruited by family and friends, with more than half of child trafficking victims trafficked within their own countries. The number of child victims is rising and around every fourth victim of trafficking in the EU is a child.



1 In the first of its kind report researchers have explored the report is based on analysis of extensive, globally sourced data, is the first of its kind and analyses primary data from more than 69,000 victims of trafficking of 156 nationalities, trafficked in 186 countries, who registered with IOM in its 113 countries of operation, using the IOM Victims of Trafficking Database (VoTD) - the largest available international database of individual victims of trafficking.

Countering trafficking – the importance of co-created awareness campaigns

Clearly THB needs to be tackled with tougher legislation, better reporting and data collection methods and advanced technological tools, and international cooperation and dedicated anti-trafficking police task force. However, awareness raising campaigns and serious gaming are crucial in warning and protecting future victims from trafficking, as well as sensitising the general public to the problem thereby increasing the possibility for reporting and early identification.

Such awareness campaigns can be conducted with all interested stakeholders including NGO representatives, experts, LEAs and most importantly survivors of trafficking. Taking a survivor centred approach can increase awareness of this ever evolving crime helping to prevent revictimization. Awareness campaigns can be created via the use of participatory platforms thereby facilitating cooperation and capacity building. In addition, multi-agency stakeholder committees can be created to further liaise with policy makers to improve policy making and enhance training for frontline practitioners including labour inspectors. Leadership programs, run by survivors of trafficking can help the relationships between some groups like undocumented migrants or ethnic minorities who do not have a good relationship with the police. Such approaches help prioritize the human rights and the dignity of the survivors.



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