

HUMAN TRAFFICKING MANUAL FOR JOURNALISTS

Third and amended edition





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Publisher:

Marija Anđelković
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Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
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www.astra.rs
©ASTRA 2023

Graphic design:

Darko Kolesar

Analysis of Media Content: *Responsibility in Words: Media Coverage of Human Trafficking in Serbia*, Agency for Monitoring Traditional and Social Media and Analysis of Media Content KLIPING

Research: *Human trafficking in Serbia: Overview of the situation in the context of the 21st century*, SeConS – Development Initiative Group

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Why the third edition of this Manual

This Manual was created with the intention to offer all those who write or wish to write on the phenomenon of trafficking in women fundamental information on the problem itself, and give recommendations for writing, all for the purpose of the most precise possible presentation of the problem to the citizens, in the interest of women victims of trafficking and all the persons dealing with them.

The second edition of the Manual that you have in front of you provides a cross section of the most significant aspects of the problem of trafficking in women as experienced by an organization from Serbia. NGO ASTRA, the publisher of the Manual, is a women's non-governmental organization which works on the prevention of human trafficking and offers direct assistance to the victims. This Manual is created on the basis of our eight-year long experience in fighting human trafficking in Serbia. In the period between March 2002 and November 2008, ASTRA SOS Hotline received 8,533 calls. During the same period, 275 trafficking victims were identified, of whom 41% were children.

We advocate the position that trafficking in women is just one of the forms of violence against women, that is, of the violation of women's human rights. We define it as trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and trafficking in women aimed at exploitation of labor e.g. work at home or forced marriage. We speak of trafficking in women when a woman is recruited by deception, coercion, threat, force, exposed to violence and forced to engage in jobs which are exploitative, in slavery-like labor, and which are, therefore, the violation of human rights that are guaranteed by birth. Due to the complexity of this phenomenon, we have tried to fully cover all its aspects.

Due to the very fact that trafficking in persons, but especially in women and children, is marked as a priority of political officials around the world and that it is present in the media more than ever, this Manual was created as a response to the current way of presenting the problem of trafficking in women and to the existing assistance mechanisms in the Republic of Serbia.

The second, extended edition of the Manual for Journalists, besides the definition and historical outline, also provides a general overview of the

situation and new trends in human trafficking in the world. The Manual brings the fundamental information on the problem of trafficking in women, on who the victims of trafficking are, how they are recruited, on the causes of trafficking in women. It speaks of trafficking in women as another form of violence, on the difference between trafficking in women, prostitution and illegal migration, on the violence a woman experiences as a victim of trafficking, and on prejudices we often hear concerning the problem of trafficking.

In the second section, the Manual speaks of the proportions of trafficking in women in Serbia, the mechanisms developed to this day for the purpose of suppressing trafficking; it stresses the data collected by means of the SOS hotline for victims of trafficking; it presents national legislation that governs the problem of trafficking in women, as well as the data on trafficking in children. Moreover, in this section you may read what the citizens of Serbia think and how much they know about this topic.

In order to reach out to as many journalists as possible, we have tried to include experts, excellent journalists who have been practicing investigative journalism in the area of trafficking in women for years or who have otherwise been contributing to the prevention and suppressing of this problem. Our idea was that it would be most useful for journalists to read about the experience of their peers working in the area of radio, TV, documentary journalism, print media and marketing. This section also contains a comparative analysis of the print media in the period May-October 2008 and throughout 2003, in order to assess qualitative progress in the reporting by Serbian media on the problem of human trafficking.

Also, we have tried to analyze terminology, the intensity of writing and the visual presentation of the problem of trafficking in women as it appeared in the print media, as well as to give recommendations to all those who write or are preparing to write on the topic of trafficking in women.

The last section contains additional references and contacts of relevant institutions, international and nongovernmental organization in the country and abroad that may be of use for all those who are doing in-depth research of this problem.

Adequate media reporting on this problem is very important for deconstructing prejudice and stereotypes, popular awareness raising, preventing future

recruitment and improving the quality of assistance and reintegration process of persons who managed to come out of the trafficking chain. We considered this to be our common interest.

Therefore, we hope you will find this Manual useful for your work. Should you have any questions, perplexities or you need additional information, call ASTRA, we will be glad to help.

A WORD FROM THE THERAPIST – The conflict between the desire to deny horrific events and the desire to speak about them

Think of a situation when you experienced an abuse, threat, violence... When you felt intense fear for yourself and your loved ones and loss of control in important areas of life. This situation may have been an isolation, lack of support and helplessness. You felt so ashamed that you wished to disappear, and the guilt that „it“ was happening to you was overwhelming, even though you clearly knew that you had nothing to do with the harm that was inflicted on you. We are talking about an experience when your feelings, intimacy, safety, integrity, dignity, honour or body experienced some kind of threat. It was difficult for you to confide to another person about the experience, you were afraid that they would not believe you... Unfortunately, your apprehension was justified: many shook their heads sceptically, assured you that it „wasn't really like that“ and that it „wasn't that important“, or made unsavoury jokes ...

I invite all readers of this Manual to picture a hypothetical situation, in which your painful recollected experience is made public in print, visual, digital media - with your full name or initials. Truly, semi-falsely or falsely described, but everyone may feel invited to further hurt, insult, intimidate you in the comments. In addition, I ask you to imagine that it would forever remain in the sphere of virtual reality, the Internet, the cloud. One click would always be enough for your trauma to be exploited again, for different and often disgraceful reasons.

The consequences of unprofessional reporting represent a new form of violence against the victims, especially when we talk about survivors of the trauma of human trafficking, a complex trauma that is classified as torture (the most serious attack on human life). Also, every time they see themselves, their name, or initials, or when the abusers (traffickers, their helpers, sympathetic representatives of the media, institutions and the community in which they live) deny the crime or to praise their deeds, the survivors become victims again, reliving the trauma they have already experienced. And not only that - through the unethical actions described, they experience another form of violence. The spiral of violence does not stop.

Regardless individual differences, all survivors' needs can be summed up in the „5P formula¹“: support, trust, connection, help and friendship. They need to feel safe first, so that the wounds heal at least to some extent, and then justice should be served. The continuation of life, with the feeling that the future is certain, is inseparable from restoring faith in one's own values and in the people around them. It is essential that the survivors feel a genuine connection with others again. Only then can we use the term - integration.

„The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma,“ said author J.L. Herman in “Trauma and Recovery”.

The above quote indicates how delicate the condition of the survivors is, and therefore the complexity of reporting on the events and painful experiences of these people, their loved ones and affected communities. In order not to become symbolic accomplices of violence while reporting on the trauma of human trafficking, I invite you to protect the confidentiality of personal data, victims' testimonies, their honour and dignity, human and civil rights, and especially the rights of child victims.

Through psychotherapy with survivors of the human trafficking trauma, I have learned that most of them want the public and the media to talk and write about human trafficking as a brutal, organized crime. It is especially important to survivors to prevent that some other children, girls, women and men have the same experience. Eventually, when the survivors feel a strong need to tell everything - to the camera or the recorder, you should remember that you are certainly more powerful than them, and therefore you should protect them from excessive exposure and potential retaliation. Reporting on dangers to children and people, risks, self-protection, institutions and organizations whose competence is the prevention and protection of victims, is the best way of socially responsible reporting on human trafficking. At the same time, it is an immeasurable support to the survivors.

However, even when it is over, the wounds still remain with the survivors. The professional ethics of journalists, editors, photographers, the honesty, respect and empathy are important links in the recovery of persons who have survived the trauma of human trafficking.

¹ In Serbian the „5P“ stands for: *podrška, poverenje, povezanost, pomoć i prijateljstvo* (translator's note)

I invite you to remember the mental exercise from the beginning of this text whenever you report on human trafficking, gender-based violence, violence against children and other forms of violence when people and their loved ones suffered injuries or, unfortunately, lost their lives.

Kind regards,

Biljana Slavković

Psychotherapist, Institute for Psychodrama



GENERAL OVERVIEW

Have you ever watched waves at sea? Violence is like a sea wave. You see it coming, but you cannot evade it. You have no choice – when it finally reaches you, it gets hold of you. Everything is out of your control, you are in the wave, desperately trying to free yourself, but the wave has its course, a life of its own. And then it breaks – and you never know where it broke, where you are now... That was my life – everything I wished was at least some possibility of choice – a chance to evade that wave. To live my own life. Then I got the feeling that this chance appeared and – I left.... (“The Story of a Woman Victim of Trafficking”, radio drama, Siobhan Cleary)

What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a global phenomenon that hits all countries in the world: countries in political and economic transition, underdeveloped and developing countries, countries in war and post-conflict countries that appear as the countries of origin and transit of trafficking victims, and economically developed countries that appear as the countries of destination. Terms “the country of origin/source country”, “transit country” and “destination country” are not absolute categories – one country may be any of this in specific cases. Also, economic development and wealth of destination country cannot be observed independently from the situation in the country of origin.

There are not reliable and comprehensive data on the size of the problem of human trafficking, but estimations made by international organizations and some national agencies may serve as a good indicator. According to the UN, 700,000 children, women and men fall victim to trafficking every year. US State Department estimates this figure at 900,000, of whom 20,000 persons are exploited in the US territory. The International Labor Organization estimates that in 2021, 49.6 million people lived in modern slavery, of which 27.6 million were victims of forced labour and 22 million of forced marriage². UNICEF estimates that a third of the victims of human trafficking are children³. Although it is still dominantly believed that only women and children may fall victim to trafficking, the truth is that anyone can be the victim.

² <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

³ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-account-nearly-one-third-identified-trafficking-victims-globally>

Human trafficking is considered to be one of three most profitable criminal activities, alongside drug trafficking and illegal arms trafficking. It is often referred to as “highly profitable and low-risk activity” because, on one side, it is estimated that traffickers’ profits range from a couple of billions to as much as 60 and even 500 billion USD a year, while, statistically, only a small number of them end up in court and are sentenced to long prison sentences.

Human trafficking works on the supply-demand principle. On one side, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, deprivation, wars, political instability, family violence, discrimination, even natural and ecological disasters make people, in search for better life or pure survival, look for job, education and other opportunities in some other town or country. On the other hand, in the globalization era, more developed and wealthier countries generate growing demand for cheap products, cheap labour, cheap services. It is not irrelevant that the 20th century was the century of numerous armed conflicts and international peace operations, which indicates to a great demand for sexual services wherever the troops are located, as well as to the absence of institutions and the collapse of the system in countries in which the conflict occurs. All of these is favourable to the growth of all kinds of crime, including human trafficking. Organized criminal groups have found their interest and possibility for enormous profits through matching such supply and demand. Besides socio-economic circumstances that generate the development of human trafficking, there are other reasons that may also make one country or region favourable for the recruitment of trafficking victims, such as natural catastrophes and too strict visa and immigration regulations of developed countries.

Human trafficking is a complex problem and different actors fight its different aspects. Although not every single act of human trafficking is linked to organized crime, but may appear as a crime of an individual, or even a crime of opportunity, organized criminal groups are those that run and control the largest portion of this “business”. In public-law and strategic context, a serious state must not allow the growth of organized crime in its territory, as it brings economic destabilization due to increased money laundering, corruption rise in the public sector, political corruption, the loss of control over border management and similar, resulting in the purchase of political power and the creation of a criminal state. However, not less important aspect which civil society insists upon and state authorities are often prone to neglect is the fact that human trafficking is the gravest violation of victims’ human rights. In addition to human rights violation which victims suffer while they are exploited, their situation changes only slightly even when they manage to find

a way out. Although the process of recovery and reintegration is hard, long and uncertain in itself, on the top of it victims are forced to fight prejudice and lack of understanding on the part of their surroundings and institutions and are often exposed to secondary victimization by those who are supposed to provide them with assistance and support.

Although it may sometimes look as if this is a new problem which has arisen only recently, human trafficking is actually a phenomenon that has been present and tolerated in different forms throughout the whole history. At the end of the 20th century, it flourished in Europe thanks to extensive socio-political changes that took place in Eastern Europe. An economic collapse that accompanied the transition from socialism into capitalism and parliamentary democracy, together with false impression of good and worry-free life on the other side of the former "iron curtain" they knew nothing about, made many people, especially women and girls, to go to Western Europe. Wars in the territory of former Yugoslavia only contributed to the establishment of a safe transit route, which was often a place for temporary exploitation of trafficking victims, too.

Already at the beginning of the 20th century, international community sensed a need to internationally ban such practices. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which UN General Assembly adopted in 1948, strictly prohibits any form of slavery and slave trade. Soon followed other international treaties and convention that prohibited practices that might be associated with trafficking in human beings. Finally, in 2000, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children (Trafficking Protocol) was adopted, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as the first document addressing the problem of human trafficking in a modern way and, with all its deficiencies, giving a comprehensive definition of this phenomenon. In 2005, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

Human Trafficking – Illegal Migrations – Prostitution

Both general public and some professionals often put equal sign between human trafficking, illegal migrations and prostitution. However, these three terms essentially differ, in spite of some commonalities.

According to general definition, migration stands for any form of temporary or permanent geographical movement of living creatures. To put it simply, this concerns any geographical movement of individuals or groups for the purpose of permanently resettling. Migrations are not a new phenomenon. For centuries, people have been leaving their homes in search for (better) life. Migrations are affected by different factors: demographic, economic, political, geographical; they are often caused by national, religious, racial persecutions and persecutions on political grounds. However, it should be remembered that migrations, both legal and illegal, are driven by the same push and pull factors as human trafficking, and many persons have fallen victim to trafficking by attempting to migrate.

Cross-border migrations may be divided, inter alia, into legal and illegal. As opposed to moving into another country based on legal documents, visa, residence and work permits and in compliance with all immigration regulations of the host-country, illegal migrations most often involve people smuggling.

People smuggling implies the illegal transfer of persons from one country to another in exchange for money. An illegal migrant i.e. smuggled person voluntarily participates in the entire process. Human trafficking lacks the element of consent on the part of the victim, i.e. even if it is there, consent arises out of coercion, deception, threat, being misled and the like. Also, people smuggling is of cross-border nature, that is, the crossing of one or more international state borders constitutes the act of people smuggling. On the other hand, human trafficking can be transnational and internal, i.e. victims may, but need not cross state borders during the process of trafficking. However, it should be borne in mind that the status and position of illegal migrants, both during the transfer and their staying in the desired destination, make this group vulnerable to human trafficking, which is another point where these two phenomena meet. Namely, fully dependant on smugglers, without documents and money and with tiny or inexistent knowledge of the country they go to, its language etc., illegal migrants are an easy prey to human traffickers.

Human trafficking was criminalized for the first time in Serbia in 2003 (Article 111b of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia) in such a manner that nicely illustrate unacceptable confusion between this problem and people smuggling. Because of this, although formal conditions were thus provided that were supposed to make the monitoring of the size of human trafficking in

Serbia and intensity and efficiency of state response to this problem possible, data obtained in this way remained incomplete and unreliable, while a great number of criminal reports of human trafficking filed by the police actually referred to migrants caught in an attempt to illegally cross the state border.

Human trafficking is often confused with prostitution, partially because the most common form of exploitation of identified trafficked victims is sexual exploitation of women and girls. However, sexual exploitation is only one form of human trafficking (besides forced labour, forced begging, forced commission of criminal acts, illegal adoption, forced marriage, organ trafficking, etc.), where the victims are also men and boys.

Although a person may choose to provide sexual services due to difficult life and social status, it is important to distinguish between „voluntary prostitution“ - when a person has agreed to provide sexual services, which is a choice - and forced prostitution. In the case of human trafficking, the victim is forced into prostitution. S/he cannot make a free decision about where and how to work, whether to reject a client, and often has no freedom of movement and cannot decide to quit and leave the situation. Such a person also faces severe exploitative practices, such as having all or most of their earnings kept by the traffickers.

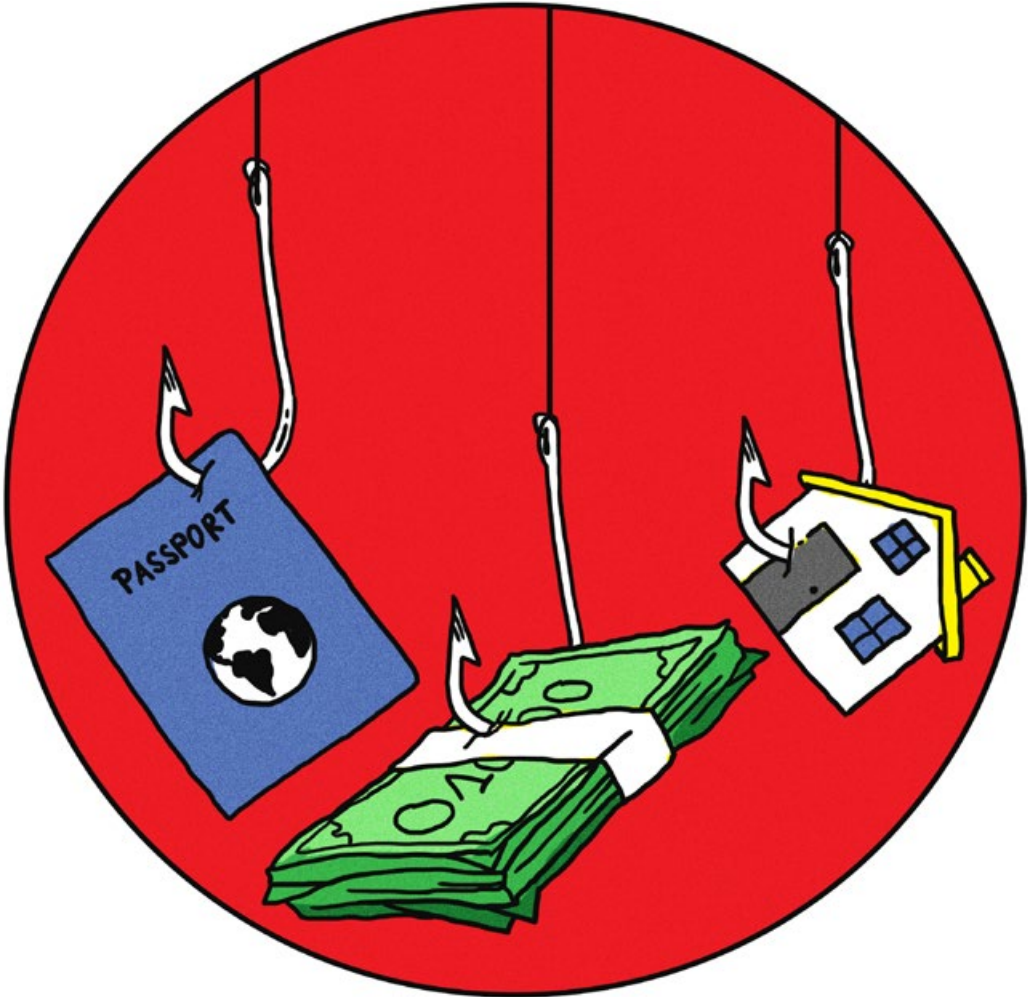
A person who voluntarily engages in sex work can become a victim of human trafficking; it happens when sex work ceases to be a choice and starts to be a compulsion.

Causes of Human Trafficking

In the majority of international documents that deal with the problem of human trafficking, special emphasis is put on trafficking in women and children because women and children constitute more than 80% of all identified victims. However, it should be borne in mind that men can fall victim too, especially to trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation. In that respect, some of the causes of human trafficking are of gender nature, based of special vulnerability of women, while others equally affect both men and women.

Different causes may affect someone becoming trafficking victims. These causes may be divided into the so-called *push* and *pull* factors. Unemployment,

poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunities, violence or discrimination may push someone to try to build life in some other place. Anyone who wants to change their life will be interested in considering offers that seem to be conducive to that goal. And, in the light of imagined advantages of better life, job or interesting experience in some other place, it is easy to accept such offers.



Living conditions in the country of origin

If we look at the most frequent countries of origin of trafficking victims, we can see that these are mostly developing countries and countries in transition. Countries in transition are undergoing political, social and cultural changes and are faced with numerous developmental challenges. The unbalanced distribution of power and opportunities, poverty and unemployment, create an environment that is favourable for recruiting trafficking victims, because people are in constant search for work. In addition, corruption and presence of armed conflict in one country or the region give traffickers breeding ground for work. All these factors have marked life in Eastern and South-eastern Europe in last twenty years, while numerous political, social and cultural changes and collapses have strengthened unequal “distribution of power” between men and women, in the form of increase in poverty and unemployment in general, and in particular the unemployment of women.

At the beginning of the new millennium, trafficking in women is a result of a new social and political reality and the balance of power in the world, but first of all, of a society that has no interest in facing its own violence. Despite numerous international documents and national constitutional provisions that guarantee the rights and freedoms of all individuals, violence against women is an omnipresent phenomenon. It reflects on economic, family, educational and public level, creating a circle that any woman is unlikely to step out of without the support of her surroundings, institutions or the law.

Discrimination

Economic uncertainty and discrimination against women is one of the main causes of trafficking, which is indicated by its precisely determined geopolitical route: underdeveloped countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe are the most often countries of origin, while economically developed countries of Western and Northern Europe appear as the major destinations. In societies that are in early or advanced stage of transition process, female population takes the brunt of unemployment. The so-called “feminization of poverty”, typical for these societies, implies low representation of women and their discrimination in the labor market: they are marginalized at poorly paid jobs, earn less than men, have limited promotion opportunities, etc. Obstacles and discrimination are visible in the very process of searching for a job. For many women, a job

interview resembles police interrogation, where they have to answer about their marital status and family planning, something no man is put through.

Even if they manage to find a job, it is in underdeveloped and low-paid industries, i.e. in “traditionally feminine” professions: health, education, culture, in which they rarely occupied managerial positions.

Women in Serbia constitute the majority of unemployed persons, according to the National Employment Agency’s data and the Labor Force Survey⁴. In the analysis of the labour market for the first quarter of 2023, the results show that the unemployment rate in Serbia was 10.1%, which is 0.7 percentage points higher compared to the fourth quarter of 2022. The number of unemployed people increased by 25,200. An increase in the unemployment rate of women is noted in almost all regions; in the Belgrade region from 7% to 8.4 %, the Vojvodina region from 7.7% to 8.2%, and the South and Eastern Serbia region from 11.7% to 16.1%, with the exception of the Šumadija and Western Serbia regions, which achieved drop from 10.9% to 10.5%.

Moreover, gender segregation of occupations in the Serbian labour market is very strong, women are more employed on jobs which are less paid in themselves, while increase in the concentration of women in some occupations or their presence in top positions often indicate to a fall in salaries and social influence of such occupations. According to the 2022 Labor Force Survey, among the employees who supervised the work of other workers, there were 41.8% women, compared to 58.2% men. At the same time, women have relatively large share in grey economy, where they are less protected from sexual harassment and exploitation and where gender gap in wages is even greater.

Men are much more formally and visibly active in the labour market, while women more often appear as unpaid workers in family and in family business. Women spend 5.2 hours on average every day doing “unpaid work”, i.e. running the household, while men spend around one hour a day on such activities. “Gender Barometer” shows that the biggest burden of parenthood still rests on women, while the only activities in which fathers take larger part than mothers are “playing with a child, disciplining a child and talking about problems”. Doing unpaid work exhausts women’s resources and makes them less competitive in the labour market.

⁴ <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/oblasti/trziste-rada/anketa-o-radnoj-snazi>

Social policy has also seen changes: maternity leaves are shortened and child care system changed, making it even more difficult for a woman to balance her career and family obligations. At the same time, thanks to the restoration of traditional social values, especially of traditional gender roles, women are seen in the model of a “home-staying mother” seeking protection of a man, whose only happiness and purpose is to take care of her family. Such an image is conveyed and maintained through the education system, the media, legislation. However, gender relations are quite different in reality: women are often the main breadwinners of the family, but they also suffer most because of bad labour market conditions. This double role that women are forced to play in most societies in the times of economic crisis and war has made many women and girls in the whole region and beyond to observe their bodies as the only source of income they have at disposal.

The economic and social marginalization of women is mostly the cause of trafficking in women and women’s migration, which is illustrated by the data obtained through the analysis of cases of women victims of trafficking in three Western European countries: Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands in 2021. In Italy, 92.40% of women victims had lived with their families in the countries of origin; 68.75% of them had working experience and 58.75% lived on the verge of poverty. The most frequent motive for accepting the offer of strangers who recruited them in the countries of origin was employment (35%), money for basic needs (30%) and money for their families (23%).

One of the circumstances human traffickers benefit from is the lack of knowledge, especially among young women, about actual possibilities of migration into Western European countries: they either have no or very little information about living conditions and employment opportunities in the European Union. The same applies to women from the Middle or Far East who immigrate to Serbia for employment. They do not know what their rights are, whether and how they can get legal work permits, that they cannot work legally with a tourist visa, and they are not aware of all the dangers of working on the „black” labour market.

Militarization of the region is also one of the causes of trafficking in women that contributes to its spreading. Defined as the “concept of armed peace”, militarization is accompanied by the arrival of a large number of soldiers into the post-conflict environment, in which there is no state control, with impotent state institutions (if any), and where there are no mechanisms for suppressing

this and other forms of crime. Big demand created a new sex industry market. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia are nowadays known as one of the main destination countries in the territory of Southeastern Europe, while surrounding countries are the regions of transit and origin. Members of international military/peacekeeping forces primarily appear as clients, but not rarely they are involved in the organization of the human trafficking chain. The unbreakable link between “peacekeepers” and trafficking in women is to a great extent maintained by generally accepted social values, according to which it is normal that soldiers have needs – “boys will be boys”.

Despite the efforts of nongovernmental and international organizations and also of the state institutions, the intensity of trafficking in women seems not to weaken. Unfortunately, some segments of society are still reluctant to admit that the problem exists at all.

Violence

Women and children are often forced to leave their families or their communities because of violence they suffer there, either family violence or violent environment as such. Not being protected by any competent system in society, girls, boys and women are accepting offers that would enable them to live a life without violence.

According to the data of the ASTRA SOS hotline, 80% to 85% of the identified victims of human trafficking in Serbia, in the period 2002-2023, had a previous experience of violence.

Human traffickers are trying to make use of “push and pull” factors described earlier in the text, and target women and girls who are looking for opportunities in foreign countries and who often have difficult economic and social situation at their homes. One of the most attractive things for young women from Central and Eastern Europe are promises of their own comfort, which is the independence they cannot imagine in their home countries. They are attracted by an idea that they could travel to wealthy West and earn (in their opinion) great amounts of money there in a short period of time, which would enable them to save themselves and their families from poverty and despair.

Women are offered jobs of waitresses, dancers, artists, escort, maids or

beauticians, whereby it is difficult to instantly distinguish between the agencies that offer legitimate employment and those that may serve as a cover for trafficking in women.

International and European legislation on human trafficking

In 2000 the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (hereafter, Palermo Protocol) was adopted, which came into force in 2003. This Protocol is important as it provides a common definition of trafficking and sets international standards.

Art. 3(a) of the [Palermo Protocol](#) defines trafficking as:

*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. * In the case of children the use of any form of coercion or abuse is not required*

The definition of the Palermo Protocol has been an issue of major struggle and dispute between those who consider prostitution itself to constitute trafficking (abolitionists) and those who consider prostitution as labour (sex work), acknowledging the sex industry as a sector in which trafficking occurs. The definition of trafficking in the Palermo Protocol represents a compromise between these positions as it allows room for interpretation. However, this has also resulted in widely differing interpretations, for example, as to how exploitative an employment relationship has to be before one can say that a person was recruited and transported “for the purpose of exploitation”.

When comparing this definition to that of the 1949 *UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution*

of *Others*, in which any form of prostitution itself is considered trafficking, the achievement of the Palermo Protocol is that it recognises exploitation as the defining criterion: The core of the crime is abuse, violence and exploitation, rather than the movement across borders or the line of work. It recognises all forms of forced labour and slavery-like practices as trafficking. A shortcoming of the Protocol is that it is developed within a criminal justice framework and therefore does not include any binding provisions for the protection of the human rights of trafficked persons.

Review Mechanism

In October 2018, a [review mechanism](#) to the UN Palermo Convention was established. Each year one third of the States parties to the Convention will be selected to be reviewed for all the instruments they are parties to. In December 2020, the order of the evaluation of states have been decided by the drawing of lots. The review mainly comprises country (desk) reviews. Each State party under review shall provide the responses to the self-assessment questionnaire. Civil society can participate in three main areas; firstly, states parties are 'encouraged' to consult with NGOs for input for the reports they will submit; further NGOs are offered the opportunity to take part in a 'constructive dialogue' convened at the thematic working groups of the UNTOC COP and lastly a panel of representatives from civil-society groups, including NGOs, may be arranged by the UNODC to share independent views on the review process. Civil-society groups will also be able to participate in and make oral statements at the 'general review' track of the mechanism, taking place at the Conference of the Parties (COP).

The Council of Europe [Convention](#) on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted in 2005 and came into force in 2008. This is an important binding treaty to effectively fight trafficking in human beings. It sets out a series of minimum measures for the protection of trafficked persons, the prevention of trafficking and the prosecution of those responsible for it. For example, trafficked persons are entitled to a recovery and reflection period as well as a range of assistance and protection measures that are not conditional on a person's agreement to cooperate in any law enforcement efforts against the traffickers, and in some circumstances, a renewable residence permits to trafficked persons.

The strengths of the treaty's provisions are reinforced by the fact that parties to the treaty have all agreed to have their implementation of its provisions monitored by GRETA, the Group of experts on action against trafficking in human beings. GRETA is an important and influential instrument in the protection of the rights of trafficked persons and in that capacity can promote the human rights based approach to trafficking in human beings. For each monitoring round, GRETA develops a questionnaire for States to report their progress on the implementation of the Convention. In addition to this written procedure, GRETA also visits all the countries that are subject to the evaluation. Next to meeting governmental stakeholders, GRETA meets with NGOs and is keen to receive input from NGOs for their evaluations. The report it prepares, the conclusions it draws and the recommendations it makes to the governments will be based on all the information it has gathered. For more information on the Council of Europe Convention and the reports of GRETA visit the [website of the Council of Europe](#).

Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament

Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims was adopted in April 2011 and was to be transposed by member States by April 2013. It sets binding rules on the definition of criminal offences and the level of sanctions as relates to trafficking in human beings. The Directive also sets out to strengthen prevention as well the protection of victims.

The [Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) acknowledges the role of civil society and encourages Member States to work closely with civil society organisations including recognised and active non-governmental organisations working with trafficked persons, in particular in policymaking initiatives, information and awareness-raising campaigns, research and education programmes and in training, as well as in monitoring and evaluating the impact of anti-trafficking measures. The directive is currently under revision.

Commentary on EU Trafficking Directive

Six United Nations agencies have compiled a [commentary](#) on the EU Directive on Trafficking in Human Beings which provides a lot of useful background information on the articles of the Directive. The Commentary discusses key articles of the Directive focusing on human rights and gender perspective, including the non-application of penalties to victims (Article 8), the protection of and assistance to victims, examining the concept of due diligence and the

principles of non-refoulement and non-revictimisation, and the role of national referral mechanisms (Articles 11), the protection of victims in criminal proceedings (Article 12), the concepts of remedy and redress (Article 17), prevention (Article 18), and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism (Article 19).

EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings

On 14 April 2021, the European Commission adopted a new [EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings \(2021-2025\)](#). This strategy which is closely linked to the [EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime \(2021-2025\)](#), provides for a comprehensive response to the crime – from preventing the crime, and protecting and empowering victims to bringing traffickers to justice. The Strategy focuses on:

- reducing demand that fosters trafficking,
- breaking the business model of traffickers through effective operational means against the criminal business model, tackling the culture of impunity by building capacity for a robust criminal justice response, as well as the digital business model of traffickers,
- protecting, supporting and empowering the victims with a specific focus on women and children,
- promoting international cooperation.



Human trafficking in Serbia

Serbia is the country of origin, transit, and destination of victims of human trafficking. The increase in internal human trafficking, led to better visibility of domestic citizens - victims of human trafficking. Among the identified victims, domestic citizens predominate. Since 2004, a significant increase in the number of children in the human trafficking chain has been observed. In the entire analysed period (2002–2023), children made 30% to 40% of the total number of identified victims of human trafficking in Serbia. Children were victims of sexual exploitation, forced begging, forced labour, and forced commission of criminal acts.

Despite this, there are still no special programs and measures for child victims of human trafficking in Serbia. Children get the same help as adult victims, share a shelter with them and undergo the same treatment or are placed in shelters, where they do not receive specialized help.

Human trafficking is undeniably a gender problem. Most of the victims of human trafficking in Serbia are women and girls exposed to sexual exploitation (80%), although there is an increase in exploited male persons. ASTRA identified the first man who was a victim of human trafficking in 2004. The number of foreign workers who are exploited on construction sites in Serbia is increasing. Due to the following reasons - culture-specific reasons (in a patriarchal society men are not encouraged to see themselves as victims or admit that they are victims), the way of exploitation (exploitation in the construction industry often involves a huge number of victims), unclear procedures for identification, and the lack of response by the competent institutions - in the case of trafficking in men, significantly fewer victims are often identified compared to the actual number of victims.

State institutions currently acknowledge that human trafficking is not a phenomenon that only affects foreign nationals, but a form of organized crime that affects everyone regardless of gender, age, citizenship, or nationality. On the other hand, human traffickers, faced with a stronger response by governmental, non-governmental and international organizations, adapt and change their forms of action: human trafficking „moves“ from cafes and night bars to private apartments and closed clubs. A similar trend has been observed in other countries. In addition to the increase in internal human trafficking, child trafficking, as well as trafficking in persons with psychologically altered

behaviour, which has proven to be less risky for traffickers, many of them have also changed the way they control their victims: instead of the strict control of movement and physical violence, currently, the blackmail and threats are used more. That way, in the case of criminal prosecution, it would be more difficult to prove that it was an involuntary „engagement“.

Agencies and individuals who mediate in employment have recognized a very lucrative job opportunity in the current situation, so they are increasingly dealing with the employment of our workers abroad and migrant workers in Serbia. They mostly offer *au-pair* programs, work and education for students and graduates, a wide range of occupations on overseas ships or in large hotel complexes, especially in Arab countries.

Human traffickers have always assessed the needs of the victims very well, which gave them a great possibility of manipulation. Considering the above, it is not surprising that the most common way of recruitment is through advertisements offering jobs abroad. Very often, a person from the close community may extend the offer, which is especially the case in children and very young people.

„Lover boy“ (young men who date girls for a while and after gaining their trust „drag“ them into the trafficking chain) is a recruitment method that human traffickers use, too. Since 2005, more victims have been recruited through the Internet, social networks, employment portals (if they place unverified ads) and SMS messages, which is a novelty as different means of communication are used for recruitment. Nowadays this is no longer an exception, but a rule.

Child trafficking in Serbia

Child trafficking is the most severe violation of a child rights that endangers their future life and development. Due to the specific psychological, sociological, and physical consequences of such experience with children, it is necessary to see human trafficking as a problem that should be responded to according to the children’s needs. However, there is a general tendency to treat child trafficking as a sub-issue of human trafficking in general, so most of the international standards for adult victims of human trafficking are applied to child victims of trafficking.

Serbia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.

Article 3c of the Palermo Protocol makes a very clear distinction between child and adult victims of human trafficking: violence, fraud, deception, or other means of execution do not need to be established in case of a child. For a child to be identified a victim of human trafficking, it is enough to establish that the child has been recruited and there has been an intention of exploitation.

Children are trafficked for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation, begging, forced marriage, commission of crimes. A much higher number of girls are victims of human trafficking than boys. In practice, boys are often victims of several types of exploitation. If they do not meet the traffickers' expectations in labour and begging, sexual exploitation is used as a system of punishment.

Cases of child trafficking for forced marriages at an early age (11, 12 years) are often not prosecuted.

Experience shows that the most vulnerable, considering human trafficking, are children in the period of early and middle adolescence. Given the standard of living in Serbia, the difficulties in finding a job and the minimal chances for early independence, many of them believe that going abroad would be a chance for a better life. An aggravating circumstance is the current visa regime, so illegal migration becomes an alternative option, which significantly increases the risk of human trafficking and exploitation. In this context, the results of the research carried out by UNICEF in Moldova are very interesting: Despite being aware of the dangers of human trafficking, children were still willing to use unsafe illegal channels to go abroad. Poverty, domestic and sexual violence, alcoholism and drug addiction are also risk factors that largely contribute to children's vulnerability.

In practice, it is not always easy to distinguish between a child who is a victim of trafficking and a child who is exposed to some other form of violence. This is especially the case when we do not have complete information about the family and the situation where the child comes from. Consequently, it is possible to make a mistake: instead of being identified a victim of human trafficking, a child might be wrongly identified a victim of violence or sexual exploitation, a „street child“, (il)legal migrant or even a delinquent.

After the experience of trafficking, it is unlikely that the child will easily establish

a relationship of trust with the persons who provide help. A child might not want to be identified as a victim of human trafficking because s/he might not see their own interest in it, but only the negative consequences. Children sometimes do not believe that their wishes and expectations will really be considered and fulfilled. Also, threats by the trafficker to the child, and also to his/her family, the fear of stigmatization and legal consequences may be possible reasons. It may happen that the family expects him/her to provide financial or other resources for daily needs or repay debts, and the child is not willing to self-identify as to get back to his/her „duties” as soon as possible.

Protection measures available to victims of human trafficking are aimed at short-term assistance to victims. There is a lack of protection of many children who are vulnerable and at risk of being caught in the human trafficking chain. There are no special programs (institutional or provided by NGOs) of assistance and work with minor victims of human trafficking. As much as 80% of children trafficking survivors are returned to their families, that is, to an environment from where they originally fall victims of trafficking. It is worrying that often even this is a better solution than the alternative, which is placement in homes for children without parental care. On several occasions, we have witnessed children running away from the accommodation provided to them because it is a completely inadequate type of accommodation without appropriate programs or any programs, they would be involved in. Unfortunately, in such situations it is usually already late to react and there are no information about these children for several months, when eventually the police identify them as victims of the same or another form of violence. The current system of social protection does not have the capacity to provide continuous assistance to the child and his/her immediate environment. On the other hand, in the NGO sector, special programs for working with these children have neither been developed, and this type of alternative help often turns out to be ineffective. Also, the amount of research conducted in Serbia on this topic is small, which speaks of the marginalisation of the issue of child rights and, of frequent neglect both by the state and, unfortunately, by NGO sector.

Institutional Framework

The state authorities of Serbia and Montenegro placed the problem of human trafficking on the political agenda after the change of political climate in 2000. US State Department, in its 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report classified

Serbia into Tier 2 Watch list due to inadequate efforts and results in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

Observed chronologically, and like in other countries in the region, the building of institutional framework was initiated by high-level international bodies, such as the Stability Pact Task Force, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the UN. In May 2001, the *Yugoslav Team for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings* was established at the federal level. Because of the uncertain status of the Federation, activities in the field of combating trafficking in human beings were transferred from the federal level to the level of the republics. In December 2001, the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia appointed a *National Coordinator* for the fight against human trafficking, and soon after, the *National Anti-Trafficking Team* was established, which operated at the level of Serbia. This team has been changing its format and role over the years. Currently, it is gathered *ad hoc* to draft or monitor the implementation of the Strategy.

On 14 December 2004, the Government of Serbia passed a decision to establish the *Anti-Trafficking Council* consisting of six ministries of the then ministries. The task of the Council was to coordinate national and regional activities in combating human trafficking, discuss reports of relevant international bodies, take positions and propose measures for the implementation of recommendations made by international bodies. The Council has not met since 2019 up to now when this publication is being issued, in 2023.

As a result of a joint project of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the OSCE Mission in Serbia and Montenegro, within the Institute for the Education of Children and Youth in Belgrade, in March 2004, the *Human Trafficking Victims' Protection* was formed, as part of the national referral mechanism of victims. In 2012, this Office was transformed into the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection⁵, which is a social protection institution with the role of identifying victims of human trafficking, assessing their needs and referring them to the existing services.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia, with the support of the OSCE Mission in Serbia, adopted in December 2006 the first Strategy for the fight against human trafficking, which consisted of a series of measures and activities to be undertaken in order to combat this problem. The Strategy established strategic goals that should be realized in various activities of state

⁵ <https://centarzztj.rs/>

institutions, non-governmental and international organizations. Currently, the Republic of Serbia does not have a strategy for the fight against human trafficking, because the previous one expired in 2022, and the new one has not yet been adopted.

Standard operating procedures for dealing with victims of human trafficking were adopted in 2018 but have not been revised yet.

Since November 2021, the Serbian anti-trafficking institutional framework and NRM have been strengthened by the National Rapporteur for Human Trafficking. In amendments to the Law on the Protector of Citizens, this function was added to the mandate of the Protector of Citizens and should be the responsibility of one of the deputies.

Legal Framework

The Republic of Serbia signed and ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocols Thereto in 2001 and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in 2009. The criminal offense of Human Trafficking was introduced into the criminal legislation of the Republic of Serbia in 2003. Currently, the classification of the criminal offense of human trafficking largely corresponds to the definition of human trafficking in international conventions.

Human Trafficking

Article 388

- (1) Whoever by force or threat, deception or maintaining deception, abuse of authority, trust, dependency relationship, difficult circumstances of another, retaining identity papers or by giving or accepting money or other benefit, recruits, transports, transfers, sells, buys, acts as intermediary in sale, hides or holds another person with intent to exploit such person's labour, forced labour, commission of offences, prostitution, mendacity, pornography, removal of organs or body parts or service in armed conflicts, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to twelve years.*
- (2) When the offence specified in paragraph 1 of this Article is committed against a minor, the offender shall be punished by the penalty prescribed for that offence even if there was no use of force, threat or any of the other mentioned methods of perpetration.*

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- (3) *If the offence specified in paragraph 1 of this Article is committed against a minor,
the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum five years.*
 - (4) *If the offence specified in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article resulted in grave bodily injury of a person, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of five to fifteen years, and if a grave bodily injury of a minor had resulted from the offence referred to in paragraph 3 of this Article,
the perpetrator shall be punished with imprisonment of at least five years.*
 - (5) *If the offence specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of this Article resulted in death of one or more persons,
the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum ten years.*
 - (6) *Whoever habitually engages in offences specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of this Article or if the offence is committed by a group,
shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum five years.*
 - (7) *If the offence specified in paragraphs 1 to 3 of this Article, is committed by an organized group, the offender
shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum ten years.*
 - (8) *Whoever knows or should know that the person is a victim of trafficking, and abuse its position or allow to another to abuse its position for the exploitation envisaged in paragraph 1 this Article,
shall be punished with imprisonment of six months to five years.*
 - (9) *If the offence specified in paragraph 8 of this Article is committed against a person for whom an offender knew or could have known to be a minor, the offender
shall be punished with imprisonment of one to eight years.*
 - (10) *Endorsement of persons to exploitation or establishing slavery or similar relation to it specified in paragraph 1 this Article, shall not affect the existence of crime specified in paragraphs 1, 2 and 6 of this Article*

Having in mind that the frequent purpose of trafficking in children is illegal adoption and that the main crime of trafficking in human beings does not embrace trafficking in children for the purpose of adoption, the Serbian legislature found appropriate to incriminate a separate offense of trafficking in children for the purpose of adoption. Article 389 reads:

Trafficking in Minors for Adoption

Article 389

- (1) *Whoever abducts a child under sixteen years of age for the purpose of adoption contrary to laws in force or whoever adopts such a child or*

mediates in such adoption or whoever for that purpose buys, sells or hands over another person under sixteen years of age or transports such a person, provides accommodation or conceals such a person, shall be punished with imprisonment of one to five years.

- (2) Whoever habitually engages in activities specified in paragraph 1 of this Article or if the offence is committed by a group, shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum three years.*
- (3) If the offence specified in paragraph 1 of this Article, is committed by an organized group, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of minimum five years.*

Representation of Victims in Criminal Proceedings

The so-called injured party (Serbian legislation does use the term “victim”) has the right to representation through their legal representative in the entire course of the proceedings. Victim’s legal representative has right to participate in all procedural actions, propose evidence, examine the accused, witnesses, expert witnesses and other participants, submit the claim for indemnification and, finally, give the closing. In case of the withdrawal of Public Prosecutor, s/ he may continue prosecution. For this reason, it is necessary that in all stages of the proceedings for trafficking offences the victim is ensured representation by professional and sensitized attorneys, ready to fight and face misogyny, xenophobia, certain personal risk and different modalities of obstruction.

Since the victim, and consequently her legal representative, does not have the status of the party but only a participant to the proceedings, the court is not obliged to send them the indictment, expert witnesses’ findings or even the judgment. The victim does not have the right to appeal the judgment, except for the part pertaining to costs or in case that Public Prosecutor has assumed the prosecution from the victim that instituted the proceedings as a private plaintiff. For this reason, good cooperation with Public Prosecutor is vital for the protection of victims’ personal rights, because this is the only way in which the argumentation of her legal representative may be presented through Public Prosecutor’s appeal.

However, we believe that, although in the legal system of Serbia, the witness protection standards provided for in Article 24 of the Convention are adequately respected, in practice they are not often applied to victims of human trafficking.

Victims often do not feel safe and protected and this is the most common reason why they refuse to testify. On the other hand, the prosecution most often relies on the statement of the witness/victim as the most important piece of evidence, without conducting a proactive investigation.

Because of the physical and psychological torture, which sometimes lasted for years, the victims are often afraid and are unprepared to talk about what happened to them. Post-traumatic stress, among other things, makes some of them remember the smallest details (nicknames, names of clients, tattoos, sentences), and some forget the names of those who abused them. This is one of the reasons why their testimony in court often does not match the one given to the police. Often, the victim, out of fear for themselves and their family, does not tell everything s/he knows, and is often intimidated by the traffickers believing that s/he is the one who committed the misdemeanours and criminal acts and will therefore be held accountable. Victims are often ashamed and think that they are to be blamed for what happened to them, so they frequently deny or minimize the actions of the accused when testifying. They are afraid of being judged by their community and returning to their family, where they need to answer questions about where they were, what they were doing, what happened to them and why they didn't bring the promised money from the trip.

In practice there are cases when victims who have decided to testify are sent constant threats, even their families in their home countries (while the proceedings against human traffickers are ongoing in another country). This is an evidence that those participating in the human trafficking chain are very well connected and informed.

Conclusion and recommendations

Despite noticeable progress in combating human trafficking, it should be pointed out to problems, deficiencies and challenges that need to be tackled soon, to make the fight against this problem fully effective.

- (a) The Republic of Serbia has not yet adopted new strategy and action plan for the fight against human trafficking, and in the budget of the Republic of Serbia there are no funds foreseen for the suppression of human trafficking, except for the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection.

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- (b) It is necessary to improve the Standard operating procedures for handling cases of human trafficking.
 - (c) It is necessary to clearly define the role of the National Team and the National Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking.
 - (d) To this date, the prevention of human trafficking has not been tackled systematically, nor has an evaluation been done, to determine the actual effectiveness of the so far preventive activities and the direction in which they should continue.
 - (e) Although significant progress was made when the Office for the Coordination of the Human Trafficking Victims' Protection (2004) was established, now the Center for the Protection of Victims (2012), the fact is that direct assistance (medical, legal, psychological, etc.) is currently provided only by two NGOs licensed by the state. However, their work is not funded by the budget of the Republic of Serbia.
 - (f) It is necessary to improve the process of identification of victims of human trafficking by defining clear and transparent indicators and procedures.
 - (g) In Serbia, there are no special programs and measures for child victims of human trafficking. They receive the same assistance as adult victims, share the shelter with them and undergo the same treatment.
 - (h) Victims' data protection is an area that needs to be significantly improved, bearing in mind that victims' personal data are often published in the media.
 - (i) The penal policy for the crime of human trafficking is, with a few exceptions, quite mild. In recent years, there has been a trend of reclassification of the criminal offense of human trafficking into the offense of mediation in prostitution, as well as an increasing number of plea agreements between the prosecution and traffickers. Victims of human trafficking almost never exercise their right to compensation. In practice, this request of the witness/victim is generally not decided upon during criminal proceedings. The court directs them to exercise their right to compensation in civil proceedings, which as a rule, take a long time, require the presence of the victim and entail large costs (for fees, attorneys etc.). The problem is even greater for foreign nationals who testified in criminal proceedings in Serbia and were then repatriated to their home country. They are exposed to additional travel and accommodation costs if they want to exercise their restitution rights. The issue of their safety upon returning to the country where they testified and potentially meeting the trafficker is reopened. Current training for judges and prosecutors should be continued, but the participation of judges of civil courts should also be considered to reduce the revictimization of victims in court proceedings to a minimum.

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- (j) Reintegration and resocialization of victims appear to be pressing problems. The victims are mostly offered language, computer, and similar training, but there are still no systematic and long-term programs. There is a noticeable lack of information after the victims' repatriation to their home country about their resocialization in the country of origin. This segment requires an urgent and more organized involvement of the social protection system and special programs within the system.
- (k) In the context of repatriation, it is important to establish cooperation at the regional and international level between institutions and non-governmental organizations that will not be burdened with redundant procedures and further traumatize the victim, but still make it safe for the victim returning to his home country.
- (l) To successfully fight against this specific form of violence, the state must decisively and systematically be involved in the eradication of poverty. We must also be aware that human trafficking would not exist on such a large scale without corruption. Precisely for these reasons, the priority in suppressing human trafficking is tackling the basic causes of human trafficking, which are primarily the poverty, unequal status of women and violence against them, corruption, and organized crime.

Reality of Trafficking Victims

"When buyers come, the girls are ordered to take off their clothes and stand naked on the road. They are exhibited like cattle for selection." (testimony from ARIZONA marketplace in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Once a person finds herself/himself in the trafficking chain, exploitation may take different forms. Thus, Women are often coerced into prostitution, i.e., providing sexual services in districts and streets where prostitution and the porno industry are concentrated, in escort agencies or apartments that are used as brothels and in bars, but they may also be subjected to labor exploitation in households and farms, shops, factories, etc. Children are usually sexually exploited, forced into begging or committing criminal acts, while as far as adult men are concerned, they are forced to work at construction sites, farms, and the like. It is important to stress that women are still the majority of victims of this crime.

However, if we look at trends in human trafficking, there is a noticeable

increase in the number of victims trafficked for labor exploitation. According to the latest UNODC report⁶, we can see that globally, the number of identified victims of both labor and sexual exploitation has nearly equalized. Therefore, we are dealing with a problem that permeates almost all layers of society, ranging from individual cases of labor exploitation where exploiters are individuals or criminal groups to massive cases involving the involvement of small and large corporations, state institutions, or even entire countries and their governing structures.

Cases of mass labor exploitation are often closely linked to global economic migrations, which typically occur from East to West. In this context, Serbia is recognized both as a country of origin (in cases where our citizens migrate for employment in the Western countries) and as a destination country (when a significant number of individuals immigrate to Serbia for employment, such as the mass labor exploitation of workers from Vietnam in the construction of the Linglong tire factory in Zrenjanin⁷).

Regardless of the kind of exploitation, it is always done in the most severe possible conditions. For the purpose of this Manual, we have tried to outline some common points, but it should be borne in mind that the reality of trafficking victims is always much worse than it can be presented in a manual, report, or any other publication. On the other hand, human traffickers are always introducing new, more severe, and perfidious ways of abuse, with only one goal: to make and sustain profits. Trafficked persons are exposed to different forms of violence (psychological, physical, sexual) and torture in order to gain full control over them, break their resistance, and ensure obedience. Thus, women forced into prostitution are required to have intercourse with a great number of clients per day, often without any protection, while traffickers often make them drug-addicted in order to have more efficient control. Victims usually live in the same establishment where they work. They have to clean, cook, do the laundry and ironing for the entire club/bar. They do not eat regularly or sufficiently. They are required to work extremely long hours without the possibility of refusing certain services to certain clients.

When we talk about women who ended up in the trafficking chain, we may see that society is quick to make judgments about whether she “asked for that” or “knew what she was going to do,” whether she is “naïve and stupid.” This is

⁶ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>

⁷ ASTRA (2022), *WOULD YOU REALLY BUY THIS? The mass case of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation in Serbia: Reinventing Slavery in the 21st century*

a consequence of prevailing prejudices against victims of human trafficking. It is often forgotten that these women are deceived regarding their working conditions, that they are made to believe that they are going to another country/town to work as waitresses, nannies, models, factory workers, nurses, etc. From the moment of the victim's recruitment, when abuse and exploitation start, their motivation to leave home becomes irrelevant. Victims themselves are often not aware that they are victims; they think everything is their fault, they feel ashamed for the work they have to do, and do not know that they can ask for help. Male victims of labor exploitation often feel shame because it's challenging for them to admit to themselves that they are victims (given the dominant discourse that expects them to be providers and heads of the family). They may find themselves trapped by traffickers and forced into working situations that are not suitable for them, with limited options to escape the situation.

The basic goal of human traffickers is to make money through the long-term exploitation of victims. To achieve that, they would do anything to protect their investment, i.e., ensure undisturbed work and prevent any runaway attempt, using different control mechanisms.

Most frequently used control mechanisms:

Captivity/isolation

As mentioned earlier, trafficking victims have limited freedom of movement. Every time they go out, they have an escort, and they are not allowed to have contact with strangers or with their families. They are often kept in isolation, thus becoming dependent on traffickers. Traffickers benefit from such a situation. Their goal is to strengthen that feeling of isolation and dependence of persons they exploit, to make them believe that they should not expect help from others, especially from state authorities and the police. Human traffickers often keep the individuals they exploit further isolated by providing them with false information about the hostile environment in the destination country. This strategy keeps them away from the local population, which might otherwise recognize the exploitation and report the case. They do not know the local language, they have no money and documents, they do not trust the police and other institutions, their residence status is illegal, and they feel scared, afraid of the unknown and of reprisals from exploiters, ashamed, and isolated – all of these contribute to their dependence.

Trafficking victims are **often transferred from one place to another** in order to lose orientation where they are (they sometimes do not even know in what country they are living) and to prevent them from developing friendships and close relations with their environment. This is also done in order to make any investigation and discovery by the police more difficult.

With their **identification or travel documents taken away**, victims are deprived of their officially verified identity; in addition, their illegal status is confirmed in this way, preventing them from asking for help or running away to another country/address. Since many victims come from countries where the police are seen more as a cruel force than as a helping citizens' service, victims themselves avoid any contact with the police. Traffickers support such a picture, telling the victim that she/he is free to go to the police if she wishes so but that she or he would be instantly deported, i.e., returned to home country, where she/he would be exposed to reprisal. Alternatively, traffickers may tell the victim that it is no use to ask for police assistance because all police officers are corrupt and dependent (inter alia because they are compromised in regards to (free) use of sexual services). Unfortunately, in some cases, traffickers were right, either regarding corruption or deportation, i.e., banishment from the country. Moreover, deported persons are criminally prosecuted in some countries after their arrival for prostitution or illegally leaving the country. Besides, they may be required to cover deportation costs, which only adds to their previous debt.

Threats and violence/Imposing fear

Traffickers use violence and/or threats of violence as an effective means of control. Victims are often beaten and raped; their movement is restricted; they are kept in isolation for long periods, deprived of food and water, drugged and tortured with sharp objects, and burned with cigarettes, all of this in order to subdue them. This may be done as a way of punishment for some forms of disobedience, but also as a warning to other victims, i.e., to show them what kind of consequences they would suffer in case of disobedience. In other cases, physical and/or sexual violence is imposed on the victim simply for the reason of sexual sadism. In the cases of sexual exploitation, the shame that the victim feels is another mechanism of control. The trafficker may threaten that he would tell the victim's family that she worked as a prostitute. In this way, she is made to abide by all trafficker's requests.

In addition, it is essential to consider that the internet, social media, and the presence of new technologies have brought numerous changes in the

functioning of human trafficking networks. This includes alterations in recruitment methods, methods of keeping individuals submissive, extortion, and the organization of exploitation itself. In the past decade, human traffickers often maintained control over exploited individuals by possessing compromising materials, such as photographs and videos, threatening to send them to close contacts or publicly disclose them in case of any form of disobedience.

Use and threat with reprisal against the victim's family

One of the most effective threats is a threat of violence against persons the victim loves, i.e., her closest friends and family, and against herself. In many cases, human traffickers are trying to find out exact information on the victim's family or her loved ones. This can be an internal nickname of a close family member or the address of another close person. The threat itself enables control over the victim, and that is why the trafficker doesn't need to possess all data about the victim's family. Since the victim does not want to risk the safety of the people she loves, she would not try to check whether the trafficker is bluffing or not when he speaks about intimate details and when he threatens violence against her family. These threats are also used to secure the victim's obedience and to prevent her from running away. And they often realized, too: if a woman dares to run away and gets caught, she and her family face reprisal. On more than one occasion, such a victim was murdered as an example for other victims.

In certain cases of human trafficking for labor exploitation, one deceptive aspect involves victims signing illegal contracts with intermediary agencies or future "employers"/exploiters. They are falsely informed that, in the event of leaving the workplace before the agreed-upon term, the victim's family will be obligated to pay fines and costs. These fines are typically unrealistically high, posing a threat to the entire family, and their payment is demanded within a very short timeframe, often just a few days.

Debt bondage

One of the primary mechanisms of control is debt bondage, which implies that the victim is required to pay back augmented costs of her transfer to the destination country and all other alleged costs – food, clothes, makeup – that the trafficker had to bear for the victim. In cases of labor exploitation, these are fictitious costs such as employment mediation, the creation of work and residence visas, travel to the destination country, accommodation, food, work equipment, etc. The victim is promised that she will be free to go as soon as she

pays back that debt. These costs are additionally increased by exaggerated and cumulative interest rates, as well as by the enormous price of accommodation she uses, advertising costs, and transportation costs. In the end, this transforms into an amount that cannot be repaid. Trafficker often manipulates these alleged costs, increasing them and reducing them in dependence on “her behavior.” She believes that once she repays her “debt”, she will be free, while in reality, this is only one of the mechanisms to keep the victim dependent.

In cases of mass labor exploitation, exploiters often enter into some form of written „contracts” with recruited individuals, serving as additional conditioning mechanisms. These contracts prescribe unrealistic working hours, draconian financial penalties for failure to fulfill job responsibilities or leaving the workplace, and prohibit any form of organizing and worker rebellion. Such contracts are invalid and illegal but exploited individuals often do not know this because the contracts are frequently written in a language unfamiliar to them, and they are unaware of the legal framework governing labor both generally and in the destination country.

Once, when the chain breaks...

Above described are methods traffickers use to impose the feeling of fear, helplessness and stigmatization on trafficking victims. If they pluck up enough courage and strength to run away or endure long enough to be rescued by the police (which is mostly the case), this does not mean that they would necessarily leave the circle of violence.

The majority of sexually exploited victims returns to the same situation they tried to escape from in the first place: their surrounding does not know and does not want to know what have happened to them, they can not explain why they are returning without money, they are scared and feel humiliated, believing that such thing happened only to them. Their families and institutions refuse any responsibility and additionally impose the sense of guilt and shame, for which reason girls often do not want to return home. It should not be forgotten that it is the same community in which local criminals who once recruited them live and they can find them and sell them all over again.

In some countries, the law treats trafficking victims as criminals or illegal migrants in violation of legislation. On the other hand, women that end up in forced prostitution are not considered, by both society and public opinion, as persons who have been deceived – they are “just” prostitutes that practice a socially stigmatized activity.

For the beginning, women who survived enormous physical violence (beatings, squashing out cigarettes on their bodies), sexual violence (rape), mental violence (maltreatment, threats, blackmail, control) need only to be in a safe place and surroundings. They need to reconnect and gain trust in persons who offer them support. Women who have experienced trauma often relive the same situation through flashbacks and nightmares. Some of them avoid any situation – people, places, things - that may remind them of traumatic event and have overwhelmingly strong feelings and reminiscences of the traumatic event.

Stereotypes about Human Trafficking

“Only naive girls become victims of trafficking”

The motive behind a girl responding to an advertisement or accepting a business offer is not crucial; what matters primarily is the violence, poverty, or other forms of hardship that she is exposed to before finding herself in the human trafficking chain. It is essential to note that human traffickers are often individuals in positions of trust—fathers, brothers, boyfriends, acquaintances, or friends—whose offers few people would typically scrutinize.

“Trafficking in women and prostitution are one and the same”

Trafficking in women does not take place solely for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but it can take other forms, too. Prostitution may be a voluntary choice of a woman, if she decides about the conditions of her work and controls the profession she practices. A woman who ends up in forced prostitution as the victim of trafficking has no freedom of choice and decision-making about any aspect of her life, while prostitution can be a conscious choice. In addition, human trafficking is not only forced prostitution or sexual exploitation but can also appear as forced labor, forced begging, or forced removal of organs. Not only women but children and men too can fall victim. Even when a girl knows that she will be engaged in prostitution, she is deceived about the conditions she will work and live in, and she has no control over anything happening to her whatsoever.

The victim cannot agree to human trafficking because consent cannot be based on deception, coercion, the loss of control over one’s own life, or the loss of personal dignity. The victim’s consent is irrelevant to the existence of human trafficking as a criminal offense if she is deceived and coerced in any way.

“Trafficking in women is white slave trade”

Women victims of trafficking cannot be called “white slaves” because trafficking does not affect only women of a particular race, ethnicity, or national affiliation. “White” women are not the only victims of trafficking; among them are African women, Roma women, Asian women... It is a racist term which does not reflect the reality. The term “female slaves” is also problematic because it is discriminatory – it stigmatizes the woman, presenting her as somebody whose destiny is sealed, and nothing can be done to change that.

“Only foreign women are victims of trafficking”

Trafficking in women can take place internally, i.e., within the borders of a single country. It does not necessarily imply the crossing of state borders. Trafficking victims are not always foreigners or illegal migrants; quite the opposite, people may be recruited and exploited in their own country. This means that a Serbian national may be a trafficking victim in the territory of her country when she is sold from one town to another or even exploited in the same town.

“Why trafficking victims just don’t run away?”

Victims of human trafficking live under constant control and the threat of violence, conditioned in various ways such as debt bondage, confiscation of documents, intimidation, deception, etc. Moreover, they are blackmailed and threatened that traffickers would harm their children, brothers and sisters, and parents if they ever tried to escape. When they try to escape and fail, they are severely beaten, sometimes to death, sending a message to other girls as to what will happen to them if they attempt the same thing.

Victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation from the population of economic migrants, who are increasingly being exploited on the territory of Balkan countries, including Serbia, are often conditioned by various debts to agencies and other employment intermediaries. It is through their interventions that these victims have reached their future employers.

Although they end up in the hands of employers/exploiters, they often aren’t aware that there is an international and national legal framework that protects them if they are deceived regarding living and working conditions or even in situations of forced labor. Agencies and exploiters very often sign fictitious illegal contracts with them that include clauses confirming exploitative practices or putting victims in a situation of debt bondage. Individuals who have signed such contracts, written in a language they don’t understand, or

contracts that prescribe unrealistic penalties for not performing the job or leaving the workplace, are often afraid that their families will have to cover these debts or that they themselves will face legal consequences for not fulfilling obligations to the employer or agency. Another possibility is the threat from employers that they won't extend their stay and work visas, that they will report them to the police, or that they will be deported to their home country.

“Persons will ask for help or assistance when they are identified as victims of trafficking or when they identify themselves as victims”

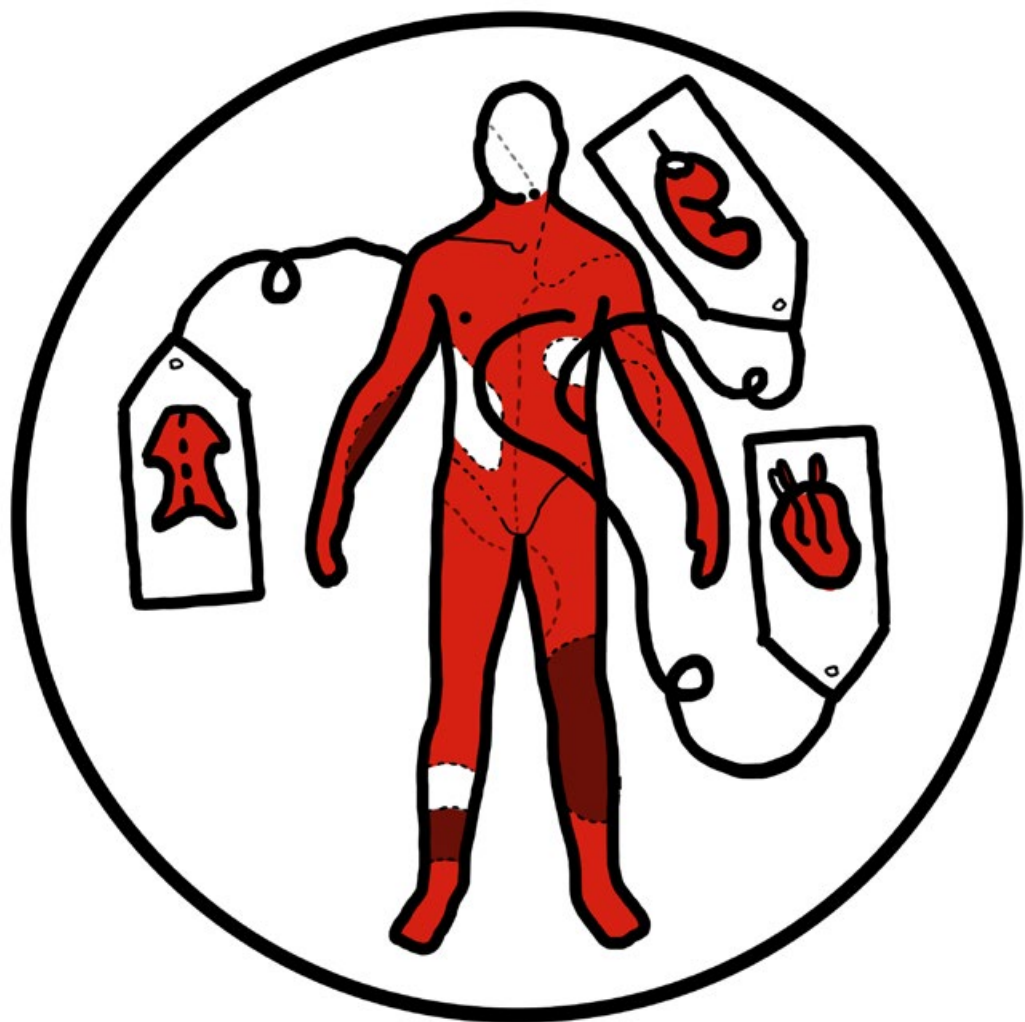
Victims of trafficking do not always identify themselves as victims. Moreover, if they do so, mistrust and self-blame will often prevent a victim from sharing his/her story. One victim said: “I didn't know whom to trust, so I ended up like a slave. Now they say, in order to be free and get assistance, I am supposed to trust all of you, complete strangers.” What you know is always less scary than what you do not know.

“Trafficking victims always come from poor families”

There is no profile of a trafficking victim. They may be of any sex, age, social or ethnic background. Although young people without opportunities are under greatest risk of falling victim to trafficking, poverty is just one element that enables human trafficking to exist.

„We are not concerned about what happens to economic migrants – victims of human trafficking because they came here to work for low wages and take jobs away from our people“

For years, there has been a cultivated hostile narrative towards the migrant population in general, and particularly towards economic migrants. One of the accusations propagated by policymakers in an attempt to shift blame for job scarcity, low wages, the outflow of the local workforce, and pervasive poverty from decision-makers to “external enemies” – is that migrants coming from poor Eastern countries are responsible for the lack of jobs and low wages. They are portrayed as willing to work in much worse conditions and for lower pay than the local population. Due to such a narrative, the public often holds an ambivalent stance towards the treatment of foreign workers/ economic migrants in Serbia, not realizing that the general lowering of acceptable standards for worker treatment also affects the position of the domestic workforce. It is crucial to understand that there are Serbian citizens who, by many indicators, fall into the category of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation.



Trafficking Risks and anti-trafficking response related to war and conflict

Conflict, instability and natural and man-made disasters have been shown worldwide to lead to an increase in human trafficking.⁸ Profiteers – including organised criminal groups and individuals often take advantage of the turmoil and lack of legal enforcement to exploit the vulnerability and desperation of internally displaced people and refugees. Since the full scale war broke out in Ukraine in 2022, much research has been conducted into the trafficking risks of those that have been displaced and international and national monitoring groups and task forces have been set up to coordinate support and mitigate risks. But also with other conflicts and wars, research has been done into trafficking risks and anti-trafficking response. It is acknowledged that displaced persons and refugees are at increased risk of trafficking and that conflict introduces new risks of trafficking and/or exacerbate pre-existing risks. The war in Ukraine seemingly provided quite some risk factors for human trafficking of its refugees, including pre-existing trafficking networks, massive population displacement and large numbers of women and children travelling on their own.

Evidence collected over the past decades has clearly demonstrated that generally there are a range of intersecting factors that increase the risk of being targeted by traffickers. These include poverty, marginalization, financial exclusion, irregular migration status, low educational background, disability, and dysfunctional family environments. Crisis and conflict are thought to increase these vulnerabilities for several reasons.

- **Trafficking as a direct result of conflict** - when parties to the conflict traffic people to serve in armed groups, either as combatants or in ancillary services.
- **As an indirect consequence**, such as when traffickers targeting victims who are in vulnerable situations as a result of the situation, as crisis and conflict amplify the social and economic vulnerabilities of the people affected.
- Crisis and conflict erode the rule of law and the capacities of state institutions, which can result in impunity and generate an environment in which trafficking in persons can thrive.

⁸ See, for example, IOM, *Addressing Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Times of Crisis: Evidence and Recommendations for Further Action to Protect Vulnerable and Mobile Populations* (July 2015); Caritas, *Trafficking in Human Beings In Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations* (2015); Freedom Fund, *Struggling to survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon* (8 April 2016); The New Humanitarian, 'Preying on disaster: How human trafficking has spiked in quake-shattered Nepal', 26 April 2017; UNODC, *Conflict In Ukraine: Key Evidence on Risk of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants* (March 2022).

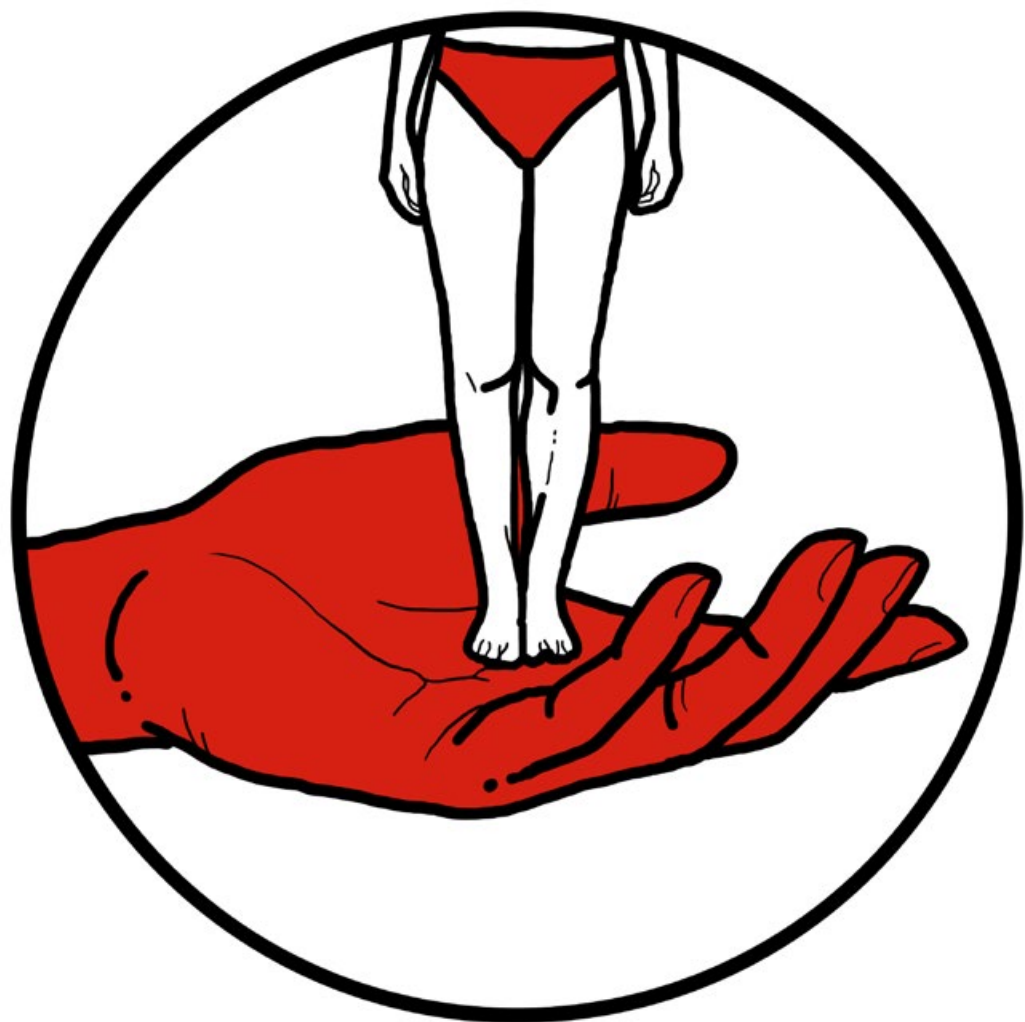
With the war in Syria, we saw reports of early, forced, and temporary marriages; sexual exploitation; street begging and displacement as a risk factor. With Libya, we saw erosion of the rule of law and impunity; militias and armed groups engaged in human trafficking/trafficking-like practices and that those on the move were most at risk. Generally state collapse, deteriorating rule of law and impunity; forced displacement and humanitarian need and socioeconomic stress, as well as social fragmentation and family breakdown have an impact on risks for human trafficking.⁹

In Ukraine, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has created the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Currently around 11 million people from Ukraine have been displaced within and outside the country, including nearly 6 million recorded in Europe.¹⁰ The state however has not collapsed; the Ukrainian law and justice institutions remain functional and there is no deteriorating rule of law and impunity, moreover there is no evidence of (Ukrainian) state involvement in trafficking. Moreover, the Ukrainian State has been taking deliberate action against trafficking in persons and to protect the population, including through cash and social support. While forced displacement has occurred, inside and outside the country, and on a massive scale, Refugees moved to surrounding EU, and other countries. What has prevented risks for those that fled Ukraine is that European governments took measures to facilitate safe and regular entry stay and provided these refugees with access to labour markets, education and social protection. In addition, there are humanitarian needs and there is a socio economic crisis; there is loss of life, injuries, severe destruction and damage to civilian infrastructure and housing. Also public services are under severe pressure, and access to health care is limited. Several million jobs have been lost inside of Ukraine. Many households both inside and outside of Ukraine are unemployed and/or are dependent on social assistance. So these conditions are in place, but are met with response. Lastly there is social fragmentation; there is a huge impact on public life: destruction of civilian property and energy infrastructure; indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing and shelling of civilian areas, and apparent war crimes perpetrated by Russian or Russian-affiliated forces, next to widespread family separation.

The EU's Temporary Protection Directive provides people fleeing from Ukraine with rights including residency rights, access to the labour market and

⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/anti-trafficking-task-force-atf-ukraine-terms-reference-may-2022>

¹⁰ 5,946,000 refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe (as of 21 November, 2023); 392,100; refugees from Ukraine recorded beyond Europe (as of 14 October 2023); 6,338,100 refugees from Ukraine recorded globally (as of 21 November) 5,088,000 Estimated number of internally



housing, medical and social welfare assistance, and access to education for children. It applies to Ukrainian nationals and other non-EU nationals with a temporary legal stay in Ukraine, as well as their family members. It also applies to non-Ukrainian nationals and stateless people legally residing in Ukraine who cannot return to their country of origin, such as asylum seekers and refugees, and their family members. Moreover, people who fall outside these categories must be allowed access to the EU to transit prior to returning to their countries of origin. However, Ukrainian citizens who have fled without documentation, and third-country nationals who cannot provide proof of legal residence in Ukraine, might be unable to access the temporary protection scheme. There is also evidence that people have not requested temporary protection because of a lack of information about, or lack of understanding of, the scheme or for other reasons. People who are unable or reluctant to register for temporary protection cannot legally work in EU countries and may struggle to access services and support such as housing, health, education and other services, making them more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Trafficking risks in Ukraine since 2014

Since 2014, armed conflict and Russian-backed occupation of the Donbas region and the Crimea have posed grave threats to civilian safety. According to UNHCR, approximately 1.5 million people had already been displaced due to the armed conflict and the occupation of the Donbas region and the Crimea since 2014.¹¹ This population has been especially vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Employment options are limited and internally displaced people living in Russia-controlled territory face significant barriers to obtaining or renewing identification documents, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.¹²

Between 2014 and 24 February 2022, Ukrainians (men, women, and children) have been exploited within Ukraine and across borders, including trafficked for sexual exploitation and labour exploitation.¹³ Victims of labour exploitation have been identified in a variety of sectors including construction, manufacturing, agriculture, as well as in the illegal production of counterfeit tobacco products.¹⁴ Ukrainian children and vulnerable adults have also been trafficked for forced begging or for conducting criminal activities.¹⁵ Since 2014, women and girls

¹¹ UNHCR, Internally displaced persons Ukraine (<https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/internally-displaced-persons>)

¹² <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/ukraine/>

¹³ See data LS Ukraine and IOM Ukraine .

¹⁴ See US TIP report 2021, see IOM data and LS Ukraine data

¹⁵ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/ukraine/>

from conflict-affected areas have reportedly been trafficked for sexual and labour exploitation in Ukraine, Russian controlled territory, and Russia.¹⁶

Human rights violations have also been reported across Ukraine in recent years, putting specific vulnerable groups, including LGBTQI+ people, rights activists and ethnic minorities like Roma at risk of further violations, exploitation and abuse.¹⁷ Gender-based and domestic violence and discrimination against women have also been widespread.¹⁸ Conflict, inequality, violations of human rights, gender-based and domestic violence, discrimination and the absence of viable employment opportunities or social support are major root causes for human trafficking and labour exploitation.

As mentioned, prolonged conflict typically results in an erosion of the rule of law, institutional breakdown, and corruption. This creates a situation where criminality – including human trafficking – can flourish with impunity. Due to the nature of these crimes and the complexity of an emergency context, many cases can remain hidden. In the absence of social ties, people become more vulnerable to trafficking. The longer a war or conflict continues, the more traumatised the people crossing the border are. These circumstances can lead to negative coping mechanisms, making people easier targets for trafficking and exploitation. Those that have lived in occupied territories and those experience multiple displacement – are often in a worse state than those who have only fled once, making them easier targets for traffickers. Lack of financial means is a major risk factor for trafficking as it creates desperation. Individuals in need of money are compelled to accept job offers quickly with poorer working conditions than they would normally do. It can also create situations of people falling into debt bondage.

Remaining risks for displaced persons from Ukraine

The immediate and large-scale response was likely effective at addressing key factors of vulnerability, including forced displacement, humanitarian need, socioeconomic stress, social fragmentation and family breakdown. For many of the risk factors that are present, there has been a large, effective, and coordinated response – but risks remain. Some remaining or residual risks exist that require greater attention, additional investigation and/or targeted intervention.

¹⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/ukraine/>

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch Global Report 2022

¹⁸ Amnesty International report 2021/2022

Research and direct assistance work revealed that there are several specific groups at risks among the displaced group from Ukraine; these include children, especially separated and unaccompanied minors, and children in institutional care. We also see that people with non-Ukrainian nationality, undocumented and stateless people that have no access to the temporary protection directive and generally much less access to rights, have been at risks, next to other groups that face discrimination like Roma and other minority groups and LGBTQ1+ persons. Further chronically ill, disabled and elderly people that might not be able to leave and lack support are at increased risks.

The Ukrainian war learnt that people (at the border, in shelters, at other venues) were approached with false promises of accommodation and work in the country of arrival or another European country. While camps or temporary shelters for internally displaced people and refugees should be a place of safety, experience from humanitarian crises shows that they can in practice be contact points for traffickers and their potential victims.

We have also seen cases of abduction/adoption of children, with the intent to exploit them; next to offers of work or employment (including opportunities offered online) that are bogus or intended to exploit. We have heard reports of women being targeting for marriage or who have been requested to offer sexual or other services for rent.

Another risk identified is the increased use of technology that refugees use for obtaining information and getting access to support and employment. While this in generally has strongly helped to inform large groups of people and connect them with work opportunities and other support, we also see that social media have been used to misinform persons and or to recruit them for jobs that were exploitative. We see that many workers from Ukraine find their jobs online and via social media and messaging platforms, such as Facebook and Telegram. This also leads to a lack of regulatory oversight, resulting in increased vulnerability to exploitative practices. There have been cases of false adverts for jobs in tourism, hospitality and catering. These jobs turned out not to exist and people were deceitfully recruited into other forms of work.

Furthermore, civil society, FRA and others have reported many complaints about employment and employers. A common problem reported by Ukrainians was non-payment of wages, or payment of only part of promised

wages. It was also reported in several countries that Ukrainians and other displaced persons received lower wages than other national workers. This is by the way not unique to refugees from Ukraine only, but also other refugees and migrants report this. There were also issues related to absence of adequate contracts or civil contracts in Poland, next to long working hours and other exploitative working conditions. Reports were further filed about bad recruitment practises, poor accommodation and much dependency on employers including through accommodation. When accommodation is linked to employment, we generally see that this prevents workers also to complain out of fear to lose their housing, or workers are housed in remote locations, with employers organising their transport. This leaves them very isolated from the rest of the community and disproportionately reliant on their employer.

Still we see fairly limited knowledge among Ukrainians about their rights in the hosting countries. Workers often do not properly understand their labour rights neither are aware of their entitlements, for example, in relation to contracts, documentation, payment of wages and the national minimum wage and need support to access the labour market.

As mentioned, generally the figures of identified trafficked persons among refugees from and those in asylum centres remains low. Also among displaced persons from Ukraine, we may not be identifying a large group of trafficked persons. Detection of victims is difficult in all contexts and strongly relies also on self-referral and relevant stakeholder to recognise persons at risks and to see the trafficking indicators. Delayed vulnerability is likely to exist and trafficking cases may only be revealed with time –as vulnerabilities intensify due to depleted coping capacities and as responses scale down. Vulnerability factors, coping strategies, and mobility patterns will shift over time and require flexible responses.

Statistics of ASTRA SOS Helpline

Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection identifies human trafficking victims and coordinates the assistance and protection of the victims.

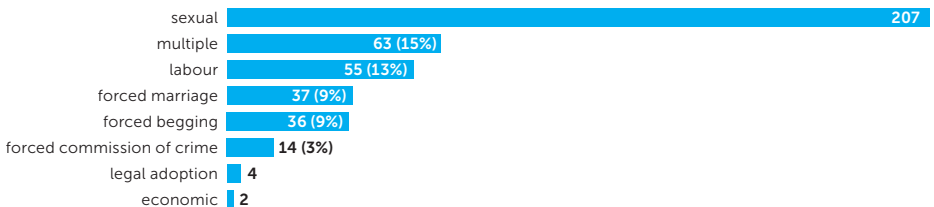
Key aspects of the work of the Centre:

- identifying and assessing the condition, needs, risks, strengths of the victims and their environment,
- planning and providing services,
- referring to other institutions and organizations,
- monitoring the implementation of plans and coordination of protection
- cooperating with judicial authorities and preparing the victim for the proceedings

As a special unit of the Centre, the Shelter for trafficked victims provides urgent accommodation, takes care of basic needs and security, preserves and supports the victim's wellbeing through providing health care, psychosocial support, regulating legal status of the victim, supporting continued education, trainings, etc.

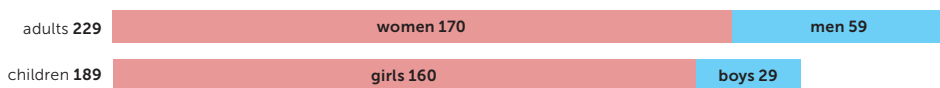
In the period from 2015 to 2022, the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection identified 418 victims of human trafficking. Of that number, 387 victims were originally from Serbia, and 31 were of foreign origin.

The number of identified victims by the method of exploitation:



Origin of identified victims of human trafficking: Serbia 387 (92%), BiH 2, Croatia 2, North Macedonia 2, Montenegro 1, Albania 2, Germany 1, Denmark 1, Ukraine 1, Syria 1, Afghanistan 3, Pakistan 4, Nepal 1, Mali 1, Nigeria 1, Cameroon 3, Congo 2, Eritrea 1, Tunisia 1, Uganda 1.

Age and gender of identified victims of human trafficking: adults 229 (women 170; men 59), children 189 (girls 160; boys 29)



ASTRA – ANTI-TRAFFICKING ACTION provides specialized services of prevention, direct assistance, and support to beneficiaries and citizens, free of charge and available 24/7.

ASTRA'S SOS HOTLINE is a licensed service that informs victims of human trafficking and citizens on types of assistance, service providers, institutions, and organizations in the country and abroad, and on how they can exercise their rights.

Preventive role of ASTRA'S SOS HOTLINE

Preventive activities of ASTRA'S SOS HOTLINE are the following:

- **Informing on preventative measures when going abroad and/or getting employed,**
- **Checking business offers,**
- **Checking the data of the companies that recruit and agencies that mediate in employment based on the data of the official register of the Serbian Business Registers Agency and/or the competent Ministry,**
- **Providing legal analysis of employment contracts before they are signed, etc.**

ASTRA'S TEAM for the victim support

Helps victims since the first contact, through recovery and reintegration, on the entire territory of Serbia. The support includes contacting institutions, connecting with the community, administrative support, and assisting in exercising various rights.

Specijalizovane usluge ASTRA TIMA za podršku žrtvama obuhvataju:

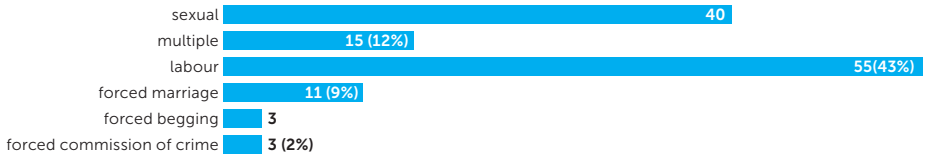
Specialised services of ASTRA'S TEAM for the victim support are the following:

- **Organizing and providing necessary medical and psychological assistance,**
- **Providing legal support and assistance in criminal, civil and non-litigation proceedings,**

- Support in starting or continuing education and in economic empowerment.

In the period from 2015 to 2022, 127 trafficking survivors were supported through ASTRA’s SOS hotline and directly. Of that number, 94 people were from Serbia, and 33 from abroad.

Number of preliminarily identified victims assisted by ASTRA by method of exploitation:



Origin of preliminarily identified victims assisted by ASTRA: Serbia 94 (74%), Croatia 1, North Macedonia 2, Albania 2, Germany 1, Latvia 1, India 19, Vietnam 6, Philippines 1.

Age and gender of preliminarily identified victims assisted by ASTRA: adults 109 (women 55; men 54), children 18 (all girls).



Since the inception of SOS hotline, in March 2002, until December 31, 2022, ASTRA received a total of 56,715 calls from 6,715 callers through the hotline. Through this specialized line, 587 victims of human trafficking were identified: 466 (79%) were female (of which 168 were girls) and 121 were male (of which 14 were boys); 456 were citizens of Serbia (78%) and 131 of foreign origin.

By reviewing the data, we can see that the focus of the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims’ Protection is on identification and actions that relate primarily to women and children, as well as to domestic citizens.

The data that the Centre and ASTRA monitor are quite similar, but the statistical data of the Centre show a small representation of victims of foreign origin, as well as persons who have been exploited for labour. Also, considering the

cooperation, but also the competences of the centres for social work and the Centre, a larger number of identified children, victims of forced marriage, as well as forced commission of crimes, would be expected.

The reasons for this might be the following:

- prioritization and selection by urgency,
- the number of applications from institutions and organizations that the Centre acts on,
- limited resources of the Centre to respond to all requests,
- in some cases, the influence of other actors and politics of whether to actively get involved in certain cases or not.

In addition, for some victims, due to previous negative experience with institutions, the communication with civil society organizations is more acceptable due to accessibility, confidentiality, and flexibility. Also, their support is not conditioned by cooperation with law enforcement authorities, etc.

Key factors for overcoming deficiencies in the system for the support of trafficked victims:

- strengthening cooperation between civil sector organizations and institutions,
- increasing awareness of certain forms of human trafficking through education, training and campaigns,
- improving the information and data collection system for better monitoring and support for victims,
- harmonizing the standards of work and procedures,
- safety as a priority in the actions of all stakeholders,
- organizing support according to the needs of the victim and allowing easy access to all categories of services,
- available and comprehensive health care and support in recovery,
- ensuring continuous functioning and sustainability of accommodation for victims,
- creating and providing missing services and innovative approaches,
- strengthening the legislative framework and its consistent application.

Human Trafficking in Serbia – Overview of The Situation in The Context of The 21st Century

(Abstract)

Authors / SeCons researchers: Marija Babovic, Jovana Obradovic, Milica Stević, Publisher: ASTRA – Anti Trafficking Action

Introduction

Research on trafficking in human beings in Serbia was conducted by SeConS Development Initiative Group, in period September 2021 – March 2022, for the purpose of ASTRA – Anti-trafficking action, and in cooperation with them. **OVERALL OBJECTIVE of the research is to contribute to improvement and strengthening of protection system (including public and civil sector) of one of the most vulnerable social groups – victims and persons at risk of trafficking in human beings, through creation of a unique factual basis (database) on complex forms of trafficking in human beings, which change with the changes in social context, along with identification and perception of human trafficking risks in general population in Serbia and particularly among more vulnerable groups that are most exposed to risks.**

The key research components are:

- **Desk research**, the aim of which was to investigate the manner in which trafficking in human beings and its specific forms were defined in relevant documents (laws, conventions, publications, etc.),
- **Quantitative research** included public opinion survey on the representative sample of general population, with additional sample from Roma population.
- **Qualitative research** with especially vulnerable groups – victims of human trafficking and persons who are at risk of trafficking in human beings.

Scope of Research

The research has, at the same time, encompassed general population in Serbia, specific groups that are under greater risks of trafficking in human beings, as well as the victims of different forms of trafficking in human beings. Territorial reach, in case of research in general population, means the entire territory of Serbia, while certain components of research are geographically located on narrower territorial units.

Specific forms of trafficking in human beings included in the research are as follows:

- trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation,
- trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation,
- trafficking in human beings for the purpose of domestic servitude,
- trafficking in human beings for the purpose of begging,
- trafficking in human beings for the purpose of coercion to commit criminal activities,
- trafficking in human beings for the purpose of giving birth/adopting a child,
- child trafficking.

Although anyone can become a victim of trafficking in human beings, vulnerable social groups are at particular risk of being in a situation of human trafficking. Factors that contribute to vulnerability of a certain person can be divided into two groups:

“Push” factors or factors of pressure include inability to find work, poverty, social exclusion, discrimination based on sex or ethnicity, exposure to violence, low level of education, etc.

“Pull” factors or factors of attraction include attractive job offers and greater employment opportunities; better material living conditions expected in other environments, mainly in another country; more dignified life, primarily without discrimination and violence expected in the new living environment; belief in tempting, but false promises.

Migrations and work abroad – risk of trafficking in human beings

Migrations, particularly if they are illegal, represent a very fertile ground for trafficking in human beings. As some authors note, with greater migration flows, this social problem is intensifying.¹⁹ Even in cases of economic migration, when persons voluntarily go abroad in search of work, they are exposed to increased risks of labour exploitation and human trafficking. Researches on migratory movements show that the nationalities of victims registered in a particular country largely coincide with the citizens who came into the country as regular migrants during that period.

¹⁹ Jelić, M. S., & Vasić, D. M. (2018). Žene i deca migrant – žrtve trgovine ljudima, u: *Savremene migracije i društveni razvoj: interdisciplinarna perspektiva*. Beograd: Srpsko sociološko društvo, Institut društvenih nauka, Filozofski fakultet, Serbian Sociological Society, Institute of Social Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy. 87.

Due to mentioned factors of “pressure”, migration and human trafficking routes very often coincide – persons leave less economically developed regions for economically more developed regions with higher economic activity and greater possibility to find a job, as well as leaving rural for urban areas. According to data from 2016, the largest number of victims of trafficking in human beings were foreign citizens in the country where they were identified, about 60% of identified victims in the world in total.²⁰

Unfavorable economic position, low level of education, lack of knowledge of the language used in the country of destination, as well as inability to find work through legal channels or outside informal economy, contribute to the risk of someone becoming a victim of various forms of exploitation, but also a victim of trafficking in human beings. If it is illegal migration and/or work without work permit, the stated risks increase additionally.

Serbia is considered to be a country of emigration and, according to different studies, number of persons who leave Serbia every year is between 30.000 and 60.000, and in the largest number of cases, these are economic migrations. Economically attractive destinations for persons who emigrate from Serbia are most often countries of the European Union (EU).

In addition to migrant status, the sector of activity in which they work further increase their vulnerability. According to the report by the International Organization of Labour, migrant workers are most often employed in the sector of construction, season agriculture, home care, catering industry, or they provide cleaning services.²¹ These jobs can be mainly found in the sector of non-standard employment, which is characterized by higher insecurity for workers in comparison to standard employment. Recruitment of workers for this type of jobs is frequently done by various employment agencies abroad, which, in some cases, may be an initial link in human trafficking chain, for the purpose of labour and/or sexual exploitation.²²

According to data of the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking for the period from 2016 to 2021, among Serbian citizens registered as victims of human trafficking abroad, the largest number of them was registered in Germany, France, Russia, Switzerland, but also in countries in the region. On the

²⁰ UNODC. (2016). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. New York: United Nations, p. 57.

²¹ ILO. (2017). *Nestandardno zapošljavanje širom svijeta: Razumijevanje izazova, oblikovanje mogućnosti*. Geneva: International Labour Office, p. 8.

²² UNODC. (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, p. 14.

other hand, although going to work abroad is a significant source of risk from trafficking in human beings, especially in Serbia as a country of emigration, there is a large share of persons exploited in Serbia among those who have been identified as victims of trafficking in human beings by the Centre.²³

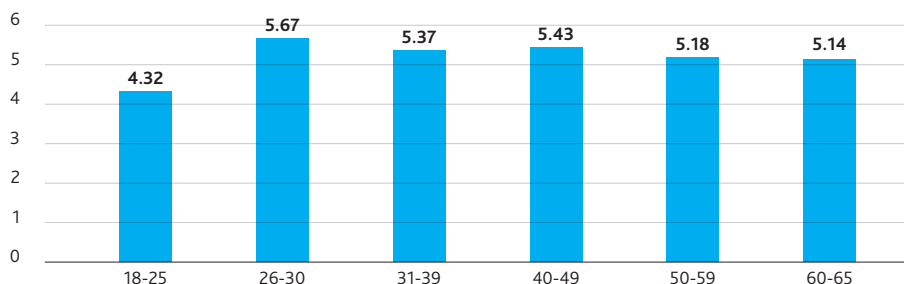
On the basis of presented data, it is clear that anybody can be a victim of human trafficking, i.e. everybody is exposed to certain risk from trafficking in human beings, primarily when we speak of demographic characteristics, such as gender and age. Still, **risks from trafficking in human beings can be greater in certain groups of population faced with different forms of exclusion, discrimination and poverty, lack of education or information.**

Research Results

Knowledge And Information About Trafficking In Human Beings

When it comes to human trafficking, respondents were asked to assess how much they were aware of the risks of someone becoming a victim of trafficking in human beings, on the scale from 1 to 10, where grade 1 means that they were not aware of the risks at all, and 10 that they were fully aware of them. As shown in the Chart 1, the largest share of respondents (16.4%) assessed their knowledge with grade 5, while average grade at the level of the entire sample is 5.2.

Chart 1: Respondents' average grades for their own risk awareness of trafficking in human beings, per age

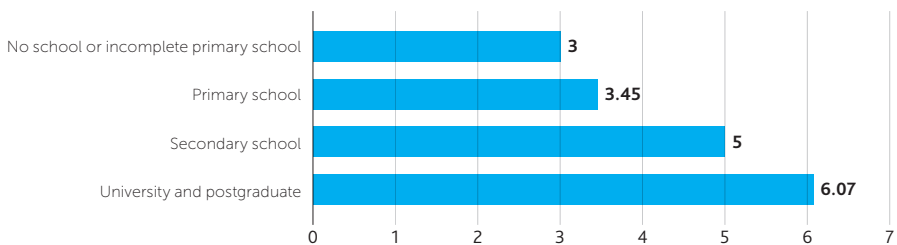


If specific grades are taken into account, it is noticeable that certain categories of respondents significantly more often assessed their knowledge with the lowest, i.e. the highest grade. In awarding the lowest grade to their

²³ Annual statistical reports available at: <http://centarzztlj.rs/statisticki-podaci/>

own knowledge of risk from trafficking in human beings, age and level of respondents' education proved to be the most significant indicators. The youngest respondents in the sample, aged 18 to 25, assessed their awareness of risks most often with grade 1, in comparison to older respondents. More precisely, even every fourth respondent from this age category (25.5%) thinks that he/she is not aware at all of risks that someone can become a victim of trafficking in human beings. Level of education is also very important in this case, so among respondents who are without education or have completed only primary school, almost every third respondent (31.1%) said they were not aware of this type of risk at all. **Among respondents who think they are fully aware of risks from trafficking in human beings, there are significantly more women, respondents who live in Belgrade, as well as those with the best financial situation.**

Chart 2: Respondents' average grades for their own risk awareness of trafficking in human beings, per level of education

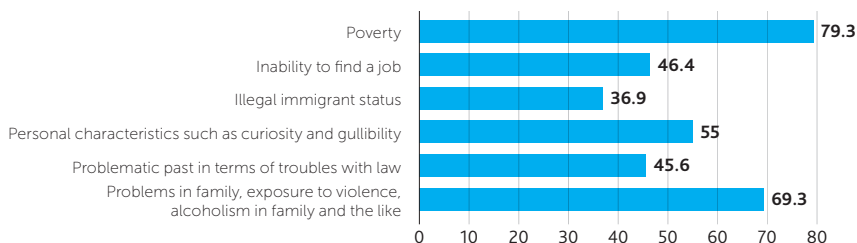


If work status of respondents is taken into account, it is important to note that respondents who were unemployed at the time of research, and actively looking for job, awarded their knowledge on risks with lower grade (4.84) in comparison to respondents who were employed (5.56). Poorer knowledge about risks from trafficking in human beings, both in comparison to employed persons and the entire sample, shows that unemployed persons could find themselves in particularly vulnerable position during their search for work.

Statistically significant **differences between general and Roma population** occur exactly in awarding the lowest grades to their own knowledge about risks. Members of Roma population significantly more often responded that they were not aware of risks that someone could become a victim of trafficking in human beings – every fifth respondent among Roma population (21.6%). Therefore, an average grade is lower and it is 4.65.

In addition to self-assessment of one's awareness of/being informed about risks from trafficking in human beings, respondents singled out, among six given factors, those **factors** which they considered to increase the risk of someone becoming a victim of human trafficking.

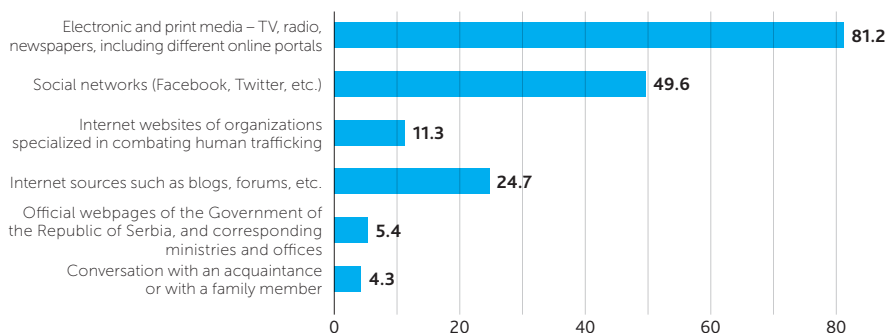
Chart 3: Factors increasing the risk of someone becoming a victim of trafficking in human beings (%)



Information channels about trafficking in human beings

Knowledge about trafficking in human beings and perception of certain situation as less or more risky, to the greatest extent are results of (non) information about this topic. Information can be obtained through various media reports about discovered chains of human trafficking and their victims, different internet sources or publications and announcements of official institutions and/or nongovernment organizations. Almost one fifth of respondents (18.5%) stated they were not informed about this topic at all, and answers of other respondents are shown in Chart 8. Respondents did not choose only one option, but they stated, among given options, all information channels which they use.

Chart 4: Sources from which respondents are informed about human trafficking (%)



Exposure to Risks from Labour Exploitation and Human Trafficking

Work abroad

As already presented in the previous chapter, going abroad to work contributes to vulnerability of workers and increases chances of becoming victims of different forms of exploitation, or even victims of human trafficking. Members of Roma population significantly more often stated they had had experience of working abroad (25.5%) in comparison to members of general population (12.9%), where experience of working abroad was mostly reported by men. Of the total number of respondents who worked abroad at some point, 70.9% of them were men, and 29.1% women. The greatest share of respondents found jobs abroad through close contacts – relatives or friends from Serbia or abroad (Chart 12). Other channels through which respondents found work abroad are informal intermediaries whom they didn't know, job ads and internet employment platforms, while very small number of respondents from general population registered with formal institutions (such as the National Employment Service) and employment agencies abroad as channels for finding a job abroad.

Deception during labour recruitment – Serbia and abroad

Deception during recruitment, according to the International Organization of Labour, presents one of the key indicators of human trafficking. Persons are primarily being deceived related to different aspects of work they are applying for or offered to them by an employer or another person. Regarding threats and use of force, deceptions are subtle way of “pulling” a victim into human trafficking chain, and therefore, these situations are more difficult to identify as potentially dangerous.

Deceived persons do not have to become victims of human trafficking; however, it is certain that these people's labour rights have been violated. The research has shown there is a significant share of those who, in Serbia and abroad, were exposed to deception in connection to different aspects of labour.

Chart 5: Share of respondents who were exposed to deceptions in Serbia in comparison to the entire sample – general and Roma population (%)

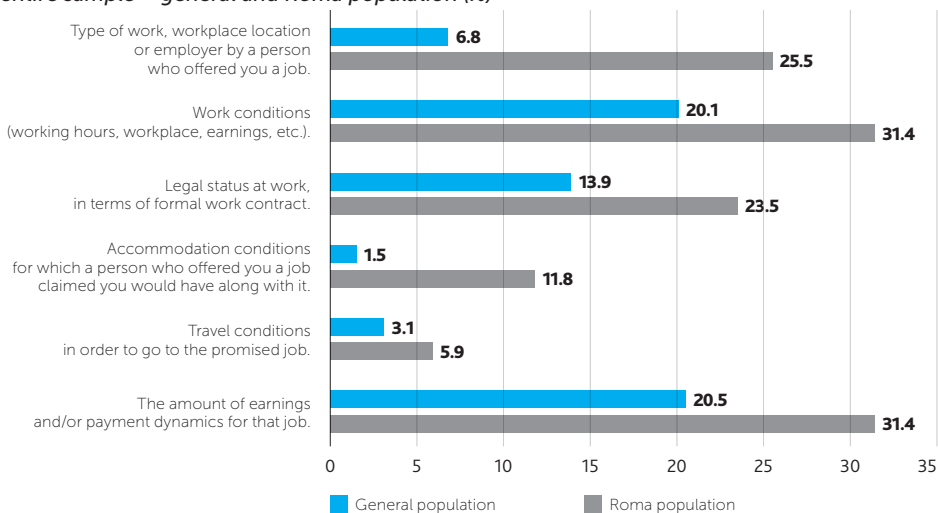
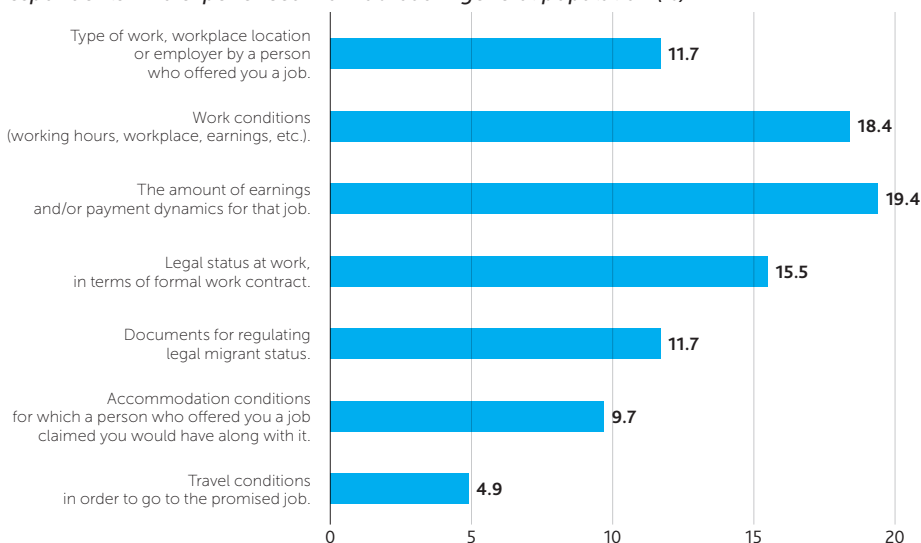


Chart 6: Share of respondents who were exposed to deceptions abroad in comparison to respondents who experienced work abroad – general population (%)



Deceptions to which respondents were mostly exposed were the ones related to work conditions, in terms of working hours, safety at work, workplace and the like (20.1% in Serbia and 18.4% abroad), as well as the amount of earnings and/or payment dynamics for the job (20.5% in Serbia

and 19.4% abroad). The next most frequent deception is the one referring to legal status of the employee, i.e. deception that they would conclude a work contract with the employer (13.9% in Serbia and 15.5% abroad). When we take into account the respondents' characteristics, young people aged 26-30 experienced significantly more deceptions regarding work conditions in Serbia – almost every third respondent from this age category. There is no significant statistical difference in any of the stated deceptions according to gender, which means that among those who were exposed to deceptions, men and women were almost equally represented. **Members of Roma population showed larger share among those who were exposed to deceptions in Serbia in comparison to general population.**

Forced labour – Serbia and abroad

In the sample of general population, 3.3% of respondents stated that in Serbia and/or abroad they performed certain work under coercion. In total of 26 respondents stated they had had such experience, of which 16 men and 10 women. Even 17 respondents were forced to perform work they didn't want and for which they didn't apply in the first place. The next most often means of forced labour is through denial of livelihood, to which 9 respondents were exposed. Seven respondents were forced to work due to debt they had towards the employer. Somewhat less often are the answers that appeared with two, i.e. three respondents, referring to coercion through violence or threat of violence; isolation, restriction of movements and surveillance

The share of respondents who worked in Serbia and/or abroad under coercions is many times larger in Roma population – every tenth respondents from sub-sample of Roma population (5 of 51 respondents in total) experienced work under coercion. In comparison to general population, violence or threats of violence are the most frequent types of coercion to which the respondents from Roma population were exposed.

Domestic servitude – exposure to risks from labour exploitation and human trafficking

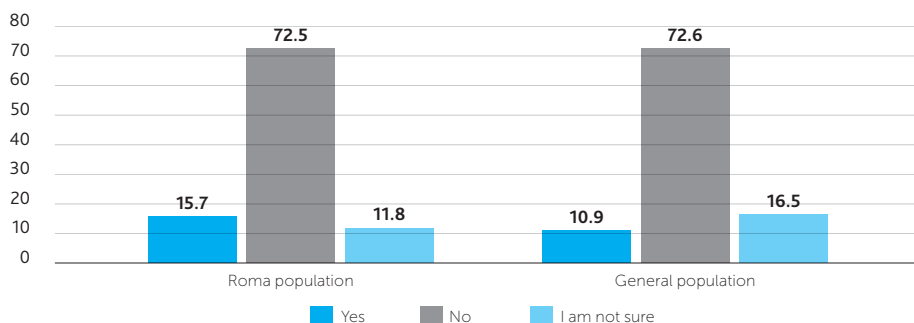
One of the categories which is considered to be especially vulnerable in view of exposure to risks from labour exploitation, but also to risks from human trafficking, is the category of those who work as domestic servants (domestic servitude). **According to research data on the sample of general population, approximately every twentieth person is currently working or has worked in domestic servitude at some point in Serbia and/or abroad.** It

is not surprising that most of this category consists of women (70.3%), while men are represented to a significantly lesser extent (29.7%). The most often problem, which the persons who worked as domestic servants faced, is too long working hours (in terms of number of hours worked, as well as number of working days in a week).

Intention to leave the country for employment

Due to inability to find decent employment in Serbia, a significant share of respondents, both from general and Roma population, states they intend to leave the country in search for work (Chart 7). Every tenth person from general population stated they planned to go abroad, and it is particularly worrying that young people are significantly more likely to take this step (aged up to 30), in comparison to older categories of respondents. So, even 30% of young people from 18 to 25 and another 20.5% of those who are between 26 and 30 state they intend to look for job outside the country.

Chart 7: Share of respondents from general and Roma population in relation to whether they plan to go abroad in search for work (%)



The respondents were also asked whether they would accept a highly paid business offer abroad, **without performing any background check** of the employer, work conditions, and experience of other persons who worked in similar or the same positions. Although the numbers are not seemingly high, they should not be disregarded, since non-information about business offer, especially if it is outside the borders of the country of residence, is in direct connection to exposure to risks from labour exploitation, and also human trafficking. Namely, **2.6% of respondents from general population answered affirmatively, and the number is almost three times higher when we observe Roma population included in the sub-sample of the research (7.8% answered "yes").**

Recommendations

- It is necessary to **improve the system of identification and keeping records about human trafficking victims** in Serbia, particularly having in mind that “dark figure” are considerably higher than the number of registered cases.
- It is very important to **raise awareness about human trafficking risks**, especially among younger population, taking into account that the research has shown that even every fourth person aged 18 to 25 is not aware of those risks at all. Also, it is necessary to raise awareness about those problems with unemployed persons and persons with lower level of education, since these two categories proved to be the least informed after young people category.
- It is required to **find innovative ways to raise awareness** about risks from becoming a victim of human trafficking among Roma population, as especially vulnerable group, since the research has shown that even the fifth of respondents from this category is not aware of such risks at all.
- In addition to devising concrete measures to reduce risks of becoming victims of human trafficking for individuals, particularly those who belong to especially vulnerable groups (young people, Roma people, unemployed persons, persons with low level of education, etc.), it is very important to **take into account the structural factors that influence a person to be at such risk**. As poverty presents the most prominent factor that “pushes” people to find alternative ways to ensure survival of their families and themselves, it is necessary for the state to create measures and programmes through which the position of people who belong to the category of the poor or who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion is improved.
- As education presents one of the protective factors, both in terms of exposure to poverty and in terms of exposure to human trafficking risks, it is very important to **enable everyone to exercise** one of their basic rights, such as the right to education. This particularly refers to children from Roma population, who need additional support not only to start the education process, but also to stay in it as long as it is possible.
- Since the research has shown that women less often than men identify human trafficking in the situation of labour engagement as domestic servitude without wages or the possibility of leaving the job, it is important to think of innovative ways of providing information to women and raising awareness of such specific form of trafficking in human beings, because they are actually the ones who are at the greatest risk of becoming the victims of this form of human trafficking. **Special attention should be directed to the**

risk from exposure to labour exploitation, both in the country and abroad, and connection of these risks with human trafficking risks.

- It is very important that the institutions in charge of protecting workers' rights (such as labour inspection) **conduct regular inspections**, to gain insight into the conditions in which employees work, whether they are threatened or exposed to any form of labour exploitation. Accordingly, it is important to adequately penalize those who jeopardize labour rights of the employees.
- It is necessary to **implement activities** (such as trainings or advertising campaigns) **to inform the citizens about their labour rights**, as well as possibilities to protect themselves in the situation when their rights are jeopardized.
- It is very important to **raise awareness about the significance of information about business offers**, especially if there is an opportunity to work abroad. It is necessary to inform the citizens through various activities, especially young people and the unemployed, about the way in which it is possible to check out business offers and the employer, but also which institutions and organizations they can turn to for help if they find themselves in the situation of human trafficking.



MEDIA PRACTICE

Media reports on trafficking in women: The hunt for victim

Written by Saša Leković, a freelance journalist and a trainer of investigative journalism

The research on the media treatment of the phenomenon of trafficking in women, presented in this brochure, conducted for the [second edition](#) fifteen years ago, shows that the situation in Serbian newspapers (the research was conducted only on the content of print media) did not significantly differ from the situation in other countries formed in the territory of the former SFRY, nor from the practices in other transitional countries in Southeastern Europe. Since then, there has been no new comprehensive research on this topic, but based on the experiences documented by ASTRA, the overall situation has not changed significantly. The main problems remain the same, including deficiencies in media reporting.

Judging by articles written in both daily and weekly papers in Serbia in 2008 that were analyzed for this research, it turns out that **journalists and editors do not discern between illegal migration, international prostitution and human trafficking** (see the section on human trafficking, illegal migration and prostitution) or that it simply does not matter a great deal to them.

However, this is just the beginning of the confusion that walks hand-in-hand with misunderstandings, wrong interpretations and the publishing of articles in which it is obvious how unclear the topic of human trafficking (in women, in this particular case) is to many journalists who would actually like to write about the subject.

The research has shown that human trafficking was mostly written about after news of a victim of trafficking being discovered became public, but that, most often, this would not serve as a catalyst for a more long-term analysis about the phenomenon of human trafficking. A large number of the published texts are shallow, appeal to the basest passions, and either instigate or simply track undocumented scandals.

How to destroy a story?

A drastic example of a totally mishandled media portrayal of trafficking in women is the one known as the „Montenegrin Case,“ which began at the end of 2002. This scandal lasted for months. On the basis of a statement made by a young Moldovan woman who was put into a shelter for victims of trafficking in women, some high state officials were accused of sexually abusing her, as well as other women, who they knew were also victims of trafficking. The media accusations were even expanded to accusing the said officials of being actual accomplices in trafficking in women.

The victim’s statement was published, as were the names of those believed to be involved in abusing the young woman, along with arguments between lawyers, prosecutors and judges concerning details of the case. Political parties also became involved in the discussion. Everyone had an opinion about everything. Arrests were made, and even the deputy state prosecutor was temporarily imprisoned.

In the end, the courts ruled that there was not enough evidence for prosecution, while the victim was additionally traumatized, humiliated and totally psychologically broken. The media, in large part, only competed in trying to exploit the seedier details of this ugly tale and participated in feuds, where the goal seemed to be everything except solving this case and doing something about trafficking in women.

After there was no longer any interest in sensationalistic media reports, the “Montenegrin Case” disappeared from the newspapers and TV screens altogether. It was as if it never happened. Although using victim’s story as a starting point, it was possible to develop a series of different stories connected to the human trafficking problem, most of the media did not even try. Not one aspect of this story was followed to its end. This despite the fact that, out of all analyzed texts in 2002, 60% of those printed in Serbian newspapers dealt with this case²⁴.

Instead of the interest in the theme of “trafficking” being used as a catalyst for investigative reports that would bring these problems to light in a professional manner and for the purpose of finding solutions, many in the media abused and neglected this chance to inform the public about the essence of this problem.

²⁴ ASTRA (2003), Manual for Journalists

They neglected the inherent responsibility of the journalistic profession and, foremost, elementary human rights – primarily those of the victim.

Re-victimizing the victims

Like with many people, most of the time it does not occur even to journalists that when the story involves “some prostitutes”, first of all, this is really about the violation of basic human rights. **Without regard to a person’s age, where they come from, their education or past, all of these women are, first and foremost, victims - which they are even if, by their own free will, they choose prostitution.**

No sex worker has willingly agreed to be beaten, raped or forcefully drugged. Could anyone actually believe that even one woman would like to service the sexual pleasures of many strangers without the possibility to decide, where, how, when and with whom this would take place? Would anyone like to be deceived or paid little or nothing – no matter what kind of work they were performing?

These are banal and, in the end, worn-out questions. But it would be good for every journalist to seriously ask themselves and try to honestly answer every time they decide not only to write about trafficking in women, but also when they write about topics like illegal migration and prostitution. Just as it is a mistake to lump all these together, at the same time it is wrong not to see how often they could be linked.

In any case, the victim is the most injured party. This particularly relates to situations where an entire story is written on the basis of only one source involved in actual events. **A woman or girl who is already frustrated, humiliated and damaged, is additionally victimized by irresponsible conclusions about a situation she has found herself in.** Sometimes a victim is not even asked whether she wants her experience written about, especially if the source has their own motives for bringing the certain details into the public arena.

With that, for journalists, but not only journalists, it can be useful to ask themselves one more banal and unnecessary question: how would we act if this involved our mother, sister, wife, girlfriend or friend? Would we publish our story without looking for substantiation? Would we even write about the details of her tragedy? Would we do so without the victim’s consent?

Victims are the most interesting part of the human trafficking story, so it is understandable that journalists and editors like to have victim's story, or at least a story about the victim. With that, they do not keep in mind that the victims of trafficking are vulnerable and exposed, that they never cease to be victims – not even when they manage to escape from the grasp of human traffickers. Even when these victims choose to share their stories with reporters, that does not mean that reporters have free reign.

In those situations it pays for reporters and editors to apply in the most responsible fashion the professional rule of protecting their source (especially when the source is particularly exposed to additional physical and mental pain). Every non-adherence to this rule can end in tragedy.

Mistakes are (not) a part of journalism?

Both journalist and editors can make catastrophic mistakes in their reporting and they can harm victims even while having the best intentions in mind.

Following are some actual examples which confirm this.

One American TV station announced, in 2002, a story about young Albanian women who were abducted from the streets of small Albanian towns and taken to Italy where they were forced into prostitution. The story came to light when the girls were found and rescued by local police. With their faces blurred for their protection, the young women detailed their ordeal to TV reporters before they were sent back to Albania. Although the story was only aired in the US, once they got back to Albania the women were again abducted and then killed. **In the world of organized crime, news travels most quickly and most surely. If the reporter does not keep this in mind when dealing with the topic of trafficking in women and girls, this can have unintended and fateful consequences.**

The TV crew in this story was obviously not warned how carefully these victims needed to be protected, and how much preparation was necessary in order for this situation to be brought off with the best possible outcome. Most importantly, a basic rule was ignored: a reporter must protect his source, sometimes even from the source itself. **A victim is not compelled to know what the journalist must: what the potential dangers are if she decides to be interviewed, particularly in front of a camera.**

Unfortunately, even those whose job it is to protect victims sometimes do

the opposite. An example of this happened in Macedonia where the police, in 2002, raided a few local establishments where it was suspected that foreign girls were being forced into prostitution. In these clubs, many girls were found who, it could be assumed, were the victims of human trafficking. The police, without any preparation or permission from anyone, allowed a local TV crew to film the girls while they were still at the local police station.

Some of the girls agreed to be interviewed by the reporters, but their identity was not sufficiently hidden, while the other girls, although they had not agreed to be either interviewed or filmed, were also clearly seen simply because they happened to be in the same room. This is an obvious example of unacceptably unprofessional behavior of both police and reporters. The girls were returned to their countries of origin and their ultimate fate is still unknown.

How to avoid mistakes?

With regard to any kind of video footage, a good rule of thumb is (as much as this is possible), that the victim is able to view the footage to make sure that her identity has no chance of being revealed. With that, it is also important to electronically alter the victim's voice and that the victim (especially her head) be filmed from behind or that her head, along with the rest of her characteristic features, be electronically altered so as to be unrecognizable. In the end, it is also important that even when meeting with the reporter the victim does not give her correct name or place of residence – much less give this information during the actual filming.

The victim must be informed of the possible hazards of airing the piece and given the opportunity for legal and all other pertinent counsel. If the victim, for any reason, is incapable or unable to understand the potential dangers of having the piece aired, then the responsibility falls squarely on the journalists and editors to do everything they can to protect her.

To be sure, the media outlets and editorial staffs that act the most professionally are those that have clearly stated and written procedures which are to be followed in the more delicate cases. The BBC, for example, is known for its exceptionally high standards and strong criteria, but every editorial staff, even every news team, can have a group of procedures to which they will always adhere. The risk of making a mistake will automatically be drastically reduced if this is the case.

Obviously our colleagues from Macedonian TV had no written code of

conduct that they could strictly adhere to. However, the fatal consequences brought about by the mistakes of the aforementioned American TV crew are a clear example of how unprofessional and irresponsible behavior is not the exclusive domain of young, inexperienced reporters from badly organized editorial staffs originating from poor countries.

The importance of consistently respecting the protection of victims' rights is reinforced, despite an abundance of professional experience and basic preparation, by an example involving the author of this text.

Also in 2002, I published an article in the newspaper that contained the confessions of a trafficking victim who had managed to escape captivity. The victim's identity was maximally protected and she had returned to the Šibenik hinterland where she lived with her family. Several months later, a TV crew that was preparing to air a show about human trafficking, called me up and asked me to put them in contact with the victim so that they could do a segment on her.

Basic procedure in such cases is that neither the identity of the victim nor her address or telephone number are divulged – not even to fellow reporters. If the victim agrees to a meeting, I give her the telephone number of the journalist, tell her to call from a public phone that is far away from her residence, or a mobile phone that uses a calling card instead of a subscribed number, whose owner cannot be identified. Another option is to have someone, in whom the victim has total trust, call for her – while still taking the same precautions. The next piece of advice is to have the eventual meeting take place at a "neutral site" – away from the victim's residence, but also away from any television studio or editorial office. Even one witness is too many, and may prove to be fatal.

In this case I adhered to these strict procedures. Except one: I did not expect that both the victim and my colleague would ignore my advice. The victim forgot to be cautious, giving her full confidence to the reporter, and the TV crew did not stick to basic precautions. The result: the segment was filmed in the yard of the house that the victim was living in (including a wide view of the house, its surroundings, as well as of the city itself), the victim's voice was not altered, and her face was not blurred despite the fact that some of the scenes showed the victim's half-profile – which was sufficient for recognition.

After the airing of the segment, what was supposed to be encouragement to other victims who lived through a similar terror to be witnesses against human traffickers, instead became a situation where the victim had to flee from the place she had been living and, with no job, scared and disillusioned, was forced to move away from her family which, until then, had been her only support. **This story shows once again how fragile and risky every decision is to tell the tale of human trafficking through a story about a victim, or through the victim's own story.**

However, cautionary tales almost certainly will not scare off reporters and editors from continuing to insist on stories about victims because they are the most interesting way of reporting on the theme of human trafficking. Thus, everyone who writes about victims should keep in mind some very important truths. The author of this text has condensed these into ten guidelines and presented these at the International Conference on Investigate Reporting in Copenhagen (May 1-4, 2003), where one of the topics was trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Editors are not interested in stories about trafficking in women?

Offer them a victim's story.

Authorities refuse to acknowledge that the issue of trafficking in women exists?

Always and again, tell the victim's story.

BUT...

You must always protect the victim.

Reveal her identity to no one.

The police, court authorities, social services...want to contact "your" victim?

Make it possible for the victim to contact them if she wishes, but so that she stays protected.

Other reporters would like to contact the victim?

Treat them like any other interested party. The safety of the victim is paramount.

You are on the trail of a possible victim?

First contact her family and explain what you are doing and how much you know.

What do you tell the police, or other interested parties, while you are working on the story?

Allow the victim/her family to decide. Tell them upsides and downsides of every eventual decision.

How to effectively report on human trafficking in the long term?

Connect with an informed network of colleagues who deal with this topic in your own and in other countries.

The victim has returned home. Is that the happy ending to the story?

Not at all. Resocialization can be the hardest and longest part of her trauma.

Is there ever a happy ending to the story of human trafficking?

Because of what she has been through, a victim is always a victim. You should always keep that in mind.

The victim should be understood, not pitied.

These guidelines resulted from journalistic and editorial experience coming from work on the stories about women and girls - victims of trafficking. The guidelines are not absolute and certainly not unchangeable. There is a whole list of possible suggestions that can be used in specific scenarios. The ten guidelines are just a reminder of common occurrences which can take place in any story about victims, without regard to their age, origin, education, social status, nationality or specific personal trauma.

Only after taking these factors into account, and if he/she is ready to adhere

to this guideline that protects the victim, can the reporter begin to think of approaching a victim or her family. That still does not mean that he/she will get the story, and that her story will appeal to editors as well as to the public... When approaching a victim and writing about the issue of trafficking in women, along with other professional abilities, the reporter must be a good psychologist – along with being a good diplomat. And he/she has to be ready to do what can be the hardest thing for a reporter: give up the story. **If the story could endanger the victim, then it is the responsibility of the reporter not to publish it.**

Another big mistake that happens, almost imperceptibly, to many reporters is to go into an interview with a victim unprepared – they mix in sympathy (pity) and empathy (understanding their situation). Although every normal human being will feel sympathy for a human trafficking victim that has been put through great anguish, and will judge the behavior of a trafficker, the reporter who is facing the victim and her story must be utterly professional and neutral. If a reporter pities the victim without understanding her, the victim's story will be compassionate, but will not answer any important questions. **The main goal of the reporter is to ask the right questions and find the most incisive answers.**

The reporter must find out what happened to the victim, but he/she cannot feel sorry for her, comfort her, make promises that he/she can't keep, or give her special privileges. The reporter must carefully and unaggressively – but nevertheless still – try to find the story's logical trail, posing questions that require clarifying, not hinting at answers, not coming to any personal judgments, and not using any groundless accusations by the victim which are leveled at actual persons or institutions.

The Golden Rule: don't be aggressive – learn to listen

A victim's motives for speaking with a reporter about her experiences and having them made public (even if the victim remains anonymous) can vary. The desire to help other potential victims, despair, or revenge are just a few of the possible motivations that are behind a victim's decision to speak out. Regardless of the motive, the reporter is given an enormous responsibility. **Sometimes the life of the victim can directly depend upon the conduct of the reporter.**

With that, maybe the best advice an experienced journalist can give to a younger colleague who wishes to write about trafficking in women, and especially victim's story, is: regardless of the attractiveness of the topic, think hard about whether you can live up to the standards (professional and ethical) that the situation will require.

Sometimes the braver, practical and professional decision is *don't go into a topic that you cannot handle responsibly and professionally*. Many times, stories about trafficking in women are precisely that. If you do decide to tackle these types of stories, you should seek advice from colleagues who have experience in similar matters.

If at all possible, it may be best to form a team and work on the stories together. Formulate a plan of action and give everyone a different aspect of the story to work on. Check out facts between yourselves, control each other and be each others' "devil's advocates". Don't become self-satisfied but constantly question one another. **Don't think in the direction of *I did a great job on this one but think did I do this properly? What did I fail to accomplish? What could I do better?***

Women trafficking victims are frequently more easily approached by female rather than male reporters. Women feel more comfortable talking with other women, it is easier to tell them intimate details, and they feel a sort of mutual connection and trust amongst themselves. After the hell that men put them through (there are women involved in trafficking in women as well, but traffickers are mostly male), women victims are loath to, once again, be face to face with a man. They feel an aversion towards them, many times directed at all males, and therefore also toward a reporter that wants to talk about this subject with them.

However, this does not have to be the rule. A lot depends upon the experience and preparation of the reporter, the circumstances surrounding the meeting, and the quickness with which the reporter adjusts to the victim, and become someone she can talk to. While speaking with the trafficking victim the reporter should make use of one of the most important qualities a good reporter should have, something that is particularly meaningful in such delicate circumstances: he/she needs to know how to listen.

Without regard to the victim's motive for speaking out, the details of her traumatic experience, age or education, once she decides to speak, the victim

will have a need say a great deal. **A good reporter knows how to listen, knows when to be quiet and when to pose a question.**

I was witness to a conversation between a victim and a reporter when an, up to that point, seemingly productive interview turned into a complete disaster, and was subsequently ended. This happened after the reporter began to insist on detailed facts and concrete physical descriptions of the maltreatment that the victim had had to live through. The journalist's use of direct and very precise questions to extract from the victim as many concrete descriptions of the torture she went through as possible resulted in her ultimate resistance.

Feeling once again humiliated, she suddenly began to cry and from that moment on the reporter only elicited a feeling of disgust. This even though for the previous hour she exhaustively described everything that had happened to her, without any hesitation or discomfort. However, she was doing this spontaneously and with very little prompting from the reporter. The situation in which it was expected from her to exhaustively describe her humiliation and the too-obvious demands of the reporter clearly traumatized her more than the rest of the story's details. Finally, the insensitivity toward her by the reporter provoked her resistance to going on with the interview. For both the victim and the reporter it would have been better that he has never even approached the victim in the first place.

Stories about actual victims, so attractive to readers, viewers, and listeners, so important to journalists and editors, can also be very dangerous – for a reporter's professional reputation, as well as for the victims that come forth with their stories, allow their experiences to be written about or become "media stars" against their will.

Trafficking of women as a lucrative business

There are many other ways to report about trafficking in women. But many of these are not used in the transition countries of Southeastern Europe because serious investigative journalism is not represented, nor respected, by the mainstream – not even in the journalistic profession itself.

Many times it is enough to use elementary logic to come to the real answer to the question of: what would be a good theme. Human trafficking, along with

the trafficking of drugs and weapons, is one of the most profitable activities of organized crime and one of the most lucrative jobs in general. Southeastern Europe is one of the largest markets for trafficking in women. Serbia is one of the intersections of the trafficking routes, but in the economic sections of the highest-selling newspapers a whole year can go by without a single text that deals with trafficking in women!

Many times the “economic” element of this problem is simply not attractive enough. Indeed, the catalyst for writing about trafficking in women “in another way” (without detailed accounts and actual victims) can be found in different economic analyses, hard to understand statistics, and unreadable table charts...but, to be published in economic sections, the topic does not have to be written about in a boring and unintelligible fashion.

For example, analysis from an economic perspective centered around an ugly affair involving female illegal migrants or a news release from a police press conference about a few “foreign prostitutes” can shed light on the real story behind trafficking in women – that will be attractive enough, yet at the same time factually based. The most compelling and important stories about the phenomenon of trafficking in women begin in just such a fashion.

Dead end: using only one source

Most texts dealing with the topic of trafficking in women in Serbia are, just like in most SEE countries, based on facts gathered during police news conferences. These meetings with the press are mostly used by authorities to pat themselves on the back about what a good job they are doing, and include raids and the bringing in of women and girls who did not have proper documentation.

It cannot be denied that the main source for information that can shed light on trafficking in women. A much bigger problem is reporters settling for information put out by the police that frequently is more accusatory toward potential victims (they are in the country illegally, without valid documents), than potential perpetrators, including human traffickers themselves.

It is easier to write about the obvious and what is practically “served” to you. It is much simpler to simply relay information about undocumented women than to get down to the real story. **By not researching further and not looking**

for new approaches to the topic, the reporters become mouthpieces for the police instead of offering the public a professionally researched story in which relevant questions are at least asked – if an adequate answer has not been uncovered in the meantime.

Of course, along with the authorities' press release, other sources must be utilized in order to better inform the reporter about the topic. In the matter of trafficking in women, non-governmental organizations as well as international institutions which deal with this phenomenon, with women's rights or which provide direct victim assistance can be a significant source of data.

Reporters, meanwhile, are making a mistake if they do not look at information in a critical manner and accept this as the only relevant source. This stance is unprofessional as only repeating police press releases. **A report must remain fair and balanced. Only taking into account, and relying upon, information gathered from one source makes a reporter do something he/she should never do – take sides.**

This type of behavior unavoidably reduces the level of professionalism and the value of the finished product. It leaves the reporter only a small step away from catastrophic results: half-truths, exclusiveness, sensationalism... In the long run, a reporter who relies only on one source becomes more and more dependant upon that source and more susceptible to manipulation. Instead of using the source for the purpose of complete and balanced information – the source then uses the reporter to put out a picture about trafficking in women that is in that source's interest.

In using a typical example we will try to show how the most ordinary police information can be the catalyst for a series of analytical stories connected to the topic of trafficking in women – or how it could turn out to be the path to professional catastrophe.

The path to one extreme or the other began long before the reporter arrived at a press conference, where the initial piece of information would be announced: the moment at which one of our three theoretical (but in fact very real) reporters decided to go about his business in a professional manner (he adopted a strict code of conduct, gathered and organized information, exchanged experiences with colleagues, widened his circle of sources, checks and re-checks fact...).

At the press conference, the police offered the following information:

In a routine check of the RUŽA club in town X in central Vojvodina, three female Ukrainian citizens were found with falsified travel documents and work permits. The owner of the club, A.A., stated that the girls worked for him as waitresses. After investigation, it was found that the Ukrainian girls offered sexual favors in exchange for money to a number of different men. Criminal reports were filed against a number of individuals."

The first reporter relayed this exact information, at which point the editor "strengthened" the statement and gave it the headline: *THREE UKRAINIAN PROSTITUTES ARRESTED.*

Having given the editor the police information, the first reporter's work was done and he went out with his colleagues for drinks and football talk, enjoying his free time until the next press conference, to be held the following day.

The second reporter went out for a drink with his source from the police force after the press conference was over. In this way, in addition to the terse official information, he obtained juicy details about the raid, including photographs, the names of the Ukrainian girls, the fact that they were underage, copies of the false passports, visas and work permits. He found out a member of the force was suspected of being involved in the actual illegal transport of the girls over the border. He also did not know that his source was using him to get back at a colleague whom he had a dispute with.

The next day the newspaper of the second reporter ran a "screaming" headline: *POLICE ALSO INVOLVED IN PROSTITUTION SCANDAL.* The text, which, along with police information, contained everything that his police source had told him (named as a trusted source inside the force who chose to remain anonymous), included the name of the colleague he was in a dispute with, was "decorated" with photographs of the girls being arrested, with their faces uncovered, their names, and the copies of the documents with which they were found. Happy with the space in the paper given to his story and its actual placement, the second reporter celebrated by taking his colleagues from the desk out for drinks.

After the police spokesman read his prepared information, the third reporter started asking questions:

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- What is the definition of a routine check?
 - How often is the RUŽA club routinely checked, other clubs in town X, or other places within the jurisdiction of that particular police office?
 - What were the results of previous checks?
 - Is the origin of these falsified document known, and where were they issued according to the documents themselves?
 - Is this the first incidence in which the police found girls with false documentation, or without documents altogether, in RUŽA or any other establishment owned by A.A., if he owns any more?
 - Were other girls also found and did they have valid documentation?
 - How did the police find out that these girls were in prostitution (from the girls, from clients, anonymous sources...)?
 - Against whom, specifically, criminal reports were filed and for the violation of what specific law?
 - Did the police find out whether these girls had been beaten, were they allowed to move about freely, were they forced into prostitution?
 - Did the police contact any non-governmental organization that ran the shelter for trafficking victims, and has anyone besides the police spoken with the girls, including the representatives of the Ukrainian consulate?

These are just a few of the questions asked by the third reporter at the press conference; this despite the answer he would get to most of the questions was that the facts could not be revealed due to the ongoing investigation. By asking these questions, the reporter let it be known that he would not be satisfied with the meager information given out by the police spokesman, and at the same time he began gathering information that would be essential in the continuation of his investigation.

Maybe in the end the third reporter will not succeed in proving the presence of trafficking in women, but by working in this manner, he will be able to focus on what can actually be documented, i.e., the minimal story. All remaining facts gathered will be useful to him at the time when he has enough for the maximal story – a story dealing with trafficking in women that will show that even the banal episode involving the RUŽA club played an important part.

The spokesman did actually tell the third reporter that he could not answer most of his questions due to the ongoing investigation. The reporter noted his own questions as well as the spokesman's answers to these questions. He already had answers to most of his questions (about the earlier events),

because he had regularly gathered information, checked it, and organized it in a way so that he could find it when he needed to.

The third reporter's piece ran the next day, with the following headline: *PROSTITUTES OR SEXUAL SLAVES?* Along with the police's information, the most important questions asked by the reporter were also published, as well as the answers he received and facts connected to the topic that he had obtained earlier, but which the police spokesman had pronounced inaccessible due to the ongoing investigation. The spokesman did this because, as opposed to the third reporter, he had not come properly prepared for the news conference he himself had called. Actually, these facts had already been published earlier and the source was actually the spokesman himself – who let them out during a previous meeting with the press.

The third reporter ended his story by including questions that were still not answered, and at the same time sent them to the appropriate institutions (including the police department). Afterwards, he re-read his text, made sure it was accurately published, and compared it to the texts of the other two reporters. The names of the girls, those taken from the documents presented by the second reporter, along with his own story and a list of unanswered questions, he sent to a number of different places for the purpose of finding some help from his colleagues.

The third reporters "packet" arrived at the desk of a colleague in Ukraine, where, judging by the passports, the girls came from originally. But it also was sent to a country where they seem to have obtained their visas. Through established procedure, each reporter will conduct their own investigation in their respective country at which point the gathered information will be exchanged, checked and coordinated amongst them.

In this way they will be helping each other, as well as at least have their own, albeit minimal story. The reporter in Ukraine will have a story about the plight of the Ukrainian girls (or girls who had fake Ukrainian passports). The reporter in the country from which the visas were given will have a story about falsified (or real?) visas. All three will be able to utilize the facts of the other two in the building up of their stories, and also in the continuation of their investigations.

They may never find proof that the three girls found in the club RUŽA, somewhere in central Vojvodina, were the victims of sex trafficking. However,

by working in this fashion, they will have the greatest chance to find proof of this, if it exists. At the same time, they will develop other stories inspired by the meager information given out at a police press conference in Serbia. That way the path laid out by a daily press conference for reporters in Serbia will have been found by two journalists who have never even been to Serbia. At the same time, two reporters who received “firsthand information” will never utilize it.

Some of the stories that were begun on the basis of police information, to which most reporters do not even pay attention, will point the way toward key problems that enable or are even conducive to trafficking in women; some will show actual events, point to the routes used by traffickers, corruption scandals, links between human traffickers and the other activities of organized crime...

Advice that can be useful for a good story

Trafficking in women can be approached through a series of aspects: economic, political, women’s rights/human rights, legal, security, organized crime etc.

Pick out an aspect that has been the least written about. There is a larger chance that you will say something new.

The most frequently written stories are those about victims’ destinies

Pick out a less often explored aspect of the topic. Ex: an analysis of the control of the visa regime and the issuing of work visas. Even raw statistics associated with this can lead to uncovering possible corruption involving the trafficking of women.

Potential victims of trafficking that are reported on are mainly foreign girls brought into your country due to the fact that the main source of information is the police, with the indicator being lack of valid documents.

Trafficking victims – domestic nationals are harder to uncover, not because they do not exist, but because they usually end up in other countries. Check routine information given out by the police in other countries.

Among the victims of trafficking there are persons who are officially listed as missing.

Publishing information about missing women and girls, along with their photographs, can help in finding them, and can also lead to information about human trafficking channels.

Information you have can often seem unimportant and useless.

Don't ever throw it away. Keep it so that it can be easily found. If it could not be used in one story, it may prove to be useful in another.

Most journalists write on this topic only when they are prompted by an actual event.

If you are seriously following this phenomenon, you will gather pieces of information, analyze and coordinate them. Ideas for a story will show up by themselves. You will be at an advantage, will have more time to work on the story, and will not be subject to the pressure of events.

Trafficking in women, in the context of organized crime, is never an isolated incident involving only one country.

Work together with journalists from other countries. Many times you will exchange information that will only become valuable once it is exchanged. Information that means nothing to a colleague in Macedonia or the USA can be of key importance to you. This way both of you actually get the real story.

Women and girls who are the victims of human trafficking in Southeastern Europe are usually forced into prostitution, but not always.

For example, individuals you may see begging or stealing on the street everyday are the property of human traffickers, constantly being watched and have no hope of escape.

As a form of organized crime, trafficking in women is connected with other illegal activities, for example: drugs trafficking.

There are more and more trafficking victims among the women who transport drugs. If they are arrested, the damage done to the actual criminals is minimal. As a source of information about traffickers, they are useless; but as human beings, they are sacrificed in advance. And this can be your story, too.

ETHICAL DOUBTS: Kristina's²⁵ story

Written by Saša Leković, a freelance journalist and a trainer of investigative journalism

What kind of ethical problem a journalist can face while investigating the destiny of victims of human trafficking, from the disappearance to the finding of the victim

When I was approached by ASTRA to write a text for the second, expanded edition of the Manual for Journalists interested in reporting on human trafficking, I decided not to write the classic educational article with advice on what a reporter should, or shouldn't, do in certain situations. Instead, I decided to write a story about Kristina.

Even though this true story occurred a whopping 22 years ago, it remains relevant today. Even journalists who specialize in reporting on human trafficking, of which there are very few, lack the firsthand experience that I went through and detail in this text. After eight months of investigation and multiple published stories, I managed to locate a girl who, at the age of 15, became a victim of human trafficking in one country and was exploited in another - and bring her back home.

But this is not a story in which I boast. This is a story in which I describe the dilemmas I faced, the decisions I had to make, and the reasons behind them to ensure the girl was found, even though they could have been fatal for her. This is a story about how a journalist should not cross the line between empathy for the victim and sympathy that motivates them to transition from an observer to a participant in the story. And that is not necessarily a good thing. In fact, as much as it can make the story more interesting, it can simultaneously further jeopardize the victim.

I honestly hope that every journalist who has the desire to write about human trafficking will learn at least something from this story—especially those who have the desire to go the extra mile beyond simple reporting – to the actual investigation.

At the time the story begins, Kristina, a fifteen-year-old student in the first grade of high school, is a victim of human traffickers and forced into prostitution.

²⁵ All victim's personal data changed.

When I wrote this text, Kristina was 22 years old and worked as a saleswoman in her hometown. This year, 2023, Kristina is 37 years old.

When it comes to Kristina, what happens from time to time to reporters who care about the subjects of their stories happened to me. This is particularly the case when these persons are in need of help: from an observer I turned into someone who has an effect on the broader unfolding of his own story.

One should try to avoid such situation, but it can happen to bad reporters as well as to those at the top of their profession.

Sometimes there is very little choice in the matter: either you will be more than a reporter or you will spend your whole life second guessing yourself about whether you were enough of a human being.

What happened to me in the case of Kristina is something that almost never happens, even to reporters who have been investigating human trafficking for years.

I rescued the victim.

Sometimes I pass through the city where Kristina lives, but in the 22 years since she returned home, I have never reached out to her, never entered the store where she works, never called her, nor contacted her family.

I cannot look them in the eye.

A few years ago, Kristina's younger sister called me after finding my phone number. She only said: "Thank you for saving my sister. You will forever be in our hearts."

Perhaps that is the greatest recognition a journalist can receive.

However, not a day goes by without me thinking about how I crossed the boundaries of journalistic role, and it was only a twist of fate that prevented me from becoming complicit in Kristina's tragedy.

When Kristina was rescued from the clutches of some very dangerous criminals, her whole family was thankful to me for helping to get Kristina home.

They had nothing against my writing about what happened to her in the paper, knowing that her story might help other girls and potential victims of human trafficking.

Even Kristina had nothing against my writing the story.

In the end, the writing of stories is my job.

That job is what led me into their lives.

Nevertheless, I am certain that Kristina and her family long ago realized that writing a story about her sexual enslavement was not the best idea.

I knew that the moment the story was published, but it was too late.

Because of the feeling that, with the best intentions, all possible precautions, experience and knowledge, I did not do everything in my power to prevent the victim from being traumatized again – and this publicly, I cannot look into the eyes of Kristina, her mother, stepfather, younger sister, grandmother...

The feeling of guilt has haunted me all these years and constantly evokes the “second guessing” in my head of hundreds of situations in which I may have acted differently, more intelligently, more professionally...

Kristina disappeared on the seventh of February 2001.

In fact, that day was the first time that she did not come home at the usual time from nearby Petrinja, which is several kilometers away from the family home on the outskirts of Sisak.

A few days later, the local newspaper ran the most recent photo that her family had of her, along with a short description of the fifteen year old, whom the police had officially classified as missing.

FALSE PRETENSES

No one had seen or heard anything about Kristina.

One month passed since her disappearance, then the second.

The mother and stepfather, tired of being asked the same questions yet never receiving any kind of answers from the police, decided to try to find their daughter on their own.

First they searched Sisak and Petrinja and later Zagreb upon finding out that some of Kristina's schoolmates had heard that she had gone there.

After a full two months of fruitlessly searching for their missing daughter, her parents made their way to my desk in the editorial offices of the weekly Arena, and asked me to help them find their daughter.

At that time, I was an editor at Arena, and practically ran the editorial staff.

Along with my editorial responsibilities, I was also a regular contributor.

To prevent the conflict of interest, I asked the editor-in-chief to take the decision himself whether the story would be written at all and, if so, how this should be gone about. Also, I wanted to be completely left out of this process and treated as any other reporter would be.

By the same token, the job that I was doing as the executive editor of the magazine would not make it possible to search for Kristina when taking into account that my duties forced me to be at work for at least ten hours a day.

Thus, I decided to devote all of my free time, mainly late nights and the early morning hours, to searching for Kristina.

My private life, which barely existed anyway, completely ceased to exist from that moment on.

The story about Kristina, who one day for no apparent reason did not return home and whom after two months of searching neither her parents nor the police could locate, was run over two pages in Arena.

In fact, before I even started on the story, I reminded Kristina's mother and stepfather that I was a journalist, that it was my job to write stories and not to expect that I would find their daughter.

This was a very important point which I repeat to all family members that ever decide to look for their missing loved ones through my stories.

Family members only turn to reporters after they have lost all hope that their daughters, sisters, fathers... will ever be found by the police.

Because they get the feeling that a reporter is devoting them more time and cares more about the destiny of their missing family member than does the police, these unhappy people many times have unrealistic expectations from the journalist.

Because of this, it is important to honestly and clearly warn them of what they can really expect from publicizing the story about their lost loved ones.

Mainly, they shouldn't expect too much and they should especially not talk themselves into thinking that publication of the story will automatically solve their problem.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Sometimes the unrealistic expectations of the family can cause problems, as well as unpleasant situations.

For example, one mother asked me to write about her missing daughter. After a few months of fruitless searching, the woman accused me of collaborating in a conspiracy involving criminals, the police and reporters who had supposedly participated in the abduction of her daughter and were keeping her hidden.

For this reason, I am very cautious when involving myself in a similar undertaking.

My rule is, before beginning to investigate into the missing person, to get to know the family or other interested party who is looking for the subject. To ask in detail about their motives for finding the subject, their relationship with the missing person, to uncover as many details as I can about the subject and the people around her. I also put together a psychological profile - of the victim and those around her.

Ultimately, I decide whether I will begin the investigation after the results of the preliminary research show that it is possible to work with the individuals who want to find out the destiny of their family member or friend, and that these people understand how limited a newspaper investigation can be and that the possibility that the person will be found, especially after the police could not find her, is even smaller.

After a few long and exhaustive conversations with Kristina's family, which involved some very intimate details of their lives, I concluded that I could work along with these people in the search for Kristina.

These were people of very little formal education who were nevertheless very aware of how small the chance was that Kristina would return home.

At the same time, they truly loved this little girl and wanted to find her and accept her back regardless of the reasons behind her disappearance, including whatever she has lived through or done in the meantime.

The long article about the missing girl allowed for the re-publishing of her last photographs along with details that could help any readers to recognize her if they saw her.

The story was purposely written in a very sensitive way, bordering on being pathetic. I maximally used the emotional pleas of Kristina's family, who showed just how much they missed their little girl and how worried they were about her.

So, for the story to carry as much weight as possible I brought in a number of narrative elements – from using emotion-filled quotes instead of just paraphrasing what the family said - to a detailed description of how hard it was on Kristina's mother - to a detailed description of her room and favorite things inside the room.

While writing the first article, I had no way of knowing whether the girl was the victim of human trafficking, whether she left home because of some adolescent crisis or problem at school, whether she was the victim of some sick killer or if it involved all of these options.

THE (AB)USE OF A CHILD

The story was headlined by a quote from Kristina's younger sister: "Come back home, sis."

Alongside was a photograph in which Kristina's younger sister could be seen drawing a picture with wooden pencils.

In the picture was a drawing of two girls holding hands in front of a house, one girl taller than the other, and above the picture in a child's unpracticed handwriting, could be seen the quote that was used in the headline.

I decided on this approach because Arena, the magazine in which the article was published, was a family oriented publication.

The magazine was read by all generations and I wanted to get their attention as well as their empathy – for Kristina and for her family.

This could only be accomplished by writing a warm story with many narrative and descriptive details, but also with photographs that were dramatic enough to emotionally reach the reader.

For this reason, and whenever it was possible, as a working partner I chose my colleague Toni Hnojčik. He is one of those people with a camera that an editorial staff considers to be not simply a photographer – but a photo journalist.

I always considered photo journalists as equal members of a news team, not colleagues who were there only so that the editorial staff would be able to get some photographs.

I have worked with Mr. Hnojčik on and off, for more than twelve years – covering everything from everyday stories to reports from the war front to stories involving human trafficking.

He was essential in presenting my story about Kristina not only because he knew how to capture the best possible photo in every situation, but because he knew how to act around people he was photographing so that he, as a photographer, and I, as a reporter, would get the most out of the situation.

Kristina's story, both textually and in photographs, was designed in such a way so that it would touch not only someone who knew something about her destiny, but would also touch Kristina herself in the event that she left of her own accord and could still move around and communicate of her own free will.

But trying to make our story as touching as possible hid a possible ethical trap – the further abuse of the child.

The way in which we decided to use Kristina's younger sister in the story could be considered unethical, despite the fact that we photographed and wrote only about things that really occurred.

We did not tell the little girl what to say nor did we make anything up.

To ensure that any potential harm was kept to a minimum, we explained to Kristina's family that using the child in this way was in fact bordering on the unethical. We also presented the possible positive and negative effects of our approach.

We asked the family to decide whether to allow us to use the little girl in the manner which we suggested.

This is the rule that I adhere to strictly in all similar circumstances: I let the victim's family know about all the potential positive and negative possibilities that can result from a reporter's activities during an investigation. I then require from them to decide whether I should go forward or stop where I am at.

(NON)COOPERATION WITH THE POLICE

I had that conversation with Kristina's family, but I also included something about communications with police investigators: I will inform the family of all information obtained, and will consult with them in regard to any actions taken. But the family will decide whether said information will be passed on to the police.

I will not give information to the police, on my own initiative, about my investigation. If the police do call me in for a briefing, I will absolutely not give them any information about my sources, nor will I give them any

information that Kristina's family does not want me to pass along.

Kristina's family promised to adhere to the rules I had insisted upon, and also decided that Kristina's younger sister would be included in the story in a way that would be the most effective in bringing Kristina home.

After the publishing of the story we took no action for ten days in the hope that Kristina would return home of her own accord, or that someone that saw her would call.

When this didn't happen, I told Kristina's family that I would begin to look for their girl in, and around, Zagreb.

To tell you the truth, Kristina's parents had previously tried this tact, but a desperate couple who aimlessly wandered city and outlying streets that they had never previously been to had little hope of succeeding.

Kristina's last photograph, published in Arena, was photocopied in the hundreds and I began to make the rounds of the city and suburban cafés, along with other places that I was familiar with, or that were frequented by shady company: taxi stands, disco clubs, and late-night bars.

As I showed Kristina's photographs to people, I would explain to them that I was a friend of the family and that the girl's parents had asked me to help them find Kristina.

Falsely representing oneself is a method not approved by journalistic ethics. However, an exception is made when this is the only method of gaining key information for the saving of a life or doing something for the effect of the greater good that would be much larger than the potential damage done by falsely representing oneself.

I observed that (and Kristina's family approved) by representing myself as a reporter, I would never be able to get information that I would be able to get if I were just a friend of the family. Information that could save Kristina's life.

In fact, at that time I had slowly, but surely, begun to cross the line between sharing in their feelings and having sympathy for them – which in a way made me a friend of the family.

By this I was no less of a journalist, but I was potentially becoming less objective and careful.

Here passed two weeks of evening–late night–early morning making of the rounds, observation and conversations. These took place in locations that contained things that surprised, disturbed, shocked and even scared me despite my many years of investigative experience - the larger part of which was spent investigating organized crime.

It's better that Kristina's parents never saw these places.

In the end I was sure that Kristina had in fact actually come to Zagreb with a schoolmate that was two years older than her. That she had fallen in love with a young man who acted like he also loved her, and that she worked for more than a month as a waitress in a few cafés where the young man had employed her.

ENTERING THE INTIMATE DOMAIN OF THE FAMILY

However, the moment that I arrived in Zagreb in the search for Kristina, she was quite surely no longer there.

This was a well traveled story that, at that time, had already begun to reek of human trafficking.

The victim (or potential victim, which Kristina still was at this point because she was there of her own free will – in love with a con-man linked to human trafficking) waitresses in this and that café, but all of them are linked to one actual owner and a group of his associates.

With that, when it was clear that the police were not on the missing girl's trail, Kristina was smuggled over the Italian border (she did not have papers) and sold there.

This was done in the same way she was originally recruited; she was in love with a young man who lied about being in love with her.

For a fifteen-year-old girl whose life experience had only reached the point of innocent outings with her friends and banal school excursions, an encounter

with infinite possibilities tied to independence was a shock that she could not shake off.

Of course, it was quickly shown that there was nothing left of that independence.

Kristina had become sexual merchandise and was forced into prostitution.

At the time the police were not aware of this, or her parents, nor did I myself know.

This would have stayed the case if the person who had posed as Kristina's boyfriend had not made a key error.

He decided to allow Kristina to call her mother.

The idea was for Kristina to call, tell her mother that everything was fine, that she was living with her boyfriend, and had no desire to return home.

On the contrary, the attempt to pacify the parents and dampen the intensity of the police search turned out to be excellent for Kristina, but catastrophic to those that were keeping her enslaved.

Kristina's mother told me that Kristina had called her, and that the police were informed of this conversation.

I found out the number that Kristina had used from because Kristina gave it to her mother, with the caveat that the mother should not call her because either there would be no answer or her "boyfriend" would pick up, and that he did not speak Croatian.

The number was from an Italian mobile network but Kristina's captors were not completely stupid.

They had bought a pre-paid number at a kiosk, with no user identification.

I prepared Kristina's mother in the event that Kristina called again.

We practiced what she should say and how, and what she must not say under any circumstances.

We repeatedly simulated the potential conversation so that Kristina's mother would be able to extract as much information as possible in case Kristina called again.

It was important for the mother to relay some bit of information that would intrigue the girl.

We agreed that the mother would tell Kristina how some of her stepfather's friends from Zagreb would be going on a tourist excursion across Italy and that, along the way, they would be buying a few things for their café.

This made sense because Kristina's father delivered beverages to various cafés and had many friends that she had never met.

According to our agreement, the mother was to offer that her "stepfather's friends" bring her a letter from her mother along with her favorite toy – a stuffed teddy bear.

HOW FAR DOES THE REPORTER DARE GO?

Two months later Kristina called her mother once again and they actually did talk along the lines of our agreement. She convinced her daughter that the "friends" had the intention of wandering around Italy for a while and it was not a problem for them to meet her wherever she was.

Kristina listened to what her mother had to say and told her that she would call back with an answer the next day, after she had talked to her "boyfriend".

The next day Kristina called again and stated that she would meet up with her father's "friends".

She stated the time and place: in front of the cathedral at the main entrance to the square in Milan.

Thinking that in this way he would get both the parents and the police off his back, Kristina's "boyfriend" made his second key mistake.

Kristina's family was extremely excited.

They couldn't sleep.

The hope that their daughter would be rescued rose with every second.

Rescued – because a normal, voluntary return no longer crossed anyone's mind.

Also, it was apparent to Kristina's family that she was being kept prisoner, regardless of the fact that she left of her own free will.

Kristina's family decided not to inform the police about our plan in which the stepfather's "friends" would meet Kristina and bring her the gifts from home.

They feared that the police would do something that would prevent the meeting from happening and subsequently forever keep Kristina from her family.

It was a very sensitive situation.

Kristina's family had less and less faith in the police department and put more and more faith in a reporter and photo-journalist that had neither police authority nor a strong support infrastructure standing behind him.

With that, our lie about "friends" was an undoubted misrepresentation, compared to which the story about the family friend making the rounds of the cafes on the outskirts of Zagreb with Kristina's photo was trivial.

This was one of the countless moments in which a reporter must decide whether he will continue his investigation or simply quit.

Logic said to QUIT, but the line between empathy and sympathy had already been crossed.

How would I tell the family that I have changed my mind and don't want to go any further?

That every outside activity can endanger Kristina's well being and it is not out of the question that she will be beaten, or even killed, if her captor's realize the trick and panic - or want to exact revenge.

That it is possible that after the exchange of gifts from home the human traffickers would conclude that they have completely pacified the family and neutralized the police and, therefore, decide to never allow Kristina to contact her family again.

That it is possible that if the Croatian police were notified about the planned meeting, that they could take the matter seriously and notify their Italian colleagues who, in turn, might organize Kristina's rescue in the event that she actually shows up at the agreed time and place.

So many POSSIBILITIES, and so little certainty.

Victims' family members, in these kinds of circumstances, usually listen to their heart instead of heeding the warnings in their head.

I was aware of how dangerous it is for reporters, falsely identifying themselves, to start on this adventure on their own.

This was like gambling with Kristina's life.

But, at the same time, this was really the only chance to find out more about Kristina's destiny and to possibly enable her rescue.

As long as it doesn't take a turn for the worse.

WHAT IF IT TAKES A TURN FOR THE WORSE?

If it does take a turn for the worse, I will not be vindicated by all the hard work I put in to investigating the incident, or by the faith put into me by her parents, nor for the months of intense planning, nor my striving to resolve all ethical doubts in a supremely professional manner.

Logic would dictate that I should not take upon myself the responsibility of a situation that I cannot control. Even along with precise, supreme planning.

Nevertheless, we set out for Milan.

I did not want to betray Kristina's family nor the principles that I asked them to

adhere to: I let them know all the possible good and bad consequences of any of my potential actions, and they would decide whether I should go forward with them or not.

They decided that Toni and I should depart, so we departed.

During the trip we talked about every possible scenario, then we thought about them in our own heads, then we talked them through again.

The first decision we came to, as soon as we got in the car, was: we have started and there is no turning back.

We had to have cool heads in order to be able to figure out all the possible scenarios that could be awaiting us in Milan. In order to do this we had to avoid any disagreements. We even had to avoid any thoughts about whether what we were doing was smart and whether we should be doing it at all.

We were aware that the line was crossed that kept the reporter as an objective observer as opposed to a participant in the event.

Something that never should happen had already happened.

We arrived in Milan hours before the scheduled meeting with Kristina completely convinced that she would come to the meeting with her alleged boyfriend.

We left the car in a large public parking lot, kilometers away from the town's main square in order not to draw any attention and knowing that Kristina's captors would check the square, as well as the surrounding streets, before they allowed her to show.

Toni's car was a beat up, twenty-year old Alfa Romeo.

Café owners do not drive this type of car.

We took a taxi most of the way, but walked the last kilometer.

We walked seemingly aimlessly around the square for more than half an hour, looking at displays and turning our heads for pretty girls, the same way the average

café owners would have done, and appeared unconcerned about the impending and unimportant meeting with the fifteen-year-old that ran away from home.

We purposely gave this impression to possible observers while the entire time we were carefully noticing and remembering the faces of passers-by, any unusual behavior, along with the number and placement of the Carabinieri walking around the square.

Any information that we obtained, or suspected, could be crucial.

It was a minute until the agreed-to time of our meeting with Kristina.

Although Kristina was told by her mother what we looked like and how we would be dressed, and there were not many people at the square, we decided to stand in the middle - where there were the least amount of people in order for us to be more easily seen by the people that were watching us.

The agreement was that Kristina would approach us.

DANCING ON A WIRE

We spent a few anxious minutes trying to appear like two carefree tourists who were just hanging out.

That was when, with nervous steps and a scared look, a girl accompanied by a rather short, grim young man approached us from the terrace of the nearest café. He was a little to the right and about twenty centimeters behind her, practically brushing against her with every step.

It was blatantly obvious that the story about the boyfriend was a lie.

Kristina had painted fingernails and hair that was colored and much longer than in the picture that was taken eight months ago - before her disappearance.

She wore a serious expression under all of her make-up.

The way she looked you would never guess that she hadn't even reached sixteen years of age.

The short conversation in the middle of the square was very indicative of the situation – a combination of Kristina attempting to appear carefree and two disguised reporters trying to appear naïve.

Throughout this time Kristina’s “boyfriend”, whom she introduced as Giovanni, was completely silent.

Kristina explained that Giovanni spoke neither Croatian nor English, but I wasn’t sure whether he even spoke Italian well, because he did not look very Italian.

I asked Kristina how much time she had.

She said that she could stick around for about half an hour – an hour at the most.

I suggested that we have a seat in front of one of the cafés, at which point she immediately turned and headed toward the same café that she and the supposed Giovanni had just come out of to meet Toni and myself.

At this point the young man was firmly holding her right forearm in his left hand and didn’t let her go for a moment.

After we sat down on the terrace of the café, I handed Kristina her mother’s letter along with her stuffed teddy bear, and told her that her mom, stepdad, grandma and friends said hello, and that her younger sister had sent her the bear.

For a moment it looked as if she was going to cry, but she regained her composure.

She placed her mother’s letter in her bag without even looking at it, but she kept the teddy bear in her hands throughout the whole conversation.

Over the next half hour, we exhausted all the possible themes that a fifteen year old runaway and two bumpkins, who in fact had very little interest in the girl, could cover.

She had run away from home, but so what...

She's alive and healthy.

She lives with her boyfriend.

We had handed her the presents from home.

We had chatted with her.

It would be logical for us leave.

At that point Toni suggested taking a few photographs of her that we could show to her mother so that she would no longer have to worry.

The stage was carefully set.

We talked Kristina into feeding the pigeons, which were numerous in the square, owing to the fact that they were used to being fed by tourists with crumbs and corn that were bought at a premium from the surrounding kiosks.

Toni clicked, clicked and clicked away... telling Kristina to smile, and constantly suggesting new places to shoot from.

He was purposely loud and theatrical in order to draw attention from passers-by.

Maybe someone would remember this scene, the faces involved, and the mutual conversation.

You never know whether this will become important later.

Right when I thought that Toni was so "into" the photography that he had forgotten our plan, he suddenly grabbed himself by the head with both hands and let go of the camera so that it dangled around his neck. He then began to hit himself on the forehead with his right hand.

LYING TO THE VICTIM

I asked Kristina to explain to her "boyfriend" that Toni was out of film but that he absolutely wanted to buy another roll in order to be able to photograph

Kristina and him together – how would Kristina’s mother believe that she had a boyfriend if he wasn’t even in one picture?

After Kristina, in bad Italian, explained to her “boyfriend” what we were talking about, he became noticeably angry. At this point they had about a half a minute of quiet, but intense conversation, accompanied by much gesticulation of hands.

It was obvious that Kristina was convincing him that he had to be photographed.

In the end he agreed, but first we had to buy film.

Toni pretended as if he did not know where the nearest store was where he could buy more film, even though before the meeting with Kristina and her companion we took into account the moment of the running out of the camera film. Actually, we planned to be as far away from the store at the appropriate time as possible so that I would have all the more time alone with Kristina while Toni and Kristina’s companion went to hunt down the film.

It was obvious that Kristina was totally subject to the will of her companion.

With that in mind, after Toni and the companion, bags full of unused film, headed toward the kiosk, I nonchalantly told Kristina that her mother said that she would help her with whatever she needed. Also that she could come home at any time, with no repercussions, whenever she wanted. All she had to do was tell me what the problem was and what she wanted to do.

I took care that it appeared as if I was relaying a normal message, by way of a disinterested and unfamiliar man, from a very worried mother, delivered during a chance meeting.

A visibly shaken Kristina said that everything was all right, that she had no desire to return home, and that she did not need any help.

In that moment I thought a few times about an option that we had decided against during our planning: to take Kristina by the hand, lead her to the first Carabinieri we saw, and to tell him the whole story.

What if Kristina, in a panicked state, begins to shout and try to get away?

She had no idea who I was and could be more frightened by my unexpected action than staying enslaved.

Who would the Carabinieri believe first – me, her... or maybe Giovanni?

It would have been stupid to insist on anything other than that Kristina tell me anything more than that she was OK and living with her boyfriend.

With that, I offered to see her the next day, at the same place, when she could give me a letter for her mother along with whatever else she wanted to send home.

She said that she would be glad to do that but that she had to talk to Giovanni first.

We agreed that she would call me the next morning so I could find out whether she was coming to the square with a letter for her mother or not.

The next morning, I called the mobile phone number that Kristina had given to her mother.

I called from a public telephone so that my mobile number would not be revealed.

Kristina answered very upset.

She shouted that Toni and I had tricked her and that we were the police.

She refused to listen to me. She hung up the phone.

I tried her about ten more times but there was no answer.

Obviously “Giovanni” had suspicions about our story.

Or he simply wanted to be more cautious.

WHOM TO ASK FOR HELP?

Toni and I went to the Croatian consulate and told them the whole story.

We developed the film and gave it to the Consul so that Kristina would be able to be recognized in the event that someone saw her on the street or during a police raid.

We also asked the Consul to call Kristina's mother in order to speak with her.

She did that.

When we arrived back in Croatia, we had to tell Kristina's family the details of the meeting what seemed like hundreds of times over.

It was hard on them, but they asked me to recount the story, then again, then again...

In this way they felt closer to their daughter.

Not long after our return I got a call from the police.

They asked me to come in for an "informative conversation".

I went because I did not want the police to arrest me, but I decided I was not going to tell them anything except what I already wrote or that had already been publicized.

I told this to a young and embarrassed female inspector who admitted that she had not even read the texts that where the basis of why her bosses had called me in the first place.

I explained to her that I could forward her the texts if she wanted to read them, that Kristina's family had told the police everything they knew, and that I had already told everything to the Croatian consul in Milan.

When Kristina's mother found out that the police had called me in, along with Kristina calling her yelling about the fact that she had sent "police" after her (referring to Toni and myself), the woman decided to openly attack the police who had not done anything for her little girl but was in fact mistreating the family of a missing girl - along with the reporter who had actually located her.

I was not crazy about publishing a text in which Kristina's mother accuses

the police because some of her accusations were hard prove. Also, it was not a smart move to publicly attack the police from whom you expect help in finding your missing daughter, even if you believe that they are not trying very hard.

Very soon, Kristina's mother received money from Milan, in the amount of about a few hundred euros, supposedly sent by Kristina – obviously to prove that she is working and doing OK.

The police told Kristina's mother that the money transfer couldn't help them uncover Kristina's trail. But I was able to find out where and when the money was deposited and, more importantly, that the person who deposited the money was using Kristina's personal identification. However, the Croatian I.D. number that was used along with Kristina's name did not match and therefore was clearly a fake.

The fake contained three fewer symbols than actual Croatian personal documents should have.

If any Italian policeman ever checked the I.D., he would have had to notice that something was not right.

I therefore decided to publish Kristina's mother's accusations against the police, but included only those accusations that were provable by me.

This could have been construed as putting pressure on the police and was on the edge of ethical boundaries. But I found justification for this action in the fact that the police had actually not found one piece of valuable information about Kristina's case. Information that they had gotten from Kristina's family and through my articles in the newspaper was not used for the purpose of really trying to find this unfortunate girl.

Maybe even ethically questionable pressure on the police would force that institution to finally do what they were paid to do – I thought.

I couldn't do anything else.

HOW TO USE EMOTIONS?

I made sure that the desperate attack on the police by Kristina's mother was spiced with facts that, at least partly, justified her anger at them.

The article's headline read "I will find my daughter on my own", and next to a large photo of Kristina's mother with her younger daughter sitting in her lap, we ran Kristina's most sentimental photo – one that pictured her feeding pigeons in front of Milan's cathedral.

The melodramatic "packaging" that was on the border of being kitsch was quite deliberate.

Undeniable fact, in combination with strong emotion, is a reporter's greatest weapon in this type of situation.

I made sure that the story clearly talks about a mother that is demanding that her runaway daughter is brought back to her, but there was absolutely no mention of the possibility that she may be a victim of human trafficking.

Arena is read in many countries and a well organized group of human traffickers have many associates that understand Croatian.

Especially in Croatia itself, where Kristina was "recruited" into human trafficking.

Photographs are even more dangerous than actual text.

It would be enough for just one person linked with the criminal organization to stumble upon Kristina's picture for her to disappear forever.

An unidentified girl, approximately Kristina's age, was found massacred in Milan literally on the same day that we met with Kristina.

Several days after the third story on Kristina ran, the one in which her mother decries how the police are not searching for her daughter at all and how she will go to Milan herself to find her, I received a phone call that changed everything.

A man called me, representing himself as a construction worker from a

Croatian town, and described to me how he had worked in Italy for a few months - "off the books".

The boss whom he had worked for had organized for his workers to sleep at an old house in a small town near Milan. This was once a night club, but was later turned into an illegal flophouse.

The man described to me how on his return home, he was flipping through a stack of Arena magazines that had been piling up at his mother's house for decades.

All of a sudden he noticed the photograph of a girl who, for weeks, he had seen in and around the illegal flophouse.

It was suspicious to him to be meeting the same girls every day. Girls who had tired faces, empty eyes, were heavily made up and obviously dressed in a provocative fashion. These girls were constantly coming in and out of the house accompanied by one or two frowning, silent men.

When he read the text that was alongside the photograph, he realized that the girl that he had recognized was not even sixteen years old.

At that moment he understood the reason for the tired faces, distant looks, heavy make up and "provocative" clothing.

My informant asked me not to reveal his identity to anyone under any circumstances.

Upon my asking him how he would know that he could trust me if I did indeed make this promise, he answered that he had asked many people about me, including other reporters, and that he wouldn't have even made the call if he wasn't sure that I could be trusted.

Many times it seems that, in the journalistic profession, there is no benefit to acting professionally and insisting on ethical principles. However, it looks as if it does pay off after all.

Aside from living with a clear conscience, sometimes you gain the trust of people you don't even know and get information that can be key to your story.

This time even involving the rescue of a victim of human trafficking.

THE SAFETY OF THE SOURCE

I asked the person on the other end of the phone line if we could meet in person, but he declined.

The only option that was left to me was to give me all the details that he could remember – about the girl that he recognized from the photographs in Arena, about the rest of the group of girls, about the old house, the people that went there, whether the police ever came to the house and how they acted.

He spoke for a long time in great detail.

Even he wondered at all of the details he, even unconsciously, had remembered.

I told Kristina's mother everything and she, in turn, told the police.

The Zagreb branch of Interpol told her that they had sent all of the information to Italy, along with facts about her, and everything that they knew about her whereabouts.

However, nothing happened for days.

This was suspicious to me... how it was possible that the Croatian consulate in Milan had Kristina's photographs from the main square, exhaustive details gotten from reporters and statements from her mother, the Italian police having the exact location where Kristina was living – but Kristina was still in the hands of human traffickers.

The Croatian police were not interested in the destiny of a victim of human trafficking?

Are the Italian police in league with the human traffickers?

I decided that it was time for new, and more intense, pressure to be put on the police.

This time the Italian police.

After thorough preparation, during which we ran through all the scenarios of possible situations that could happen to us one once we arrived at the place where Kristina was being held, we set out on our way: Toni, who drove, Kristina's mother, Kristina's stepfather and I.

The trip lasted for hours.

We stopped two or three times, but only for a few minutes at a time. Long enough to go to the bathroom and swill down a cup of coffee from a standing position.

Almost the whole trip was passed in silence.

After that trip I no longer laugh when someone says "the tension could be cut with a knife".

The only stop that lasted for more than five minutes was the one at a gas station a few kilometers from the place where Kristina was supposed to be.

I asked Kristina's mother to call the Interpol office in Zagreb to tell them where we were, and to ask them whether they had ever passed on the information of Kristina's whereabouts to their colleagues in Italy.

Up until then, Kristina's mother had talked with officials in that branch more than a few times, and each time they had assured her that the information had been passed on.

This time there was a silence coming from the other end of the phone line, after which time the official said the boss was in a meeting but that she would pass the question on to him.

In less than a minute the head of the Interpol branch in Zagreb called back.

He nervously criticized Kristina's mother for interfering in police matters and told her to absolutely not go in search of her daughter.

She told him that she was going anyway and that nothing could stop her, now

that she was so close to finding her daughter, particularly not the same police that for nine months have been doing nothing to bring back her daughter.

Of course we had no intention of confronting human traffickers, but we were not going to admit that to the police.

We wanted to make the police do their job.

Have you noticed that I now referred to us a WE?

The line between the reporter and an interested party had long ago been crossed.

Behavior that, in journalists' workshops or in front of young colleagues at the editorial office I would have judged harshly and in a coldly analytical manner as journalistically unacceptable and dangerous for their story's actors, I now did not give a second thought to.

I consoled myself that I was still in control of the situation.

But... until when?

WHEN ARE YOU NO LONGER IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION?

I explained to Kristina's parents that we would not be stopping in to the police station that was closest to where she was staying because it was next to impossible that the human traffickers had been keeping their victims there for so long with no police knowledge.

If they had not already arrested the criminals and rescued their victims up to this point, then the local police likely wouldn't help now.

I suggested that we go to the nearest large town that had their own special police forces, the "squadra mobile".

Kristina's parents agreed to this.

Do you remember the rule: I put forward the good and bad consequences,

but the victim's family makes the final decision?

We arrived at the end of working hours.

Of the four of us no one spoke Italian, except for a few words and phrases here and there.

The police clerk knew very little English.

Wonderful.

He didn't even let us into the building.

I started waving my hands around and yelling – half in English and half in Croatian.

Finally, a policewoman arrived who spoke English.

After I explained the situation to her, she coldly told me that working hours were over and we would have to come back – on Monday.

After all, it was Friday.

She was unmoved and only gave ground when we warned her that when we would go look for Kristina ourselves and that she would be responsible when something happened.

Notice – WHEN something happened, not IF.

Sometimes, only a small variation in tone or expression can have an impact on those that it is directed toward.

The policewoman told us to wait and went back into the building.

After a few moments she came back and brought us in to see the chief of the mobile police unit.

He listened to me patiently.

He asked Kristina's parents a few questions in English, I translated the questions into Croatian, and then answered the chief again in English.

I asked him if he had ever seen any information regarding Kristina's being held captive at the place in question, which was supposed to have been sent from the Zagreb Interpol office.

He said something to one of the other policemen, at which point his associate walked into the other room and came back with a fax message.

The fax contained a bulletin with minimal information about Kristina's possible location that was sent from the Croatian to the Italian Interpol office and then forwarded to all the police stations.

The indicated time on the fax copy showed that it was sent – ten minutes after the conversation between Kristina's mother and the Interpol office in Zagreb.

From the Italian Interpol office, the fax message about Kristina had been forwarded to the station where we were trying to explain to the chief why we were disturbing him – while we were arguing with the uninterested clerk at the entrance.

In the next second the fine, composed chief of the 'squadra mobile" gave me another surprise.

He told us to check into a hotel, get some rest, and come back to see him – on Monday.

All of his people had already gone home or were out on assignment.

Maybe the chief was just another insensitive employee, but maybe he just wanted to have time to prepare for Kristina's rescue.

One thing was certain: the man was not stupid.

He knew that he didn't need any additional problems, but he also knew that before him stood a group of agitated people who would make a problem for him if he didn't do anything right away.

Just in case, I pointed this out to him.

It is not generally recommended for journalists to play this type of psychological game with the police, nor with anyone else that has the power to decide someone's fate in an instant – because the results can be catastrophic.

However, sometimes this type of psychological pressure can be successful, although it shouldn't be employed without a really good reason.

It is surely the case that this time the reason was very important.

PRESSURE ON THE POLICE

The chief mulled things over for a bit, but this did not last for more than five or six seconds.

He showed us an area where we should wait, and offered us coffee, juice, crackers and cigarettes.

A full hour had passed and still no one had come into the room where the four of us were sitting, every one of us lost in our own thoughts.

We did not tell one another what we were thinking about, but it was obvious that we were all thinking about the same thing.

I got the impression that, in the complete silence, our thoughts could be heard.

All of a sudden, a commotion could be heard coming from the hallway.

The sound of quick steps.

Unintelligible voices.

Female, then male.

Then the voices mixed in with one another.

Then a female voice, noticeably younger than the rest.

A young girl kept repeating something in a raised voice that turned into hysterical screaming.

Once again, silence.

“Our” police chief cracked the door and, without coming into our room, told us that everything was all right and to just wait a little longer.

He closed the door and the sound of his steps disappeared down the hallway.

He returned after an extremely long twenty minutes.

This time he opened the door wide into the hallway. Standing next to him were three women.

Two police women in plain clothes and a third that looked like a common street prostitute that you see in movies and think the movie is bad because they overdid it with the stupid stereotypes.

This even though in the meantime the policewomen had wiped off some of her make-up and one of them had given her a jacket to wear.

For twenty minutes the women police officers had spent getting the girl ready for this meeting, but they did not tell the girl who she was going to meet.

Kristina and her mother let out a scream in unison.

As the mother ran to Kristina crying and with extended arms, all the time repeating Kristina’s name, from the girls mouth emitted the worst string of swear words that I had ever heard.

Hiding behind the policewomen so as to avoid her mother’s embrace, Kristina began to swear at Toni and me, howling that we were the damned police.

She swore at her mother without any explanation.

She only let out the worst kind of insults.

A girl whose her mother had never heard her utter a single bad word.

The woman was completely taken aback.

Confusion and fear mixed together.

In complete shock and open-mouthed, she rushed toward her child who had not ceased her hysterics.

From Kristina were emitted all of the frustrations of the previous nine months.

Along with shame.

Unending shame.

Because standing before her mother was something that Kristina had never wanted to become.

She was facing a hard truth that the girl had buried deep within herself, fooling herself inside of her still young, child's mind that the truth did not really exist.

I don't know how long this lasted because, being a part of this situation, I had lost all sense of time.

After Kristina had calmed down a bit the policewomen, each firmly holding one of Kristina's arms, brought her over to her mother – who was still helplessly, and no longer with any voice, standing in the doorway.

It was not a hug, but desperation. An inseparable embrace by two bodies that were shaking with emotion that is only seen in the blackest of comedies.

For a long time afterward, Kristina's mother still had the remnants of the loud red nail polish on her palms that became smeared as she caressed her daughter's hair and cheeks.

Even though she had taken off her pullover and was only wearing a short-sleeved shirt, the older of the two women continued to sweat uncontrollably.

Yes, here were now two women.

The younger still had a child's face, under smeared make-up, painted fingernails, fish-net stockings, high heels, and a low-cut blouse.

Kristina still had the face of child, but in her body, in her heart, and in her eyes, the child had died.

At that moment.

In her mother's embrace.

In the meantime the room became full of people, but none of us had noticed this.

WHERE IS THE LINE BETWEEN EMPATHY AND SYMPATHY?

For the next hour and a half, Kristina, her parents, Toni and I, answered questions posed to us by the inspector. He marked everything down in his notebook, re-asked questions and asked for detailed answers.

Working hours had long since passed.

It was impossible to find a Croatian interpreter so the question and answer session lasted twice as long as it should have.

Kristina knew a little Italian, but not enough to be able to convey to the inspector everything that he wanted to know.

Kristina's parents spoke even less Italian.

Luckily, the police found someone who spoke excellent English.

In this way the inspectors' questions were posed in Italian, translated to me in English, and in turn I translated them into Croatian.

With that I translated the answers from Kristina's parents from Croatian to English, so they could then be translated into Italian, and the inspector could jot them down.

We answered the inspector's questions truthfully, I was just not so sure about Kristina.

She had, it seemed to me, a need to keep some things from us – through the embarrassment of being in front of her mother and the rest of us, from fear of retribution from the human traffickers, from the irrational desire to protect "Giovanni" whom she, despite everything, in her confused state of mind still considered her boyfriend.

This was also indicated in her diary, which the police found after they had brought her to the provincial halfway house after picking her up somewhere along the road.

There was one thing that I did not tell the inspector: who had told me where Kristina was.

I told him the complete truth about the whole investigation, including how a man called me up and told me that he recognized the photograph of Kristina in the paper.

I did not wish to divulge his name because I had promised the source anonymity.

The inspector smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and made a note.

After the taking of notes was finished I called the Croatian consul in Milan at the number she had given me in the case that there was any urgent news about Kristina.

Night was already falling and the consul was out of town, but she told us to go to the consulate and wait for an employee who would prepare some temporary travel documents that would enable Kristina to leave Italy and return to Croatia.

The only personal document that Kristina had was a fake Croatian identification card.

That fake I.D. not only had an unknown registration number, but it contained a made up address in Zagreb. It was not even the same size a proper I.D. would have been.

It was not even the right color.

According to the I.D., Kristina was twenty-two years old.

On the way home, Kristina recounted how she had admitted to a policeman in Zagreb that she was not really from there and that she had run away from home.

He advised her to go get some sleep at the train station because that's what a lot of people did, and did not even ask her for any I.D.

At that time Kristina didn't even have I.D. to show.

She showed her fake I.D. to Italian policemen more than a few times when they checked her out, or when she was rounded up during raids, along with the other young girls who were "working" the street.

No one ever noticed that the I.D. was a fake.

Or they simply didn't care.

CONTENDING WITH BUREAUCRACY

We got out of Italy with no problem, but at the Croatian border a policeman stopped us when Kristina showed him the temporary documents that were handed out to her by the Croatian consulate in Milan.

He requested that Kristina and her mother come with him into the guardhouse, but he did not allow Kristina's stepfather, me or Toni to accompany them.

Through the glass we could see the animated reactions of Kristina's mother, with Kristina joining her in these reactions after a few minutes.

They were vehemently explaining something to the policeman, who showed absolutely no emotion on his face – not even for a moment.

By reading his lips, we could see that he just kept repeating the same short phrases.

We were the only people at the border at this time – the three of us in Toni's car, and the two of them inside the guardhouse. Mother and daughter were there along with the persistent policeman with the stone face and a female colleague who was completely uninterested and was leafing through the newspaper.

About ten meters beyond, in his own little house, was an equally disinterested customs official.

It was already early morning and very cold – like the early mornings are known to be in the wintertime – and no one was coming over the border.

After the policeman had practically kept Kristina and her mother prisoner for more than half an hour in the guardhouse, not allowing us to enter nor answering any of our questions, I called the hotline of the Croatian Interior Ministry and tried to tell the on-duty operator what was happening.

I was looking for someone who would urgently explain to the officer that what he was doing was neither according to the law nor very smart.

If he had never seen a valid temporary travel document, then he should ask someone who had.

If he didn't know how to handle an underage girl and her mother, then he should let them go on their way.

Or again – he should ask someone who knows.

But he had no right to keep mistreating them.

The Interior Ministry operator did not really understand me too well, but he kept repeating that the officer probably knew what he was doing and not to interfere in police business.

Thanking him for his time, before I hung up the phone, I told him that I had the mobile number to his minister and that I would call him right away – it didn't matter that it was 3:30 in the morning.

I knew that the ploy worked when, a few minutes later, the policeman in the

little house picked up the phone and let Kristina and her mother leave, having previously silently listened to someone over the phone while crisply nodding his head in agreement.

For the first time that night his face showed some emotion.

It was true fear.

A few weeks later, Kristina's mother got a call from the police that they were investigating the incident with the border police and informed her that it would be recommended that she be reprimanded for verbal abuse and threatening a person in an official capacity.

I called Arena's attorney, who explained to me that he had called a higher-up at the Interior Ministry and that, taking into account everything the police had done – or not done – in connection with Kristina's disappearance, it would not be smart for MUP to expose themselves to additional embarrassment.

The police called Kristina and her mother in for questioning a few more times, but according to the two of them, they were asked the same pointless questions every time.

ARE THERE ANY HAPPY ENDINGS?

"Giovanni" called a few times.

First he tried to convince Kristina to come back, and then he tried threatening her.

In the end Kristina's mother forbade her to answer the phone because she would be left shaking and crying after every conversation with "Giovanni".

The last of four stories about Kristina, recounting her being found and her return home, covered five pages in Arena and was headlined "Kristina back in her mother's embrace".

I offered Kristina and her parents to leave out the parts that describe where and how she was found, along with leaving out the part about what had happened to her.

The job of a reporter is to write stories and it took me nine months to write this story.

Still, I was aware of the possibility that publishing this story could damage Kristina.

A girl who has not even reached sixteen years of age cannot easily carry the burden of what had happened to Kristina. Especially passing through the additional trauma of people reading about her experiences - and the probability that even more would read about them eventually.

There was even the possibility that I could lie and say that Kristina eventually decided to get away from her “boyfriend” and return home to her parents.

However, Kristina and her parents were for telling the story about Kristina as a victim of human trafficking, because they were convinced that if the story were told truthfully, it would prevent the same from happening to another girl.

Once again we played the game: FOR and AGAINST.

The decision of the parents was: publish it.

In order to lessen the potential damage, I suggested that I should lie a little in the story telling.

Kristina and her parents agreed.

This way in Kristina’s story, differing from her real life, she would have only been trained to be a prostitute, but it would never have gotten to the point that she actually became one.

The lie itself would have been the smallest problem.

The average reader would not have been fooled.

A much larger problem was that in that last key moment I strictly adhered to my rule in which, before both the victim’s parents and the victim herself, I lay out all of the possible positive and negative consequences, but that I leave the final decision to them.

This principle only functions properly as long as the victim and her family are in an appropriately rational state of mind to weigh all of the arguments FOR and AGAINST.

To the contrary, the decision by Kristina and her family that the story about her enslavement be publicized was not exclusively motivated by their conscious desire to warn new, potential victims.

The subconscious motive was being grateful to the reporter who helped in Kristina's rescue.

The way that this gratitude could be shown was to enable the reporter to do what motivated him to become involved in her disappearance in the first place – to write the story.

If I had the chance to turn back time, I never would have published the last story about Kristina the way I did.

I broke an important rule that I had always staunchly adhered to: the reporter who writes the story is obligated to protect the victim – even from herself.

I am well aware of the fact that I did not sufficiently protect Kristina from her own and her family's decision to publish the whole story (without taking into account the senseless alibi-lie).

For this reason, since Kristina's return home I have never knocked on the family door, dialed their number, nor walked into the store where Kristina works.

I swore that I would never again become a part of the story I was writing.

I often think about Kristina and her family just like about many other "Kristinas" that I never got to know.

Years passed

I had flattered myself that I was finally strong enough to definitively stay an impartial witness-observer even while writing about some new "Kristina".

Until I came to the realization that Kristina's story has permanently changed me.

At the time of submitting this text (in 2008), I was just starting a large regional project where I led a team of investigative journalists for four years, searching for missing people.

The author has been a professional journalist for 44 years. He was one of the 'Jutarnji list' daily founders and assistant editor-in-chief. He worked as a journalist and editor in several other Croatian newspapers (Vjesnik, Večernji list, Arena). He founded and leads Investigative Journalism Center (based in Daruvar, Croatia), works as a freelance journalist and international trainer of investigative journalism as well. His specialty is the investigation of organized crime, especially human trafficking.



Trapped into the debt²⁶

Written by Ankita Anand, an independent journalist from India and co-founder of The Gender Beat, and Daniela Sala, an award-winning Italian multimedia journalist, photographer, and videographer.

1. MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

In 2020, amidst the Covid pandemic, and the public outcry for the sudden lack of foreign workers in Italy, a 30-years old Punjabi worker named Joban Singh died by suicide. He had arrived in Italy less than one year before, his permit of stay had expired, and he was working over 12 hours a day picking vegetables in a huge farm one hour South of Rome - with no contract and no pay for two months.

In Italy, labor exploitation rarely makes any headline, as it is a well-rooted, relatively well known issue. Despite catching media attention for a few days, Joban Singh's death was no exception. Yet, what media labeled as just another case of a migrant exploited, was in fact a case of trafficking - a worker who found himself trapped (like hundreds of others) by the debt and by a criminal network of travel agents, middlemen, complicit community leaders and corrupted officials operating between Punjab (India) and Italy.

Anyone who ever covered labor migration and exploitation in agriculture in Italy knows that the situation of the Punjabi community in Latina is a playbook of systematic labor exploitation. **As a cross border team, we aimed at revealing aspects that are much less covered:** the cross-border network of agents, the precondition to the exploitation, who is profiting, how and why authorities fail to intervene.

To investigate this complex issue we worked for over a year in a cross-border team of two journalists (Ankita Anand - based in India, Daniela Sala - based in Italy) and one photographer (Marco Valle - based in Italy).

After around four months of pre-research in the respective countries (Italy and India), the whole team spent one month field reporting in Punjab, India, and one month in Latina, Italy - collecting interviews, first hand accounts, documents, police reports, and meeting migrants in Italy as well as their families in Punjab.

²⁶ Educational article re "Trapped into the debt" investigation funded by the JournalismFund.eu, <https://www.journalismfund.eu/supported-projects/trapped-debt-punjabi-workers-lured-trafficking-and-exploited-italy>

To make such a complex issue accessible to our audience, **we decided to focus on two parallel personal stories**: those of Joban Singh (the worker who died by suicide in 2020) and of Amrit, a worker we met in Latina, whose story and experience are very similar to Joban's.

Before going into details on the investigation, we believe it is crucial to present the context and the main elements of the story.

THE ITALIAN LAW AND AN OBSCURE VISA PROCESS

On paper - except for the tourist visa - the seasonal working visa is the only legal way for foreign nationals from certain countries (including India) to try their chance to enter Italy. The way the law requires that to happen makes it hard to believe it is ever applied properly.

It requires an Italian employer to make a visa request for an individual person - whom they never met before - while they are still in the country of origin. The request must be supported by a work contract, by a copy of the worker's passport, and detailed data about the employer. This is mandatory also for unskilled jobs, like harvesting.

The whole procedure is quite lengthy and bureaucratic. Without any official system or agency to allow employers and workers to get in touch, it should not come as a surprise how **the whole system - at least between Italy and Punjab - ended up relying on agents**.

THE SITUATION IN PUNJAB AND THE AGENTS

In rural Punjab, emigration is all but an abstract concept. Wall painting advertising students' visas for Canada and working visas for the EU are one of the most common sights. One of the wealthiest states in India, Punjab is among the States with the highest emigration rate.

Complicit in a visa process that is all but transparent, **the market for agents and agencies has been flourishing over the past decades**. In Punjab, there are around 6,000 registered agencies and agents, with the number of agents operating without a license being probably three times higher. Whether registered or not, what agencies do over the counter, versus how they operate and what they promise under the counter was the main focus of our field investigation.

AUTHORITIES IN PUNJAB

In 2012, the State adopted the "Punjab Prevention of Human Smuggling Act", in an attempt to regulate a business that was largely unregulated. The Act, in fact mostly aimed at preventing scams rather than human smuggling, imposed a tax and mandatory registration for all travel agents operating in Punjab.

Our investigation aimed at showing how the Act was quite effective in providing accountability for the agencies that support the students' visa process for Canada, or long term residency papers for the USA, as in those cases the criteria to establish who has the right to file a visa request - and who has not - are quite straightforward. But for countries like Italy, where the criteria to get a working visa is less straightforward - and largely depending on connections and on the rule of 'first come, first served', the Act did not make much of a difference.

It was also very interesting to **shed a light on Punjabi authorities' attitude towards migrants who are trapped into paying thousands of dollars to traffickers** - and ultimately end up exploited in foreign countries, with no chances of quitting. This is a quote we got from Neeraja Voruvuru, Additional Director General of Punjab police at the Non-Resident Indian wing: "If anybody is at fault, it is the person who is trying to get a visa in such a way. We are enforcement agents, so we only look into complaints. And these people - who are illegal immigrants - certainly do not inform or approach us in any way".

INVESTIGATIONS IN ITALY

To explain why police investigation and court trials on trafficking and exploitation in Italy are quite rare - and hardly successful - we confronted prosecutors and investigators, after going through documents related to trials and investigations.

We put together the number of the legal proceedings for "human trafficking" and for "profiting from illegal migration" in Latina are 112, plus 22 against unknown. 56 more were opened for visa or permit of stay forgery.

We also put together information on how these proceedings usually start: it is either the office who is suspecting an anomaly in the documents submitted for a visa request flagging it to relevant authorities, or, way more often, a foreign citizen who was scammed and decides to report it to the police.

Then we listed the difficulties in acquiring all the factual elements to support the case in court (payments are made in cash, investigations generally rely on wiretapping. And wiretapping opens the way to further challenges: conversation often happens through social media, in a local dialect and the court often lacks the resources for proper interpreters and in general for such time consuming, uncertain investigation).

2. METHODS AND TOOLS

After breaking down the main elements of the investigation, we can illustrate the methods and the tools we used.

SETTING THE CONTEXT (DATA, NUMBERS, PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS)

We used different public database (including national statistics bureau in Italy and India) to collect numbers on:

- Indian residents in Latina
- Emigration from Punjab
- Number of travel agencies in Punjab
- Number, dimension, and profit of farms in Latina province
- Amount of export from Latina to Europe (this aspect was crucial for setting the relevance of the story for an EU audience, not just local readers)

At times, we resorted to experts and trade unions for support in finding and interpreting these data.

To get details on the working permit requests presented each year over the past ten years in Latina by Indian nationals we submitted several FOI Requests (Freedom of Information Requests) to relevant authorities in Italy - as this data, with the level of details we aimed for, are not yet publicly available.

We also run dozens of interviews - in the pre-research phase - to get a better understanding of the local context and find the best angle for our investigation. We talked to local NGOs, trade union leaders, community leaders, dozens of Punjabi workers in Latina, experts on labor migration, police sources, prosecutors, lawyers involved in trafficking cases, etc.

In many cases, **we met the same sources multiple times over the months, approaching them with different questions as we gather more information along the way.**

Each interview was recorded and transcribed into English to be available for the team.

INVESTIGATING THE AGENCIES IN PUNJAB

In order to get insights on how the cross-border network of agents (which connects Punjabis willing to emigrate, with complicit employers in Italy that provide the necessary documents and apply for a visa on their behalf) operates, we started by talking to dozens of Punjabi workers in Italy and collected specific information on how much they paid, how they found an agent, how much debt they owe and to whom, what degree of awareness they had about the visa process, which were the exact steps they went through before getting a visa, and how long it took.

During field work in Punjab, we collected further information from dozens of people in villages on how to find agents, what they promise, and who they are. We were advised to check for ourselves how the agencies' situation was in Jalandhar, a city of one million, known as a migration hub for Punjabis.

It took barely one hour in Jalandhar to find a few agencies dealing directly with Italy, which are advertising in their premises working visas to Italy. We entered, and introduced ourselves, explaining we were conducting research about migration between Punjab and Italy. **This 'official' visit allowed us to get a sense of the place, gather information on names, on the information officially disseminated by the agents** and the rates for the 'over the counter' services.

Through this field visit, we noticed a few elements that raised our suspicions. To verify, we had a local journalist to go there undercover - several weeks after our visit, to minimize suspects. In this way we could collect proof that these agencies were not simply assisting with the translation and visa process for a few hundred euros, as they told us. In fact, they were 'selling' visas, behind payment of thousands euros.

POLICE AND COURT'S DOCUMENTS

We compiled a list of the police arrests and investigations related to trafficking and exploitation in Latina in the past ten years. For the cases that made it to court, we collected information about names and roles of the people involved and the allegations.

For some specific investigation, we got access to detailed documents that

allowed us to get further insights about the recurring figures involved in the exploitation network and get a better understanding of how the system is structured.

We verified these observations by talking to lawyers, prosecutors and police officers.

FINDING THE PERSONAL STORIES

Very often, stories related to migration in Italy dehumanize the subjects. This is why for us it was crucial to focus on personal stories. Beside Joban Singh, who died by suicide, we also got in touch with another worker, Amrit, who was going through a similar ordeal.

Before we could decide to focus on Amrit's story, we met several workers: this was partly out of the necessity of getting a better understanding of the variety of profiles and situations that migrant workers from Punjab encounter in Italy, and to get a better understanding of the similarities. And partly because it took time before we found someone who was willing to share their personal story in detail.

After getting to know Amrit better, and allowing him to take the time to get to know us and understand the goals of our work, we asked him to put us in touch with his family in Punjab - whom we met during our field trip in Punjab. This allowed us to gather a more nuanced perspective and see first-hand where Amrit is coming from.

In Joban Singh's case, finding his family was much harder: the police had no record of his hometown, nor did his friends in Italy know where exactly he was from. From them, we only learned of the province he came from. **We resorted to social media, and started approaching friends of his on Facebook** (his profile was still online, one year after he passed). One of them agreed to meet us in person, in Punjab. And after meeting us and understanding our goals, he told us where we could find his family.

3. PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS, SOLUTIONS

UNDERCOVER REPORTING IN THE TRAVEL AGENCIES

How to investigate travel agencies was one of the major challenges we faced. While there are obviously travel agencies that work in a legit and transparent

way, those who offer illicit services often do cover it up with legal businesses.

When the reporting team visited them, we decided to reveal to agents part of the truth, so that we could be allowed in, observe what was going on inside the agencies, check what they were advertising and hear from them which services they were ostensibly offering.

We had strong suspicions about a couple of places we visited. But as they had already met us we could not visit them again and expect them to open up to us.

The team then discussed how to verify what they said, and decided to find a local reporter who could pass as a person willing to migrate to Italy, and being in the initial process of collecting information on how to succeed. It took quite some time (and a lot of 'no's) before we found someone. We were also conscious that even if we support our local colleague, it would only be from a distance. So we did not wish to coerce anyone to do something they were not comfortable with.

Eventually we found someone who had the experience and confidence to go ahead. We briefed them about the task over calls and in writing. We stayed in touch about when they were planning to visit the place. We were constantly on standby should they need any support. On the day of their visit to the agency, they returned late at night. Since it was a stressful job they were doing for us, we wanted to be around to hold space for them.

Our colleague gave us a detailed account of what had emerged, which confirmed that the place was involved in illicit dealings. But we had to go without any recordings as that would have meant exposing our fellow reporter to further risks. We had to accept the fact that should they require immediate assistance in an emergency, we won't be able to reach them immediately. Therefore it was also not fair to put them in a situation that might have caused such a crisis.

JOBAN'S FAMILY (REPORTING ON TRAUMA)

After finding the address of Joban's family, we had to decide how to approach them. We knew Joban's father had died before he traveled to Italy and understood they were facing a harsh economic situation. Most importantly, the family had lost their eldest son less than two years before.

We wanted to make sure we would give them the time and the space to think about our interview request. To begin with, only two of us women (Daniela and Ankita) visited the house, while our photographer colleague and our driver stayed back. We did not wish to overwhelm the family by suddenly appearing at their doorstep in a big number, especially when some of us were foreigners. The family was gracious enough to welcome us. On our first visit we decided to just briefly introduce ourselves and explain the work we were doing and asked them to think about if they wished to meet us again and if so to call us back and tell us which days would suit them.

We had feared they wouldn't want to talk on the subject. But they wished to talk about their son, and know more about the country he had been working in. Instead of plummeting them with questions, **we requested them to share what they wanted to about themselves and their deceased son.** For us, this was not just a strategy to win their trust. We were genuinely interested in the story, the context, and the background. In fact, our aim was to humanize Joban and other workers like him, so they did not remain mere statistical numbers.

FACT-CHECKING AND PRIVACY

One of our most challenging tasks was to find and talk to Joban's "uncle", a distant relative who had supposedly taken money from him to facilitate his trafficking - and who was, at the time of Joban's death allegedly putting a huge pressure on him. We did our best to get information from him, without bringing in Joban's family, because we did not want him to blame or harass the family in any way. Keeping our calm in the face of his hostility and without asking any family member to mediate our conversation, we could get some information from him that was relevant for our reportage.

In the process of publishing, we retained names and specific locations where needed to maintain confidentiality. The families of Joban and Amrit had not explicitly asked us to do so but we took this decision to ensure the families' privacy. Fortunately, we had editors who were satisfied with fact checking the information based on our documents and trusted our instinct in not disclosing all identifying details while publishing.

This was not always the case though. With one of our reports, we were asked to provide photos or videos of our protagonist working on the farm. We respected the rigorous fact-checking, which secures both publications and reporters. However, given the context of a laborer working under exploitative

conditions with hardly any breaks, it seemed unrealistic to expect that there would be the safety or the time that would have allowed him to create such evidence. Since the worker had already passed away, the evidence could definitely not be gathered at this stage. This experience made us feel that **we need to broaden the definition of what we treat as evidence depending on the context we are working in**. Otherwise we run the risk of missing some really important stories.

REPORTING WITHOUT CRIMINALIZING

Explaining how workers from India might enter Italy with a visa that is valid, but was obtained through illicit ways, brought about serious challenges for the team on how to frame the issue in a way for the audience to understand and question who is ultimately responsible.

Investigations on trafficking and migration, especially when they uncover the responsibilities of foreign nationals who exploit people from their own community, always run the risk of criminalizing the whole community. This is why for us it was crucial on one hand to explain the limited awareness workers have about the visa process, and how agents exploit this lack of knowledge to their advantage. It was also important for us to explain the workers' background and motivation.

On the other hand, **we wanted to move up the responsibility chain and question the Italian authorities** for not conducting the due check on the visa process, and question the current Italian law on migration.

We also believe it is crucial to stress who is ultimately profiting from trafficking and exploitation (Italian employers, exporters, and big supermarket chains who can profit from low cost goods harvested by exploited laborers) and investigate the supply chain. In the end, importers and consumers also bear responsibility.

4. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION: CHALLENGES AND ADDED VALUE

CHALLENGES

- In an international team, people work in **different time zones**. Even that might not be consistent when they travel to other regions for reporting. It helps to be mindful of each other's locations and schedules and accordingly plan meetings.

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- Every team mate might be particularly excited about some aspect of the investigation. It is important to make room for those specific interests. At the same time, there need to be some **common goals** that the entire team agrees on.
 - In the case of **ground reporting** from each other's locations, tickets need to be booked ahead of time to save on expenses, and visas need to be applied for months in advance.
 - **Language** can be a barrier so the local journalist should be mindful of regularly translating for their colleagues. When needed, it is worth investing in a translator so it should be included in the budget.
 - Each country has its own **cultural practices**. In such cases, the foreign journalist could follow the lead of their local colleague and trust their judgment. This would enable developing a smooth relationship with local sources when interacting with them.

BENEFITS

- A cross-border collaboration allows us to achieve a **scale and depth** that's not feasible when working alone. It also makes sure that we get facts and nuances right, something that's not possible when parachuting.
- It creates the opportunity for the stories to be published in various countries, languages and formats. This way they reach a **diverse audience**. The risks the reporters are exposed to also get divided.
- In a group, one gets a chance to brainstorm ideas, and **share stresses**. Cross-border projects can go on for a long period. When one member needs time off, the others can continue. This is not possible when working alone.
- Every member has access to different people so the collective pool of sources becomes wider. Each member also has **different skill sets and experience** so each person might be best suited to deal with a certain source or execute a particular task. A lone reporter won't have these advantages.

5 GENERAL TIPS/ADVICE FOR WORKING ON STORIES ABOUT EXPLOITATION

- **Take your time and give people time.** Be open to hearing what people want to share, above and beyond your questions. Families want to explain why they had to let their children go elsewhere; workers want to talk about why they had to leave families behind. We cannot have their stories or trust if we only have time for a short Q & A.

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- There is a delicate link joining traffickers to workers (eg. sometimes they're family members). For workers' safety, at times we have to give up the temptation of exposing individuals and **focus on revealing the larger, systemic problems** that enable the exploitation. For real change too, both systems and laws need to be better.
 - **Photographs** should protect identities and represent the persons' dignity, not victimize them further.
 - Numbers are important for substantiation. But dehumanization is a big impact of trafficking that people endure. As journalists, we have the chance to remedy that a bit by writing **human interest** stories.
 - Our stories can remind the **general public** they have a role to play: the local populace of a foreign country can help with migrants' integration; if someone caught in sex trafficking manages to escape, their family can welcome them back without discrimination, etc.
 - Often reporters have to go through **NGOs** to interview victims. These organizations might be trying to keep the exploited persons safe, which we need to remember and respect when we are not immediately granted interviews. At the same time, a trafficked person also has their autonomy, which they should be allowed to exercise. They should be able to tell their own story. This navigation has to be done sensitively so we can have and honor both the organization's and the individual's trust.

Ankita Anand is an independent journalist in India, and a co-founder of *The Gender Beat*. She has done cross-border reporting with colleagues in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, the UK and the US. She has contributed to *Tactical Tech's Exposing the Invisible* kit for investigators, including a guide on cross-border collaborative investigations, and facilitated workshops on the subject.

Daniela Sala is an Italian award-winning multimedia journalist, photographer, and videographer. She is focusing on the SWANA region and covering the climate crisis, migration, trafficking, human rights, and mental health. Her works are regularly published by international media (*Al-Jazeera, The Guardian, Der Spiegel, El Pais, Woz, Al Monitor, De Morgen, Trouw, Internazionale, RAI, News Deeply, RSI, Open Migration, Elle, among others*).

She is currently based in Rome and she is a co-founder of *FADA* collective.

HANDS ON DECK - Uncovering modern slavery in the Irish fishing industry

Written by Maria Delaney, editor of the investigative journalism platform [Noteworthy.ie](https://www.noteworthy.ie)

"I was sleeping in the boat the whole time, even [though] my contract said that my employer should be providing a flat. They didn't even give us an allowance for food. We had to eat leftover meat and fish on the boat. Sometimes, we'd even ask other boats for food, and our rest time was only when there were storms." (Experience of a Filipino fisher who was left undocumented in Ireland due to exploitative working conditions)

Fishing is a complex industry to investigate. Not only are workers - and therefore much of the exploitation - out at sea, but multiple government departments and agencies are responsible for different aspects of the laws and regulations that apply to them.

The issue of human trafficking within the fishing industry can also be "tricky". That is according to Dr Clíodhna Murphy, associate professor of law in Maynooth University and lead researcher of a [key 2021 report](#) on experiences of fishers from outside the European Economic Area (EEA).

That is because it is usually related to "trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation". In Ireland, we don't have what they have in the UK - "the idea of modern slavery", Murphy explained when interviewed for our investigation. This "can include forced labour separate to trafficking". Modern slavery - which includes human trafficking and forced labour - is the illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain.

"In order to pursue instances of forced labour in Ireland, you have to go through the trafficking framework", Murphy told me, but because "there are so many deficiencies" in this, it doesn't offer "very much in the way of solutions" for individuals "trapped in an exploitative situation".

So, not only did we face an industry where workers were largely inaccessible and multiple authorities were in charge, fishers - mainly from the Philippines, Ghana, Indonesia and Egypt - who were exploited, fell outside what many traditionally classed as human trafficking.

The aim of our investigation was to find out how Filipino workers were being exploited in the Irish fishing industry by speaking to fishers in Ireland and, for the first time, documenting the impact their treatment in Ireland was having on their families back home in the Philippines. Filipinos are the biggest group of fishers from outside the EEA in the sector.



The route of one alleged human trafficking victim to Ireland who was facing deportation at the time of investigation despite the International Workers' Federation finding numerous indicators of trafficking applied to his case, including "excessive working days or hours", "violence on victims" and "debt bondage".

The key to this was having a cross-border team in place with reporters based in both Ireland and the Philippines. This was made possible with support from JournalismFund Europe's [Modern Slavery Unveiled](#) grant programme. I teamed up with Filipino freelance multimedia journalist Geela Garcia, who is also a "peasant advocate" in her home country, and with Irish freelance journalist and trainee solicitor Louise Lawless due to the complex legal issues involved.

We undertook a six-month long investigation across both countries which, in the end, had wide reaching impacts. This included being addressed by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar (Ireland's head of government) who said examples of abuse he had read about were "not far off modern day slavery", a term we used to describe work conditions for migrant fishers.

Our full series (which can be read [here](#)) was published simultaneously on [Noteworthy.ie](#) and [TheJournal.ie](#), Ireland's largest native online news outlet.

In the Philippines, it was published by *Philstar*, one of the Philippines' leading and most recognised digital brands in journalism.

As outlined, this investigation was a daunting task, with careful planning needed. Over the course of this chapter, I will focus on approaching victims of modern slavery, including human trafficking, how certain visa schemes can lead to a legal method of trafficking, the use of FOI to gather evidence and, finally, the impact our investigation has had to date.

SAFETY OF VICTIMS IS PARAMOUNT

"It hurt. I felt the punch land. I told him if he did that again I'd report him." (One victim on how he was physically abused by a skipper of a fishing vessel)

Noteworthy is a community-led platform and the idea to investigate exploitation in the fishing industry was [sent to us](#) by one of our supporters. Once ideas are submitted, we then examine if there is a viable project, and if there is, put it out for [crowdfunding](#). This gives us an advantage at the start of an investigation as we often receive important knowledge and sources from both the person who submitted the idea and people who contact us after reading about our project during the crowdfunding campaign.

Fishers were central to this project and we needed to speak to a number in order to find similarities in their experience and establish exploitation on a number of vessels in different locations in Ireland.

To build our sources, we approached a number of organisations involved in either the support or protection of migrant workers. It took a number of months to build trust. Key to this was finding out the best way to communicate with workers (WhatsApp in this case) and, given that many were out at sea with little phone coverage, having the patience to wait - sometimes for weeks - for a reply. We also approached local Filipino communities in different parts of Ireland. Once we got to know workers, they often introduced us to other migrant fishers.

Before we spoke to any victims, we carefully planned our approach to protect both our sources and reporters.

To find out how victims had been previously treated by the media, our team

got in touch with a number of reporters who had examined human trafficking previously in Ireland and abroad. This included Sylke Gruhnwald, editor-in-chief of the Swiss magazine Republik, who was our mentor for the project thanks to our JournalismFund Europe grant. Gruhnwald had initiated [The Migrant Files](#) project, published in 2014, which examined the human and financial cost of Europe sealing its border to migrants.

Following these meetings, we became aware of some of the serious repercussions that migrant workers and their families had previously faced after media outlets had reported their stories. Our team made the decision that all should have the protection of anonymity to prevent this occurring again. In the Philippines, to protect workers' families, reporter Geela Garcia used no face photography including portraits of silhouettes, backs and family treasures.

Though pseudonyms and non-identifying photos were used, it was also important to our team that the voices of fishers and families were presented. Their voices were amplified through Garcia on our podcast '[The Explainer x Noteworthy: Are migrant fishers exploited in Ireland?](#)'. Among others, she spoke of a fisher we called Lloyd being struck by his skipper and the trauma endured by the son of a fisher we called Rene, who had to exit education and suffered stress-related hair loss as a result of the impact on his family.

To further protect victims and our reporters, we drew up a number of protocols for interviews. This included arranging them away from ports or areas where vessel skippers or owners could become suspicious. We also ensured that victims were in touch with an organisation that supports workers or migrants so that they could get appropriate help if required.



Example of a non-identifying photo taken by Geela Garcia showing the mother of a migrant fisher looking at a photo of her son at their home in the Philippines

Re-victimizing the victims is covered in detail in this manual by Saša Leković in the case of sexually exploited victims of human trafficking. Our team was conscious that all fishers we interviewed had been through traumatic experiences and we did not want to re-traumatise or re-victimize them through our questions or reporting. We ensured to meet victims in a neutral location that would be comfortable for them and drew up a set list of questions.

It was essential that those we were in touch with understood the aims of our work. Many of those we interviewed were in precarious situations, usually undocumented and hoping to get their immigration status sorted through the justice system - in court or through the trafficking referral mechanism. We set clear expectations at the start of our interactions with each migrant worker and made sure that they understood that we could not help them with this legal process and their individual situation would likely not improve by talking to us.

Given few of the fishers we spoke to had fluent English, we conducted the interviews in both English and Filipino, with Garcia attending from the Philippines via video link. Having a native Filipino reporter on the team was a huge asset in this way as it was evident that those we spoke to were more relaxed and open when telling their story.

Another risk which we had to consider was the extremely strict defamation laws in Ireland which are an ever-present threat for reporters and media organisations. While we were undertaking our work, there was an ongoing libel case against *The Guardian* for a report on trafficking in the Irish fishing industry seven years earlier. It was brought by two Irish fishers accused of exploiting undocumented foreign workers as cheap labour. The case was settled in November 2022, a month before we published our investigation.

It was due to go to court at the start of November, but before this happened there was an agreement between the parties. *The Guardian* [reported](#) that it had not paid any damages or costs, "but agreed to pay a 'lodgement' of €50,000 to the plaintiffs to settle their action, with no admissions of liability being made". A spokesperson for The Guardian said that the investigation "remains online, in full, and entirely as originally published, without amendment or correction".

With all our investigations, but in particular with any potential legal action in mind, a large amount of evidence was required for publication. To do this, we asked every victim we spoke to to bring documents related to their experience

to our interviews. These included visas, work permissions, contracts, travel documents, court records and relevant correspondence.

Secure storage of such sensitive documents, interview records and transcripts was vitally important to protect sources. No copies were kept on phones, computer hard drives or cameras that could be misplaced or stolen. Physical copies were shredded. Our team also used communication platforms with end-to-end encryption or obtained copies of such documents in person during interviews.

WORK PERMISSION TIED TO EXPLOITATION

"Migrant workers are used and exploited within the fishing industry all over the world. This is a worldwide problem but the problems in Ireland can be traced to very specific policies and laws here." (Associate law professor Dr Clíodhna Murphy explaining how Irish laws were a large part of the problem)

Following the 2015 investigation by *The Guardian* mentioned above, a specific visa for non-EEA crew in the Irish fishing fleet was introduced to address human trafficking in the sector. This was called the Atypical Working Scheme (AWS). Bill Abom, deputy director of the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), echoed numerous migrant advocates when he told me that it was "the worst version of the employment permit system" when it comes to people's rights and the risk of exploitation.

That was because migrant workers had little choice but to stay employed by the vessel owner attached to their work permission. Otherwise, they would become undocumented - a choice that many fishers we spoke to had opted for due to the abuse they had endured.

"You can't challenge an employer when you're tied to them and you have no other choice," Abom told me. He added that he'd be a rich man if he had a euro for every time a worker came back to him and said: "We complained but they [the employer] said – 'If you don't like it, go the f*** home'".

"My experience of undocumented [fishers] is of people who got sick with serious illnesses, ended up in hospital and were abandoned by their employers," Sr Jo McCarthy who set up the Cork Migrant Centre told me. She was highly critical of the Atypical Scheme and called it a "form of indentured slavery".

This scheme is a good example of how legal systems of migration can lead to exploitation - and in some cases - trafficking of workers. It demonstrates, as already stated in this manual, how human trafficking is a complex problem.

To uncover the extent of abuse attached to this work permission, we analysed government data and revealed that 4% of non-EEA fishers in this controversial scheme had been formally recognised as victims of trafficking, with more fighting for unpaid wages through the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and Labour Court. And that is despite difficulties, explained below, that alleged victims of trafficking face in Ireland.

Our investigation showed that the proportion of alleged trafficking victims in the fishing industry being recognised as such had decreased in 2021 and 2022. In response, Michael O’Brien, fisheries campaign lead at the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), claimed that “there’s been an across the board failure” when it came to authorities delivering for migrant workers. The police force in Ireland, An Garda Síochána, told us that it investigates “all matters pertaining to any specific case” and forwards a file to the Director of Public Prosecution. When we looked into this in 2022, we found that there were no prosecutions on file related to such victims in Ireland.

Human trafficking law is currently being revised in Ireland and once this happens, the Department of Justice told me it “should make it easier for victims to come forward to seek protection and to access all of the support and resources that are available to them”.

Human trafficking in relation to fishing industry

The proportion of alleged victims has decreased in recent years



Source: An Garda Síochána (via press request) • NRM = National Referral Mechanism
*Up to November 2022

Our work followed a string of reports which found exploitation and trafficking within the Irish fishing sector. These included a report by the [Migrant Rights Centre Ireland](#) in 2017, research from [Maynooth University](#) in 2021 and successive annual [Trafficking in Persons](#) (TIP) reports from the United States government.

Following these, the government undertook a [review of the controversial Atypical Working Scheme](#) (AWS), released in November 2022 just before our investigation was published. It recommended that the scheme be replaced by a general working permit and that those currently availing of the scheme be allowed apply for a Stamp 4 permission after two years or shorter. This allows holders far more rights, including the ability to work or set up their own business without being tied to a specific employer and to apply for their families to join them here in Ireland.

A number of fishers told us how they had become undocumented after leaving their assigned vessel following abuse from skippers or owners. Our investigation highlighted their plight and the fact that they had been left out completely of any review recommendations, meaning that they would not be entitled to either the recommended general working permit or subsequent Stamp 4 visa.

USING FOI TO COLLECT EVIDENCE

“During that inspection it became apparent that a fisher engaged on that vessel, a Ghanaian national... had no documentation on board and that his passport was being held by the leasing company.” (Quote from an inspection report obtained through a FOI request that found alleged human trafficking which was referred by the inspector to the Irish police force)

To corroborate these experiences of migrant workers with more evidence, we sent 15 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to 10 different government departments and agencies involved in the fishing sector.

FOI requests are a vital resource for almost all of our investigations. In Ireland, the Freedom of Information Act 2014 gives you the right to access records held by certain bodies. These include all government departments, city and county councils, HSE and voluntary hospitals, bodies providing services for people with disabilities and more. Access to information in certain bodies is

limited, e.g. in the case of the Irish police force (An Garda Síochána), requests can only be made in the areas of finance, procurement and human resources.

Making an FOI request in Ireland is as simple as an email to an FOI body requesting the relevant information, making sure it is a record – rather than general information – you are looking for. *Noteworthy* has developed a short guide to this which you can access [here](#).

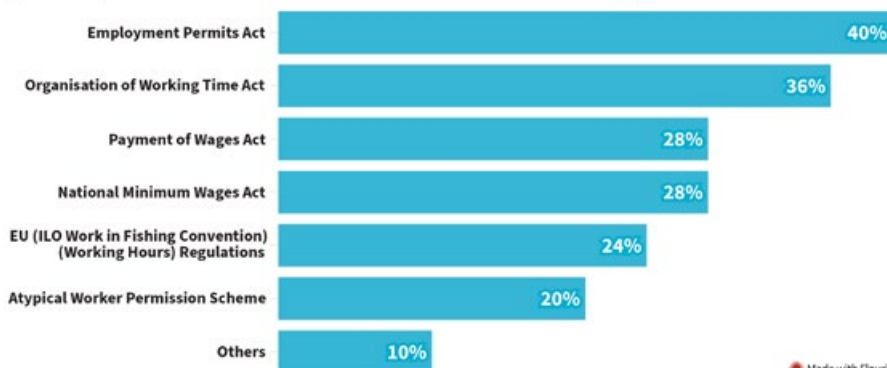
Unfortunately, FOI laws vary from country to country, so this option is not always possible. Though FOI requests can be made in the Philippines, we found accessing certain information not possible.

The main documents we were looking for in Ireland were reports from agencies involved in the inspection of fishing vessels - the Marine Survey Office, Workplace Relations Commission, Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, Health and Safety Authority and the Irish Navy Survey. These conduct different types of inspections, including enforcing fishing quotas, ensuring vessels are seaworthy and investigating if workers' rights are being violated.

Hundreds of documents were obtained through these FOIs - many of which *Noteworthy* published online for the first time. From [Workplace Relations Commission inspection reports](#), we revealed that 40% of cases involved undocumented workers in 2021 and 2022. At least three of these 10 cases involved fishers who had an AWS permission which had expired, with four cases of alleged trafficking also found.

Fishers employed without valid permit top issue found by WRC

Report analysis 2021 onwards: Numerous contraventions for leave and wage entitlements



Made with Flourish

NOTEWORTHY

Source: Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) Inspection Reports 2021 onwards (via FOI request)

Similar deficiencies to that found by the Workplace Relations Commission were replicated in Marine Survey Office unscheduled inspection reports from 2021 onwards which our team also obtained through an FOI request.

FOIs are also a great way to discover what people are telling the government about specific issues.

We asked the Department of Justice for submissions and/or observations made to the group reviewing the Atypical Working Scheme. This allowed us to gather further information on the experience of migrant fishers. We included extracts of these submissions throughout the article which focused on issues with this controversial work permission. Here's an example:

periods and to wear foot supports all day. When I asked him to give me my financial dues and not to force me to work on his other ships, he refused to renew my contract and wanted to send me to [REDACTED] without residency. In the last year I had an accident while on a fishing trip and broke my left hand and did not fully recover. Currently, I cannot work hard because my physical health has deteriorated. I do not

Extract of migrant fisher's submission to the Atypical Working Scheme review (2022) via Department of Justice through an FOI request

Though FOI requests can be crucial, it is important not to forget about the vast resources of publicly available information. Such databases and reports are often overlooked and underutilised by journalists, but can yield interesting findings for investigations.

This is exactly what we did for one article in our series in which reporter Louise Lawless and I analysed the numerous cases heard by the Workplace Relations Commission. This is the main mechanism that some migrant fishers have at their disposal in order to bring a case against vessel owners. All outcomes of cases are published online and names of all parties involved have been included since April 2021.

Our extensive analysis of these cases painted a grim picture of working conditions in the sector, allowed us to detail the serious allegations that migrant fishers had made and, importantly, publicly name those involved.

WIDE-REACHING IMPACTS

"It's clear that some, if not many, migrant fishermen are being exploited and that's not acceptable and not something that we want to be a feature of our marine economy or the fishing industry in Ireland." (Taoiseach Leo Varadkar - Ireland's head of government - in response to our investigation being raised in parliament)

Investigations like these take time, patience and persistence but because they are often covering underreported issues, they can have significant impact in political spheres, and importantly, for those affected by the issues being highlighted.

There have been a number of significant developments following the publication of our Hands on Deck investigation.

The following month, the government announced that "all holders of a current valid permission to work as a non-EEA Crew member in the Irish Fishing Fleet" expiring on or after 1st January would "be granted a Stamp 4 immigration permission". This was previously uncertain and meant that documented fishers would be allowed to change employers and apply for family reunification.

There have also been some improvements reported by advocates. Just two weeks after we highlighted issues with migrant fishers being admitted to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) - a framework in Ireland for referring victims of human trafficking - a representative of migrant fishers told us that a worker trafficked in a similar way to a fisher featured in our articles was admitted to the NRM by the gardai.

Following our investigation, Patrick Costello - a parliamentarian representing the Green Party who are currently part of a coalition government in power in Ireland - hosted a parliamentary briefing on the exploitation of migrant workers in the Irish fishing industry and invited our team to speak. Civil servants, parliamentary assistants and politicians were in attendance as I presented our findings. Following the briefing, Costello spoke about the investigation in the parliament and of the "very clear and quick reforms" being called on advocates.

In response Ireland's head of government, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, said: "I've heard and read about some really appalling examples of abuse that are not

far off modern day slavery.” He said that he would “certainly make sure” that it was on the responsible Minister’s “agenda for this year”. We wrote about this investigation inspiring political action [here](#) earlier this year.

Our investigation findings were also cited by the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) report. This Department leads United States foreign policy and its annual report on trafficking was mentioned as having particular significance in the Irish cross-departmental review of the controversial



Taoiseach Leo Varadkar responding to our investigation being raised in the Dáil (Irish parliament) in January 2023 (Credit: Oireachtas TV)

Atypical Working Scheme. It stated: “As US law includes measures restricting or prohibiting companies in that jurisdiction from engaging in business in countries of significant concern... failure by Ireland to address the matters raised in the TIPs report is likely to have significant adverse impact on foreign investment and business with the State.”

The 2023 report [cited our coverage](#) of “instances of sea fishers paying significant fees to recruitment companies in the Philippines prior to arrival in Ireland, which increases their vulnerability to debt bondage and exploitation”. It also mentioned key findings by Noteworthy, including that 4% of fishers in a controversial working permission scheme were “exploited in trafficking”.

Finally, our investigative team was awarded the prestigious [Journalism Excellence Award](#) from the Irish Red Cross Humanitarian Awards and an Investigative Writing Award from the Irish Food Writing Awards.

TOP INVESTIGATION TIPS

1. **Human-focused:** Put people at the centre of investigations but ensure to use other sources and data so that their experiences are backed with evidence demonstrating a larger problem.

2. **Cross-border:** It is far easier and more effective if a member of your team is familiar with the culture and speaks the language of the people impacted.

3. **Relate to readers:** If you anonymise people for their protection, come up with creative ways to allow readers or listeners to relate to their stories.

4. **Plan, plan, plan:** Don't jump head first into an investigation involving vulnerable people. Plan to ensure all potential risks are taken into account to protect both sources and reporters.

5. **Meet in person:** If people are telling you stories of abuse and exploitation, meet them - if at all possible - and arrange a safe location where they will feel comfortable.

6. **No promises:** Outline clear expectations to sources, make no promises and ensure they understand that their situation will likely not improve by taking part in the investigation.

7. **Gather evidence:** Large amounts of evidence from as many sources will be needed to back up your findings as well as protect reporters and media organisations from defamation actions.

8. **Problematic policies:** Examine how laws and policies are potentially creating an environment that leads to exploitation.

9. **Untapped troves:** Use FOI requests to obtain key documents and data, but don't forget to analyse publicly available reports which can be a treasure trove of underutilised information.

10. **Inform advocates:** To increase impact and reach of investigation findings, send key interested experts and organisations links to articles or other media after publication.

Maria Delaney is the editor of Noteworthy, a crowdfunded investigative platform in Ireland that supports independent and impactful public interest journalism. As an investigative journalist, she specialises in health, social justice and science. She is a two-time winner of the Journalism Excellence Award from the Irish Red Cross Humanitarian Awards and has won a number of other prestigious Irish and international awards for her work.

How to interview a victim of trafficking in women – as a journalist or as a human being?

Written by Miša Stojiljković, journalist and psychologist.

As an average consumer of the media, I heard about trafficking in women a few years ago, when I read about it in the newspaper. However, at that time, it didn't leave any kind of impression on me, maybe because I didn't know anything about it. Possibly, I didn't want to know anything about it, because it sounded like yet another "heavy topic", of which kind there are too many in this country. As a journalist, I began to be interested in the topic of trafficking in women around the beginning of the year 2002, when I was asked to participate in a seminar involving this topic, along with about twenty other colleagues of mine from Southeastern Europe. It wasn't until then that I became aware of the many facets of this phenomenon and realized what a big problem it was over the whole Balkans, particularly in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo. At the same time, I realized that this did not only involve "some Russian, Moldovan and Romanian girls", but that it involved women and girls from the whole of the former Yugoslavia, of course including Serbia itself. I probably had, subconsciously, the opinion that this was happening to someone else and far away from here. Definitely, I realized that these are not – as could be concluded by many newspaper articles – prostitutes which have come from some poor country to make a little money, but that it involved victims that were the subject of severe psychological and physical violence.

Although through the writing of articles I was able to speak with representatives from the police, the courts, and a number of non-governmental organizations that dealt with the education of women and the prevention of this phenomenon, it was only after about a year and half that I had an opportunity to speak with any actual victims. **I was told several times that what made it more difficult was that fact that I was a man and that most of the victims were uncomfortable and fearful in the presence of a member of the opposite sex.** At that point in time I thought that this was just an excuse and the easiest way for them to rebuff me. I believed that, much more than the sex of the reporter, it was more important whether one understood the essence of trafficking in women, the approach one took during the interview, and what kind of rapport one established with a victim. And, of course, this was all very important, but already in my first interview with a young woman, it

was clear that the sex of the reporter played an important role. Subsequently, after a half hour of conversation, she said that even today – two years after she managed to escape from a brothel where she had been kept against her will – she felt uncomfortable in the company of men and that she still could not maintain normal contact with them. With that, she said that she began shaking when in the same room with one or more of them, at which point she lifted up her hand to show how it was shaking. My colleague and I, with whom I was conducting the interview, asked her if she would like to stop and she said that she would.

It is that very moment that illustrates best how an interview with a victim of any type of abuse differs from other interviews, and where journalist's dilemma f. It's one thing to ask whether they want to end the interview after you have run out of questions, but it is another to end it when there are things that you still want to find out. I don't know whether there is one answer to this question or whether there is one right way to go about situations such as this. Like a large number of my colleagues, I would probably have rejoiced at the prospect that someone we were questioning – a politician, official or the like – began to shake during an interview, but this was a completely different case. **Even though in writing about trafficking in women it is very important – to invoke an overused phrase – that the truth comes out, it is even more important to protect the victim from being re-traumatized.** Recounting her life story and remembering every physical and mental abuse that she has had to go through, represents for the victim a re-living of the source of her suffering and frustration. The truth is, only through talking about this can she come to terms with the "demons of her past" and, more or less, successfully get past her problems. But the journalist has no way of knowing how his subject will react to concrete questions.

I think that in light of this it is very important for us to first get informed, from the people who are in contact with our subject (psychologists, social workers, etc.), about some very important moments of her life, so that we can plan the interview to be as painless as possible for the victim. In the end, she probably would not have even agreed to the interview if she didn't feel she was ready to talk about the trauma that she had to live through. But despite this, throughout the whole interview what is more important than our text or piece is the mental state of the subject. She should be listened to carefully, observing her non-verbal communication and body language, and when it is obvious that she is becoming increasingly upset or nervous, the conversation

should perhaps be directed to a less painful theme, and then later returned to some harder questions. If it is at all possible, and if the subject is willing, it is better to do the interview in two or three shorter meetings.

Another dilemma in which I found myself was whether to talk with victims in a group setting or each one separately. **One school of thought says that it is better separately, because you can establish a better rapport with the victim, no one would distract her, and maybe she would talk about things that she wouldn't talk about with other people present. The second school of thought, again, says that it is better to talk to all of the victims at once because they would feel more secure in the company of women and girls who have lived through the same, or similar, trauma and it would be easier for them to tell their own story.** It does not seem to me that there is a clear way to solve this dilemma, and that the journalist must appraise the situation him/herself and come to a decision on the spot.

A particular dilemma in talking with victims of trafficking in women (just as in other cases of violence) is whether to be neutral and objective, as according to the rules of reporting, or to become involved in the situation, having sympathy and openly showing your emotions and reactions to what you have heard. In fact, this may not be a dilemma at all, because, can anyone stay cold and not show emotion when she/he hears how some drunken sailors put out their cigarettes and gang-raped a twenty year old girl all night; or when someone tells you how the "boss" forced her to stand outside in 15–below-zero weather wearing a mini-skirt to wait for "clients" to come along; or when she tell you how she saw many girls hacked to pieces and left in containers; or when she tells you that she would not have a problem killing any of her "clients" if she ever saw them again. It's one thing to read about this in the paper or watch it in a movie, but it is entirely a different matter when you get this "in the first person" from a girl who actually lived through this. In my own personal experience, I know that, twice, I barely kept myself from crying and that it still gives me the shivers when I recall parts of some conversations. **I think that in these interviews a person can first of all react as a human being, and only secondly as a journalist.**

It is much more important to think as a journalist after the interview, when the story is actually being written or the piece being edited. At that point also, we have to think about how we are going to protect the victim. This means that we must not show her face under any circumstances, that we

cannot reveal her identity, nor any other facts that could put her in harm's way (the name of the club where she worked, the owner's name, or even the town in question) because it could happen that one of her tormentors may read the article, or be listening to or watching the piece. In the end, these facts are not the main point of our story.

It is important that the message reaches people that trafficking in women indeed does exist, that's it is happening in our own country, that it is happening all around us, that all women and girls are potential victims and that society must solve this problem. It is always important to underline the fact that this does not involve prostitutes, but victims who have been forced against their will to perform sexual services. This cannot be explained if the text of the story is accompanied by pictures of naked women wrapping themselves around stripper poles, just so that more readers would be attracted to the story or to improve circulation.

In addition, as a journalist, I have a need to say something that has nothing to do with conversations with victims of trafficking or other forms of violence. Namely, I wondered whether the media approach in regard to human trafficking had changed at all in the last three or four years. **Unfortunately, I came to conclusions that I did not all like. It seems to me that very little is different today from the way it was in the past. It seems as if today, in the Serbian media, there exist the same false assumptions and the same mistakes are being made in reports about trafficking in women – not differentiating between voluntary and forced prostitution, equating victims of trafficking with prostitutes, using the term “white slavery” when talking about victims (as if they are only white and they are being abducted by pirates or highway bandits from the 18th century).** Truth be told, there have been much fewer stories being accompanied by photographs of (almost) naked women that seem to be more connected with light male entertainment rather than the abuse of victims by organized crime. But it seems to me that there are much fewer articles being written altogether. It continues to be the case that most often stories about trafficking are written after police press conferences about the breaking up of a chain of traffickers or after their actual arrest or conviction, but usually only then. There are very few analytical, investigative texts. The case is similar when it comes to television. Here you see a documentary, usually of foreign origin, there you sometimes see a debate about the topic -

and that's it. We are still waiting for a TV drama serial about human trafficking, although at the end of 2006 it was announced that one would be aired in the last part of 2007 (this text was written in June 2008) and that the government of Serbia would help pay a part of its 6 million dinar budget. I hope there is a good reason behind this.

All of a sudden it's like trafficking in women stopped being interesting (if it ever was). To be sure, the playing field has changed as well. Sexual exploitation of victims is now taking place behind closed doors, in much better protected buildings that are much harder to infiltrate. A few court convictions were announced and everyone involved in trafficking is much more careful and suspicious, which means that anyone who investigates this topic is much more exposed to danger than before. Unfortunately, something that has also changed is that, when it comes to registered victims, there are many more girls from Serbia than from surrounding countries. There seems to be much more internal trafficking, meaning a victim from one town in Serbia is taken to another town sometimes only a few dozen kilometers away. However, even this fact doesn't seem to be provoking any strong reaction from journalists, nor from government functionaries. Will there be any organized reaction at all – I don't know. I only know that most of these victims (excluding a certain number of those who will have a combination of luck, adequate professional help, and positive reactions by their family members and friends) will stay on the margins of life and society. They will mainly be discarded by their families and left to their own devices or, unfortunately, the devices of dangerous human traffickers.

The author has been involved in journalism for 25 years, with 15 years spent at RTV B92 and the last 7 years at Radio Beograd 1, where they work as an editor and host of the morning program. They are also a co-author of three documentary films - two on mental health and one on the initiative of young men to change rigid gender stereotypes about society's expectations of men. Since 2002, they have been covering the topic of human trafficking and reporting on it.

Will they recognize me?

Written by: Olivera Miloš Todorović, journalist, director of documentary films and TV series, producer for the ShockArt Artistic Productions Group

I feel a great sense of apprehension and responsibility when I film children, the elderly, or the sick for a documentary – regardless of the theme. I am preoccupied with the question of whether I have the right to disturb their privacy. The very fact that they are members of this group many times means that they do not have the ability to fathom the consequences of their appearance in a film or on a television show.

On the other hand, I wonder about the effects of the message on the viewer for whom the message was meant in the first place. Sometimes it happens that I give the viewer too much credit, that I think that they can come to their own conclusions. I leave them free to do that. The only guiding I do is driven by fear of pathos and sensationalism, which would actually amount to the misuse of a child, and I am convinced that we are all normal and can think for ourselves. But sometimes, instead of using a metaphor during the filming, you should “shoot straight for the head” by showing truths that are so strong, that they of themselves elicit strong emotions.

In the last three years, as the author of video spots against child trafficking, I participated in a campaign for Save the Children. In a series of videos that were seen on all of the TV stations in Serbia and Montenegro, we presented a case involving a fifteen-year-old girl that was sold in Italy.

...my name is Ivana. I am fifteen years old. Last year the older brother of a friend of mine invited me to their apartment to introduce me to a boy that I liked. When I walked in, there were five of them. They all raped me. They photographed all of it. They told me that if I did not want them to show the pictures to my mother, I would have to steal all of her gold jewelry. After that I had to get in a van with them that was headed to Italy, because they told me that they would kill my mother and my sister if I didn't. The trip lasted eight days. We crossed the border illegally.

I tried to call my mother two times. Then they beat me and tied me up with a wire. I heard them as they were negotiating with someone to sell me in Italy.

Everyone who came along knew what was going on, they ignored the fact that I was a human being. I wanted to kill myself, but I was kept alive by a feeling that my mother and sister knew I was alive. The police know the whole story. They call me all the time to give testimony. Three of the participants I still see around the town. The police cannot question them because they are now at sea.

Of course, it was out of the question to film the actual victim. The hardest thing was to find a girl who would, in order to be believable, say the words in close-up, and look directly into the camera. Done in this way, this would force the audience to realize that the words spoken were true – that it **could be** someone close to them!

At the same time, the face of the child being filmed could not be shown. I decided to call on a drama group made up of children. We handed out the text that was to be spoken by the trafficking victim. After the reading of the text, the cameraman and I narrowed it down to three girls as possible participants in the segment. We sent the text to each parent and asked for written permission that stated that the child was allowed to participate in the filming. I could not promise the parents that their child, after the emotional reading required for this spot, would not be mistaken for the real victim in her neighborhood and school. This was precisely what the parents were most scared of.

I also utilized the second option, and that was using an adult actress whose face, up until that point, was not very recognizable, which was important so that the story would not lose the feel of a documentary.

As the campaign continued, after these video spots, the idea was to call attention to children that were between the ages of 5 and 10 who, according to statistics, belong to the most vulnerable age group in child trafficking. This group is exploited through forced labor, begging, performing acts of crime, and the selling of organs. In this case it was very difficult to use a child in a TV spot, once again because it may identify the child with a real occurrence. This time we didn't pick among actors, but used our own children, children of the members of the film crew that were of the appropriate age.

Along with the words and pictures, postproduction can add a lot of weight to a documentary film.

As the author of the documentary *The Tree of Life*, I investigated how children in foster or adoptive families live, as compared with children in institutions for the care of children without parents. The video montage and soundtrack function to punctuate emotion as well as the messages of the children, promoting the possibility that children, instead of being kept in government institutions, are given a normal family surrounding.

The whole time I am thinking about the consequences for the children that were filmed. It is important to me to say to them that they shouldn't expect any great power emanating from me, power that is, after all, limited to broadcasting the truth of their stories. **Film needs to work toward the changing of attitudes – both individual and professional, to use the story for good, without any negative motivations, that from an authentic, non-intrusive, and direct point of view, it animates viewers that would otherwise never be interested in this theme.**

Viewers often think that the journalist, through broadcasting or filming, doesn't really help children, expecting wonders and influence that go past the boundaries of their profession.

For the filming of *The Tree of Life*, we were given permission from the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Policy, which allowed us entry into institutions for the social protection of children without parents. During our preparation for filming children who lived in child care institutions, without family protection, more vulnerable, and because of this easy prey for human traffickers, we were very much helped by psychologists and social workers who worked at these institutions that opened their doors to us. Their unwavering support was reflected in their talking with the children, explaining what the film was about, what we were talking about and why we were filming. I gave the children questions that were prepared in advance and thought to myself that I hoped that our conversation didn't leave them with the feeling that they were being laid bare yet again in the "best interest of the child". To lessen the chance of misuse, we talked only with older children (16 – 17 years old) and the only question they asked was, "Will they recognize me?"

"What do you think will happen when they do recognize you?" I ask them.

"Everyone thinks that we are the lowest level of society. That's exactly how they look at us, but when they get to know us they realize that we are normal

kids and the only thing different about us is that we are here, that we live as wards of the state, and that they live at home. We are completely normal. No one recognizes that we don't live at home when we are out walking around on the street. It's not written on our foreheads."

"Generally, I avoid speaking with anyone about my past because I get the impression that people will treat me with more respect if I hide that part of my past. I know it's wrong, but that way it's much easier for me to meet new friends."

My entry card was trust and I look at everything from my own point of view. How would I react if someone asked me that question, would I be talking about this if I were in their place, or would I allow myself to be seen on a show that dealt with this theme? A theme that, according to our own mentality, is in itself sensational? I let the emotions flow into a previously prepared and conceived framework.

We are doing a trial shooting of Mira, and show her slightly dimmed footage that does not show her very clearly. I do not try to talk her into anything, do not pressure her; on the contrary, I tell her that she still might be recognized. If she thinks that this might affect her in a negative way, we won't film her. She agrees and the camera starts filming.

The filming of children, especially those raised under conditions where trust is not a given, should not be done with large crews. There are three of us. Robert Klajn, an experienced radio sound man and Miodrag Trajković, director of photography and cameraman, both of whom I have been working with for about ten years, have a feeling for people, for emotions, they understand why we are filming something and why we are filming someone precisely in that way. With his approach to people and the way he sees them, my cameraman's photography reveals a sensibility of a discreet and genuine interest in the destinies of others. **For the camera, which is already extra burdening someone who is telling his/her life's story to everyone, must, at the same time, catch that which is documentary as well as that "something" that distinguishes convincing stories from those that serve as sensationalist fill for an otherwise poor domestic news program.**

The stories and lives of these children should be in the service of the fight against the prejudices that rule our mentality. These are the destinies of little,

yet grown-up people who do not point fingers at anyone, do not accuse and do not ask for pity. Each airing of this film has to at least partially ease the life of all our children.

We are entering an institution for children without parental care. They are expecting us. We agree on who will do the talking. A smiling girl approaches us, the camera films the place where she sleeps, her friends, how she spends her free time. At one moment, the cameraman withdraws and the two of us are left alone. She is telling me something she does not want the camera to record, as though only in passing, and I know that I would never sell that sentence of hers. I cannot make use of her truth, because this girl needs to stay at this home for two more years. And while many children alter reality in order for it to become a reality show, filming staged fights with their mobile phones, these children's real lives sometimes should stay off camera. For, once the camera is turned off, each one of them is ultimately left by themselves.

The author is a qualified lawyer and has been in journalism for 25 years. She served as the editor of the First Program at Radio Studio B and was also the editor of a program at Radio B92. She is the author of a TV series in video and film production for B92, TV Studio B, and the ART channel. She is the founder of the artistic production group ShockArt. She has directed 20 documentary films and has received 10 international and domestic first prizes, including awards for investigative journalism for the project "Drvo života" (Tree of Life) about children without parental care. She is also a producer and author of campaigns against child trafficking, child poverty, and violence against children.

Human trafficking, a topic that requires a special approach – The victim first

Written by Miloš Teodorović, journalist for Radio Free Europe

The scream that pierced the air almost didn't sound human. The sound of a little girl screaming in terror. At first I cannot understand what she is actually saying, only to realize that she said, "They took my brother away!"

This was my first encounter with human trafficking. A crime which I had read about, but had never covered. Purely by chance, I was witness to an incident that happened in the very center of Belgrade. Two males walked into the home of a family and took the boy away with them. The boy's frightened older sister ran after them, screaming and wailing, trying to attract the attention of someone who could help. She kept repeating, "They took my brother away, they are going to make him beg,...!" Soon a group of us had gathered and we called the police. But before the police arrived, a young woman came who was an activist for a non-government organization that specialized in children's rights.

The incident got all the way to the media, from whom I learned of the outcome. A few streets over, the police found the two males that had seized the boy. In one of the articles it was mentioned that those same two males, who were involved in organizing children to beg on the streets, had an agreement with the parents of the boy to take him with them. Still, even today it is still not clear to me what actually happened, just as where the boy is today, and whether the abductors have ever been charged.

My interest in this topic has continued to rise since then, and in a couple of instances, the opportunity to involve myself professionally in these matters has presented itself to me. I will now tell of two separate incidents which I have worked on, with the caveat that after the media treatment, it is unknown to me whether either incident was brought as far as a court decision.

She was only sixteen years old. She was taken to the Safe House after surviving a double rape. She agreed to the interview under the condition that only one reporter was present and no other members of the crew could attend. Taking into account that the interview was needed for a segment on the show "Tačka

oslonca” that aired on Television Avala, the filming required that at least two people were present – the reporter and a cameraman. Negotiations over how this girl would be filmed lasted several days, and I will describe all the solutions that we came up with so that we could give a faithful picture of the destiny of a girl who, it would be shown later (with police confirmation), was able to get out from a human trafficking chain.

I ultimately went to the interview alone. By agreement, her words would be recorded on a mini-disk, a tool used by radio reporters. On the way to the interview, I am trying to think of what would be suitable as a first question. I am also trying to remember the basic rules that apply when interviewing a victim – whether or not it involved those that endured abuse, any kind of torture, war victims... **A basic rule was not to attempt any pathetic questions that evoke strong emotions (crying, rage, and the like) and in this way try to avoid asking for more than the victim is willing to give. In other words, making an effort to make sure that through the recounting of the trauma, the victim does not experience any new trauma. Not asking direct questions such as “What was done to you?”, “Where did he hit you?” or anything similar, but relying on impressions. With this, an essential question in this type of situation is “How did you feel?”. It is important that you should not confuse the victim by cutting her short. If you see that she is becoming confused, you are only adding to it and it is recommended that you yourself show confusion, look away from time to time, nod your head to show that you understand what she is trying to tell you and to show her that she should continue... Most importantly – don’t even try to talk to the victim if you don’t empathize, if this is just another segment or interview for you. You must realize that before you is a person that will, for the rest of their life, every day, have to come to terms with and re-live the trauma that they have had to go through. The victim will be scarred for the rest of their life.** I repeat all the rules to myself and feel ready for the interview.

Before me sat a little girl. With her was a psychologist. There was an uncomfortable silence after the introductions. I notice a look of childish curiosity while I am changing the battery in my mini-disk. At the same moment that I announce that the interview is starting, I realize that this is a mistake. Maybe (as often happens) the realization that we will be recording her words will make her tense and resistant. First question: “What would you like to tell me about yourself? How old are you?” “Sixteen,” she answered – and not a word more. “How did you meet the man that attacked you?”, realizing that I,

myself, am afraid to use the word "rape". "When I was looking for a job." Again, not a word more. I wait, hoping that she will have something to add. I don't see where this type of conversation will go. At that moment, she obviously recognized my hesitation and in a soft, unsure voice asked "Would you like for me to tell you everything that happened. From the beginning?"

Of course I agree. A monologue ensued. In short, this young girl from Belgrade, under pressure of poverty and the inability of her parents to earn enough to live on, found a job in a cafe in southern Serbia after calling a telephone number in the newspaper. The owner of the restaurant was looking for female workers in Belgrade. He got permission from the parents of my subject, whom he convinced that nothing bad would happen. Already on the way to her new place of work, he began making advances at her in the car, and began to grope her body. When they arrived, he handed her over to his colleague and announced that she would actually be working in his cafe. Two days later, without any notice or warning, he came and took her away to his own cafe with the explanation that from then on she would live and work there.

He raped her the first night. He came back again the next day, threatened that he would kill both her parents and her, and raped her again. In self-defense, she hit him with a blunt object and managed to get away. What set her case apart from that of many other girls whose trail is lost under similar circumstances, was that the heroine of our story had the small piece of luck that on that same day she was sent back to Belgrade. Her parents reported this incident to the police right away and sent their daughter to the Safe House. As we are speaking, she is still there hiding away from her assailant, who has been to her parents house three times looking for her. The police questioned him, but did not detain him. The timer on my mini-disk read 25 minutes and 26 seconds when she finished her story.

After the interview, I was left with only her voice. The editorial staff introduced an improvisation. A female colleague (who was a trained actress) sat in a chair facing a window. We filmed her from behind. The view was darkened so that all that was shown was a female outline. She simulated a person that was talking about something, from time to time lowering her head toward her chest and wiping away tears, that was synchronized with the movements of the interviewed victim. During editing it was apparent that the radio sound was not of good enough quality for television, particularly after the voice of the person

(as promised to the subject) was modified – so as to be unrecognizable. There was no other choice than to put subtitles under the parts that were used in the segment. It was a feature four minute segment of the show. No one in the studio was left unaffected, but what was most important was that the identity of the person that was interviewed was kept hidden.

The rules are clear. When it comes to such a sensitive topic, there is no way that the victim's identity should be revealed unless she does so herself. In the case of a minor, even if the parents allow such a thing, it is the responsibility of the reporter to hide that identity. In the second example that I intend to put forward, I adhered to this rule strictly.

The subject is the "Paulik" case. A story that is full of unanswered questions and confusing omissions, involving a little girl from Vranje who has been suspected to be the victim of trafficking at all. This incident was brought to my attention by members of a non-government organization that was interested in this story, which blew up in Croatian newspapers and had received tragicomic coverage in local media in Vranje (where Paulik bought TV time to proclaim his innocence), be brought to a conclusion.

The Dubrovnik police brought Paulik in after a group of tourists noticed his unseemly behavior toward a little girl in a local restaurant. After being arrested, he was quickly released. He then went from Dubrovnik to Germany, then back to Vranje where he was once again taken into custody and then released the same evening. Even after two arrests and in the case being turned over to court authorities, no precise finding or ruling was ever obtained. At the same time, in a report broadcasted by Radio Free Europe, I tried to follow the route that the child had to go, which included various institutions and international organizations, before she was returned to her family. According to the estimation of social workers, the treatment that she was subjected to was known in theory as "institutional terror".

The mistake frequently made by the Serbian media was that they cover problematic and particularly tragic stories mainly at their very beginning. Experience has shown that it is essential to constantly be included in the events of an incident so that court authorities cannot ignore these incidents and do not miss out on important details. This will eventually put alternative pressure on the courts as well as stimulate investigative organs to gather new evidence. If the Serbian media had taken this tact in regard to the "Paulik

Case”, maybe this story would have had its own court decision. In this way the case has remained unsolved and without any clear definition of whether Paulik is guilty of anything or not, whether he was connected with human traffickers or not, and whether or not he is a pedophile. There is not even any answer to suspicions regarding a number of other young girls and boys whom Paulik, with the permission of their parents, occasionally had “in his care”.

My assignment was, therefore, reduced to following the story from Dubrovnik, through Belgrade, to Vranje. This was to be done through conversations with the people that had taken over guardianship of the child, as well as those that tried to pick up Paulik’s trail.

In talking with social workers from Serbia and Croatia, representatives of non-government organizations – as well as the police, and comparing their statements, it can be concluded that the case has been passed from one instance to another, from the zone of responsibility of one to the zone of responsibility of another. Luckily, in the end the girl was returned to her family (which was, in the end, itself a victim of deceit) but, according to the facts, it becomes clear that this incident was covered up due to the indolence of the people that were involved in this case. Namely, whenever the job was handed over to a different agency, the previous one simply forgot about it. The impression given is that any matter connected to Paulik, taking into account the lack of evidence, has been closed and happily forgotten by many who are content with the fact that the police in Vranje succeeded in banning this German citizen from entering Serbia for the next ten years.

I would also underline the fact that in the last few years, the examples of violence against the weak, human trafficking (mostly in women), the abuse of children and similar incidents, have flooded the Serbian media. What should be considered to be good news, because the public has become more familiar with the risks that the weak must face, has unfortunately grown into the tragic and brutal abuse of human tragedy for the purpose of gaining in circulation and viewers. In a number of instances, the identities of victims have been uncovered, which no doubt demoralizes those that can still be helped. Along with this the reaction of the public frequently offends up with mere shock, without any solidarity with the victims. I will remind you that, for example, last year more than tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Portugal after the disappearance of a British girl. **That type of solidarity does not exist here, for which the media shares responsibility. Namely, those that sensationalize**

these types of incidents publicize them in a tabloid manner, and the most that they accomplish is shock value as opposed to any educational value. Instead of this, a mechanism should be applied that would raise the public awareness about the potential dangers and how victims could be helped. Victims should be protected as much as possible and helped to get over their trauma. When the media is in question, it must be admitted that they have continually failed the test, partly because of tabloid journalism, partly because of lack of interest, partly because of shallowness.

The author is a 34-year-old professional journalist. For the last eight years he has been working at the Belgrade bureau of Radio Free Europe. For his report on human trafficking, which was aired on RFE, he received the "Zoran Mamula" award for 2006, also receiving an award from the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia for the same piece. He has also authored a series of documentary films for the independent TV production house "Arhitel", as well as written for numerous daily publications including – "Blic", "Glas javnosti", and "Borba".

Commercials for the soul

Written by Nadežda Milenković, Creative Director for advertising campaigns

Besides being commercial, commercials can have other goals. Okay, maybe they won't change the world, but they can make it better, dress it up, introduce more socially desirable or, as it is called today, more politically correct behavior. They can absolutely do that. Even when they are done with a commercial goal in mind, and especially when their goal is to promote certain social values. Thanks to advertising campaigns, real fur is "out", as it is out not to wear condoms.

My first big experience with a campaign in the category of "social and public awareness" was at the Cannes Advertising Festival – which takes place right after the one involving films. At that time, before the advent of the Internet, the only way to see the best ads from around the world was to go to one of these festivals and view a couple of thousands of these spots. Since most of the viewings were held in various halls, visitors distributed themselves the best way they could. They did their best to see what interested them the most, while at the same time trying not to miss the many "extra-curricular" activities that the organizers, agencies, and clients held at various beaches and hotels in the area. Despite this, there was one category that managed to get us all in one place. Social and Public Awareness Campaigns. Because this was where agencies showed campaigns that were not done for money, nor so that a client would be able to boost his profit margin. Here were campaigns that one did for his own soul. For salvation, if you will. As a small addition to the cosmic scale that is much heavier on the side that weighs your contributions to commercialization. For the same reason, these are more creative than the rest, which was proved out that year because the Grand Prix award was handed out for the first time to a spot from this category.

And almost anything you could think of was being "advertised". Stay in school, say no to drugs, racists are stupid, call your aging parents... all in an unusual fashion. From "donate money" to "we are not asking for money, just for shoeboxes so that we can bury the children who died of starvation in them", from "don't drive drunk" to "if you don't care that you will kill someone because you are drunk, at least be worried that you might lose your driver's license".

Of course I came back shocked by the knowledge that ads are being made for every theme, and not only, like with us, one or two about giving blood. And, of course, I wished that I had the opportunity to participate in the creation of one. And that it makes it to a festival, of course.

Quickly, this came to pass. Unfortunately. Client: The International Red Cross Committee in Geneva. Request: That a campaign be done that would raise the awareness of the participants in "wartime activities" in Croatia that members of the Red Cross were neutral in order to keep them from attacking structures and representatives of the organization. Result: the "Don't shoot at us" campaign. And the awards came. A Silver from the New York Festival and a special award from the United Nations. An ugly cause for celebration.

At the same time, I realized why there is so much interest in these types of campaigns and why they are also the most creative. Exactly that. An ugly cause. An ugly occasion to give the most beautiful part of yourself. **Because, to be able to do one of these campaigns the creators, just like journalists, have to learn details that they otherwise would rather not know. About the hungry, the discriminated, the killed, AIDS patients, cancer patients, the elderly, the infirm, the weak, the abducted, people who were raped... Then they have to react, not with horror or pathos, but with creativity. In a way that will touch the audience, not in a way that will make them turn their heads or change the channel. To reach people that, by the same token, don't want to know all of these ugly things. To force them to do something about it, or at least be aware of a problem that they otherwise do not at all want to face. All this in 30 seconds.**

This leads to another problem, at least when we are talking about this market. Broadcasting. Whether the subject involves soup kitchens, hospices, AIDS, women's reproductive health, incest or human trafficking, the key question is always the same: what is your media budget? The most common answer: we don't have one. Contrary to popular belief, non-governmental organizations, at least most of those I have had contact with, don't have any money. In any case, they do not have the many thousands of euros necessary for broadcasting. TV channels have an obligation to broadcast important public service announcements, but not necessarily to give the most viewed times of day. Ad space in the paper will begrudgingly be given free of charge, especially if they already have paying customers for that space. The same goes for billboards. Radio stations are a much more positive example, especially local

stations, but most of the time just radio is not sufficient media exposure.

And so we come to the reason that I am writing all this to you. Media, your own, support for social campaigns. Just like you offered for the earlier "Naked Facts" campaign.²⁷ You helped it to be even more seen and noticed. Thank you for turning a commercial into news. Especially when others do the opposite – they turn news into commercials.

Nadežda Milenković is one of the leading figures in domestic advertising, and has been creative director for numerous campaigns. She has been the recipient of many awards at domestic and international advertising festivals, one of which is the United Nations Department of Public Information Awards. She is especially involved in humanitarian and social campaigns (the campaign for the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva, the campaign for the fight against AIDS, the anti-trafficking campaign for NAKED FACTS for NGO ASTRA, the campaign for the Incest Trauma Center). She was the creator of the campaign for the cult radio show "Peščanik". She is the author of the bestseller "How to Best Ruin your Child", published by the Creative Center.

²⁷ NAKED FACTS/GOLE ČINJENICE is the fifth anti-trafficking campaign launched by NGO ASTRA since its founding. The goal of the campaign is to remind both the general public and state institutions that the problem of human trafficking is still present in our country, which is frequently forgotten in a society becoming ever more tolerant of violence and the violation of human rights. The campaign message, "Women are not meat. Children are not slaves. People are not merchandise" is spoken by Jugoslav Čosić, Milutin Petrović, Ivan Tasovac, Dejan Anastasijević, Željko Bodrožić, Branislav Lečić and Vukašin Marković.

MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND TERMINOLOGY USED

RESPONSIBILITY IN WORDS: Media Coverage of Human Trafficking in Serbia

Author of the research: Ivana Milošević, Head of Media Analysis & Research, KLIPING

Researchers on the project: Filip Barić, Senior Media Analyst and Tanja Jerinić, Media Analyst, KLIPING

About the research

Human trafficking is one of the biggest global problems today, and the media play a key role in shaping public awareness and understanding of this phenomenon. Through objective, balanced and investigative reporting, the media not only inform the public about this complex problem, but also initiate important discussions to strengthen legal frameworks and improve support for victims. Good journalism can also raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of human trafficking, and enable citizens to recognise, and report presumed cases, thus potentially saving lives, and contributing to the fight against this global crime.

The research on human trafficking covered the entire year 2022, and the analysis included all types of media - print, electronic and internet portals²⁸. Print media sample includes all daily newspapers (Alo!, Blic, Danas, Informer, Kurir, Nova, Objektiv²⁹, Politika, Srpski telegraf and Večernje novosti), and three weeklies - NIN, Nedeljnik and Vreme. Electronic media included all televisions with national coverage (RTS 1, RTS 2, TV Pink, TV B92, Happy TV and TV Prva), and regional television N1, broadcasted on cable operator SBB, and TV Kurir, available to clients of Telekom Serbia. Internet portals included the top 5 most visited media in 2022 according to Gemius Rating data, namely Blic.rs, Kurir.rs, Telegraf.rs, Mondo.rs and Nova.rs³⁰.

To determine how and to what extent the media in Serbia report on human

²⁸ Source: Agency "Kliping" Belgrade, archive for the year 2022

²⁹ Publishing of the paper was cancelled in 2022

³⁰ Source: [Gemius.com](https://www.gemius.com)

trafficking, a quantitative-qualitative methodology was used, with a single text being a unit of the analysis.

The quantitative dimension shows the representation of selected reports in the media in total, individually and by authors of the texts. The qualitative dimension included 5 basic categories for analysing each individual publication:

- Forms of human trafficking (sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, forced labour, forced begging, forced commission of crimes, organ trafficking (forced organ harvesting for the purpose of sale) and forced marriages). Also, two additional categories were introduced: the articles in which journalists reported on human trafficking in general, and those about the crime of „human trafficking“ in the context of migration;
- Thematic focus as a narrow reporting context;
- Publicity, i.e. the importance of the topic of human trafficking (the main topic in the text and a secondary topic);
- Type of headlines (informative and sensationalist);
- Informativeness of the article – i.e., does the text/report inform about the fight against human trafficking?

The complex methodological approach implies cross-referencing two basic dimensions of the analysis, and therefore the data obtained in qualitative analysis are further quantitatively processed.

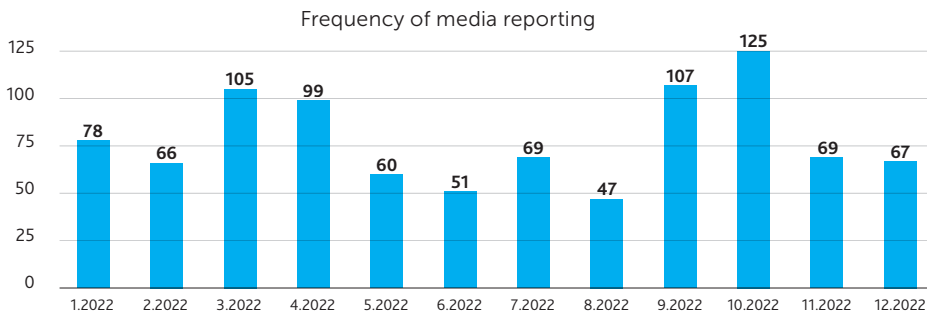
Data analysis

Kvantitativni deo

In 2022, there were **943 reports** on human trafficking. **By type of media**, the most media reports were published on internet portals (524), followed by the press (327) and television (92).

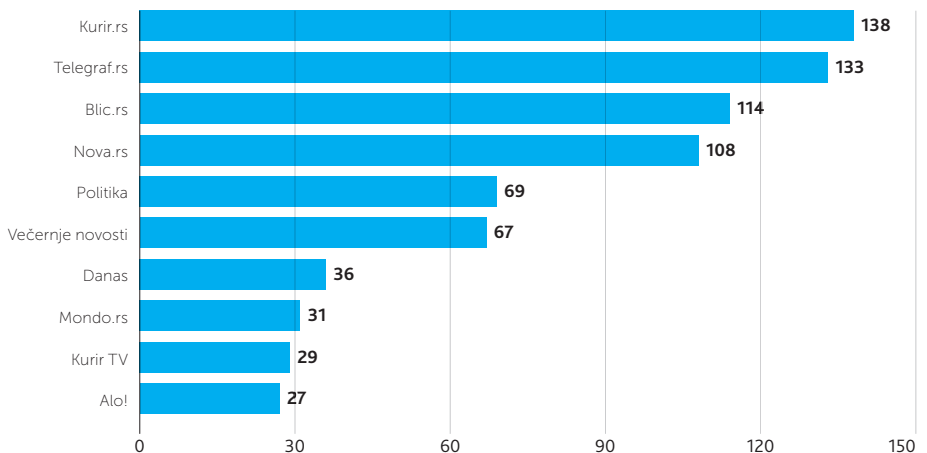
943 - Total reports - type of media

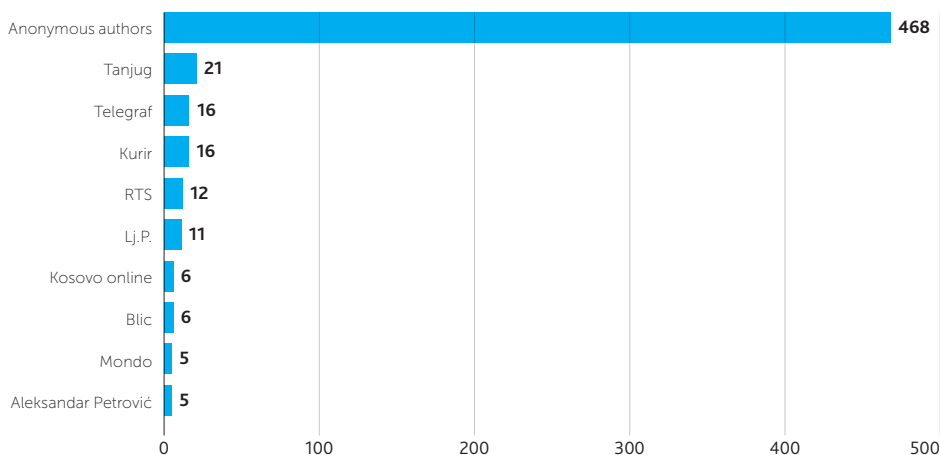




Frequency of reporting on human trafficking shows that the most reports were published in October 2022 (125), September (107), March (105) and most often the context was imprisonment of suspects of the crime of trafficking in human beings. In October, in Belgrade suspects were questioned for forcing a minor into prostitution using fraud, force and threats. September was marked by the arrest of a five-member group from Šabac and Loznica on suspicion of human trafficking and debt slavery. In March, individuals from Aleksinac were arrested in Niš, accused of human trafficking, abusing and pandering of a 20-year-old girl.

The most pieces in the analysed period were published on April 5, 2022, when Ljubiša Vasić (55), owner of a restaurant from Mihajlovac near Smederevo, was arrested together with waiter J.J. (62) on suspicion of forcing the girls from his restaurant to engage in prostitution in secret rooms for orgies (Blic.rs).





Internet portals *Kurir.rs* (138), *Telegraf.rs* (133) and *Blic.rs* (114) published the most articles on human trafficking. **As for print media**, *Politika* (69), *Večernje Novosti* (67) and *Danas* (36) stand out. Among electronic media, the most TV programs were shown on the television of the daily newspaper *Kurir* (29, of which 13 in the morning program *Redakcija*), followed by *Prva* television (21 programs, of which 8 in the 150 minutes show) and *TV N1*, which broadcasted 18 TV programs (6 in *Novi Dan* and the central news program *Dnevnik* each).

Almost 50% of the reports have anonymous authors (468), followed by information carried from the Tanjug news agency (21 in total). As for individual authors, a journalist of *Večernje novosti*, with the initials Lj.P. published 11 articles on human trafficking.

In the analysed period, the topic of human trafficking appeared on **32 front pages**, and in 10% of the total number of articles in press. The most articles, that is, 8 each, had headlines on front pages of ***Politika*** (*Legal framework for the oldest profession; 20 migrants died in the sea, search for the missing; Credit Suisse kept the money of dictators and drug dealers for decades; Europe in trouble because of Scholz's call to migrants; Who are Albanian terrorists targeting in Kosovo? Rambouillet was a frame for blackmail; Strategic partnership between Belgrade and Baku, and Heads at risk, life in a backpack*) and ***Danas*** (*Mocking victims and state institutions; Human traffickers embrace the digital revolution; Kossev: A total of 11 arrested for the rape of a girl in Kosovo; Father pimped*

crossings by migrants. It is important to point out that human trafficking involves exploitation of people using force and fraud, while illegal border crossing of migrants with no valid documents does not necessarily imply human trafficking. Frequently, there are cases when Hungarian-Czech police patrols find a vehicle with foreign registration plates and a Serbian driver, with foreigners without valid documents for residence in Hungary. In such cases, journalists report that for the crime of human trafficking a penalty of one to five years of imprisonment, with aggravated circumstances 5 to 15 years, is stipulated in Hungary. In the mentioned case, although there is a suspicion, the mere involvement of migrants with no documents does not automatically imply human trafficking. In professional reporting we should refrain from making conclusions until all relevant facts and evidence are determined on the nature and circumstances of such cases.

Forced labour was the topic of 84 reports. Media in 2022 continued to report on terrifying living conditions for the workers on the tyre factory construction site of the Chinese company “Linglong” near Zrenjanin (Blic.rs). Besides, in September 2022 in Belgrade a regional conference on the fight against human trafficking for labour exploitation took place. More than 100 participants from Bosnia and Hercegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and other countries and international organisations gathered at two-day conference “The fight against labour trafficking in Europe: standards, reality and new action strategies”, to consider strategies for the fight against trafficking for labour exploitation, the crime affecting an increasing number of women, men and children, both transnationally and internally, within each country. (Telegraf.rs).

On the fifth place there is **organ trafficking (forced organ harvesting for the purpose of sale)**, which was found in 50 media reports within the research, and most frequently on Kurir.rs portal (12). It has been mentioned most frequently in the context of alleged events in Kosovo, so the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama sent a letter to the Council of Europe member states and asked them to reject the report on organ trafficking by Dick Marty (Blic.rs).

Forced begging follows (39 reports, that is 4,14%), and the news that marked 2022 was that in September, members of the Serbian Ministry of the Interior, together with the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Šabac, arrested a five-member international criminal group accused of trafficking in human beings. The group operated in Serbia and Italy and forced people into debt slavery from 2016 to 2022 by borrowing them money with high interest rates. It is

suspected that the victims were forced to beg in Italy to repay the debts (Nova.rs).

A total of 27 media articles reported on **forced marriages**. News in focus in the previous year in Montenegro was when the police there accused K. M. (31) and B. M. (38) from Kosovo, residing in Podgorica, for arranging marriage of a 12-year-old girl, the daughter of K.M. and a 12-year-old boy from that family for the purpose of financial gain (Blic.rs). Forced commission of crimes was on the last place with only one report in 2022.

	Forms of human trafficking	No. of reports	%
1	Sexual exploitation and forced prostitution	380	40,30%
2	Human trafficking – general	270	28,63%
3	Crime of “human trafficking” in the context of migration	92	9,76%
4	Forced labour	84	8,91%
5	Organ trafficking (organ harvesting for the purpose of sale)	50	5,30%
6	Forced begging	39	4,14%
7	Forced marriages	27	2,86%
8	Forced commission of crime	1	0,11%
	TOTAL	943	

Analysis of thematic focus shows that **arrests and trials** for human trafficking are the topics of almost half of the texts (49.95%). Another significant category in media reporting on human trafficking includes the topic of **fighting against human trafficking**, with a total of 48 pieces. These texts focused, among other things, on the training of employees in the hospitality industry to identify human trafficking (Politika), as well as on instructions targeting the readers and viewers on how to recognise this problem and what exactly it entails. The media reported timely on various events aimed at combating human trafficking, including **conferences, workshops, and campaigns**. Public attention was attracted by the campaign “How close are you?”, which NGO ASTRA started on September 21, aiming to provide information and prevent human trafficking. On that occasion, the installation “Labyrinth of Human Trafficking” was arranged on Republic Square in Belgrade. ASTRA wanted to show the experience of victims of labour trafficking to the citizens. The research showed that the media in Serbia also report **in the context of the**

crisis in Ukraine (3%) and that refugee women and children from Ukraine are more and more falling victims of human traffickers after they escape the horrors of war in their homeland and come to the EU. Human rights NGOs have warned of this danger and appealed to the EU member states to increase control (Kurir.rs). In 17 reports, there were **confessions of human trafficking victims**. One of them was Nevena Mitić, a victim of human trafficking, who was taken to the Netherlands in 1995, where she was forced into prostitution for two years. After one person took her away from the trafficking chain, another one found her and saved her. Her life was put to the test, her youth was taken away from her, but the experience made her stronger and she decided to share her story to encourage other women.

	Thematic focus (Top 10)	No. of reports	%
1	Arrests and trials of traffickers in human beings	471	49,95%
2	Fight against human trafficking	48	5,09%
3	Alleged organ trafficking in Kosovo	44	4,67%
4	On the phenomenon in general	43	4,56%
5	Conferences, workshops, and campaigns on the fight against human trafficking	28	2,97%
6	Ukrainian crisis	24	2,55%
7	Case of "Linglong" factory workers	24	2,55%
8	Statistics on human trafficking victims	19	2,01%
9	Testimonies of human trafficking victims	17	1,80%
10	US State Department's TIP Report for 2022.	12	1,27%
	TOTAL	730	

The topic of human trafficking was the main one in 563 reports (59.70%), while the importance of this topic in 380 articles was secondary (40,30%).

Importance of the topic of THB in reports



One of the criteria in the analysis were the **headlines**, which play a key role in professional and objective journalism because they are often the first contact

with readers, especially online, as many do not read the entire content. The analysis showed that, unfortunately, **more than half of the headlines were sensationalist**. This way of reporting often downplays the seriousness of the situation and may lead to stigmatization and further traumatization of the victims. It may also prevent victims from seeking help and support because they feel ashamed and misunderstood. In addition, such an approach can create unrealistic public perception of human trafficking, making it difficult to tackle the problem effectively and compassionately. *Kurir.rs* leads in the number of sensationalist titles, such as: A GIRL (20) FROM ALEKSINAC WAS PIMPED FOR MONEY, AND LATER SOLD; She was invited to babysit, and then FORCED INTO PROSTITUTION; **THEY HAVE NO COMPASSION!** A pregnant madam and her boyfriend abused an ORPHAN and forced her into prostitution to pay back a fabricated debt; THE WAITER OFFERED ME S*X WITH PROSTITUTES IN A RESTAURANT: A witness at the trial told how Ljubiša Vasić pimped the girls; **A WOMAN FROM NIŠ SOLD FOR 1,000 DINARS**, THEY LIVED IN A VAN: Human traffickers from Aleksinac were imprisoned; **MY DAD DID THAT TO ME!** After TERRIBLE testimony of a girl from Subotica, MONSTROUS father got imprisoned for 12 years; DISTURBING! SLAUGHTERING AND KILLING OF SERBS! ORGANS HARVESTED FOR SALE: Vulin: Film "The Yellow House" is what we in Serbia owe to the victims!

Sensationalist headlines are also seen in other media, such as: **HE GOT BONER WHILE BEING ARRESTED!** (Alo!), HE DRUGED POOR WOMEN AND FORCED THEM INTO PROSTITUTION! (Alo!), THEY ABUSED THE GIRL, THEN SOLD HER FOR 200 EUROS FOR MARRIAGE (Blic), **"HIT HER FACE, GRAB HER NECK"** Who is controversial influencer Andrew Tate and why did he live in OUR NEIGHBORHOOD: He is suspected of rape and human trafficking (Blic.rs), A DISABLED PERSON FORCED TO BEGG He had to bring 100 euros a day, they tortured him for 7 years: Prosecution against the FAMILY FROM HELL, they are free awaiting the verdict (Blic.rs), They forced the nanny into prostitution, THEN THEY SOLD HER INTO WHITE SLAVERY (Informer), A RUSSIAN WOMAN SOLD A BABY TO GET MONEY FOR PLASTIC SURGERY! A couple bought a 5-day-old child, but something gave them away! (Mondo.rs), Prosecution against the five: The girl was forced into prostitution, **raped with a broom** (Nova.rs), He sold his daughter for 10,000 euros (Objektiv), 11 MANIACS RAPED A GIRL (Srpski telegraf), We were in the brothel "The first hairstyles of Serbia": The prices of the girls depend on one thing, and you enter through a secret corridor (Telegraf.rs), They took up to 5,000 euros per night (Večernje novosti) and Sold his daughter for 2,000 euros (Večernje novosti).

The daily newspaper Politika leads in the number of informative headlines, such as: Knowledge and education against human trafficking; Free trainings for women from vulnerable groups; Seka Sablić's brother is imprisoned in Serbia; Children who live and earn money on the street need support; Father gets 12 years in prison for abusing his underage daughter; Labour exploitation as a new form of slavery; Workers from Vietnam without adequate protection and Human trafficking - from sexual exploitation to selling organs.

Type of headlines



In addition to sensationalist headlines, reporting on human trafficking is often accompanied by disturbing images or illustrations. Such visual content can significantly affect the quality and perception of reporting because it can enhance the emotional impact of the articles, but at the same time there is a risk of secondary victimization and traumatic reactions of readers/viewers.

Examples of the analysed texts with disturbing photographs / Illustrations



The research has shown that 166 reports inform readers/viewers on trafficking in human beings and have educational content. The leading media is Politika daily paper, which, for example, dealt with legal framework for the legalisation of prostitution and its potential impact on the fight against human trafficking. Kurir.rs is on the second place. It has investigated how one falls victim of human trafficking, warned how to recognise the websites where potential predators recruit victims. Anti-trafficking NGOs, like ASTRA and Atina also contributed to this topic and to the education of the public. Other 777 articles most often had the format of statistical reports and reported on daily events.

Does the text / report inform on the fight against human trafficking?



Conclusion

The research of media coverage of trafficking in human beings in 2022 indicates an intensive focus on the issue in Serbia. **With a total of 943 reports**, the leaders were internet portals, while print media and TV coverages were also significant.

The analysis showed that media mostly informed on **arrests and trials related to trafficking in human beings**, with a special focus on **sexual exploitation** which amounted to 40% of the total reports. Besides, the analysis showed that the media published **educational content** on the fight against human trafficking in a significant number of reports on conferences, workshops, campaigns, and trainings, emphasising importance of the prevention and raising awareness of the phenomenon.

However, despite the efforts, a significant number of headlines appeared to have **sensationalist approach**, which might influence the public perception and the attitude towards victims of human trafficking. Sensationalism in the headlines and disturbing images may lead to secondary victimisation of trafficked persons and their stigmatisation, which is a challenge for responsible journalism. Also, the **issue of wrong interpretation of migrant situation** has been noted, which adds to the complexity of the issue. Often, the reports on migrants with no valid papers were hastily interpreted as human trafficking cases, without a due research or corroboration. This aspect shows the need for professional and in-depth journalism, which differentiates between human trafficking and illegal migrations.

The media play a twofold role in reporting on human trafficking. On one hand they have the power to educate and raise awareness on this complex topic. On the other hand, sensationalist headlines and disturbing visual material indicate the need for enhanced responsibility and ethical standards in journalism. In media reporting on human trafficking, the journalists should **pay special attention to the way of reporting and avoid sensationalist**

headlines, thus respecting privacy and dignity of victims. It is important to highlight educational content in order to raise awareness of the issue and the responses, while thoroughly researching and documenting each case. A balanced reporting that humanises the victims, cooperation with experts, rejecting the stereotypes, as well as transparency of sources, are key to safeguard objective reporting on this complex topic. By such approach, media does not only contribute to a more reasonable and accurate reporting, but also actively participate in the making of an informed society with effective response to human trafficking.

Terminology related to trafficking in women

Written by prof. Dr. Svenka Savić

Discussion on human trafficking in the last few years has opened a series of theoretical and practical issues when language is concerned. The first question is what kind of terminology suits to this phenomenon. Whether our language adequately marks terms, actors and processes in connection with trafficking. If it is a new phenomenon, does the language which communicates it has enough strength to express such significance. Do the new phenomena express old meanings through language, while the way that our cognitive mechanisms operate do not allow that a new phenomenon in the society is properly conceived. One of such phenomena is human trafficking. When we say human trafficking then we have in mind the recruitment and/or transportation of people by use of force or threat of force, the abuse of authority or position of the superior, deception and other forms of coercion, for the purposes of sexual or economic exploitation to make a profit or gain for the benefit of the pimp, procurer or pander, trafficker, owner of the brothels, and other employers, clients or criminal groups. One of the purposes of such benefit is forced prostitution of women (and men), beside illegal work, sex tourism and entertainment, pornography, begging, etc. When prostitution is in question, the source of earnings is a woman's body, thus, the basic question is to what extent do women have the right to control their own body, if their body is a commodity just like any other commodity to be spent, and is source of enrichment of others – primarily men (but women as well).

This issue is not new in theoretical discussion, although its practical aspects are much more complex than one century ago, when, for example, in 1893 in Novi Sad "Prostitution Statute" was adopted in the time of Maria Theresa's rule. In the Prostitution Statute, we can analyze legislation terminology of that time used to regulate the phenomenon of prostitution.

This paper aims to prove how language (in this case Serbian) is a powerful instrument to preserve stereotypes and discrimination, in this case against women; and how the media of today do (not) contribute sufficiently to bringing the language into conformity with its purpose – the elimination of stereotypes and discrimination.

I will analyze first of all how the legislator used certain terms in the Prostitution

Statute for persons directly included by the co-operation chain for the purpose of making a profit. Consequently, I will then analyze how the authors of texts in the print media use terms for identifying the same actors, and I will compare the meaning of terms offered in the Serbian Dictionary of Serbian³¹(hereinafter referred to as the Dictionary).

Once there was the Prostitution Statute

In this analysis, I am interested in terms used for persons who participate in the trafficking process. In the Statute, they were designated as follows:

- person who provides services,
- person who receives services,
- person who places at disposal premises for such services,
- term for the very premises,
- the rule of behavior in such premises.

Brothels were buildings where women were available. Brothels were supposed to be only in specified locations. ("In the streets where a church or school is found, a brothel may not be.")

Ženskinje (pluralia tantum, an archaic term no longer in use, with the meaning female person) is used in the Statute to designate a woman who manages the brothel under certain conditions, or persons who work in it. In the Dictionary, the term ženskinje (female person) stands for women, females, but when the term refers to women in the public sphere, the term used is a prostitute (p. 369).

When the legislator determined who must not be in the brothel, more precisely, who must stay away from the building, then it used the term čeljade (person). Dictionary defines čeljade as: human being, man, person in general (p. 1509). " Ženskinje (female person) under the age of 30 years) must not be held as čeljade (person) in the brothel."

A person who did not enter this "invisible" place, but stayed outside was a human being and a person (čeljade). And what happens to that person once she got registered at the brothel?

³¹ *Rečnik srpskog jezika* (Novi Sad, Matica srpska, 2007)

But, when the ženskinje (female person) became property of the brothel, the legislator identified it as a wanton woman - socially unacceptable. "Each brothel owner is obliged, before accepting any female person in his home, to bring her into the captancy, where her documents shall be reviewed, and where a report shall be made on her intention to join the brothel; upon this she shall be examined by a district doctor, and on the basis of the medical certificate, a health booklet is issued, with a photograph of the respective wanton woman, and then her name is entered in the genealogical records". Thus, the Statute confirmed that a woman changed her status - that she became a wanton woman by entering her name into the records; bludnica/wantan woman is in the Dictionary described as a promiscuous woman, lewd or licentious, sexually unrestrained (p. 95). However, the Statute did not mention a wanton man, while the Dictionary says that a wanton man is a lewd person; lustful; lascivious; libidinous; lecherous (p. 95).

The Statute regulated professional relationship of the brothel owner. ("The brothel owner is obliged to provide to the wanton woman accepted in his home decent food, accommodation and healthy resting place."). The legislator had a seemingly correct attitude toward this female person, because care for her body was ordered; however, a term was applied for her because of which both the ones who interpreted the law as those who applied it could have easily violated the rights of such a woman considering her sinful, because wanton behaviour and wanton woman are a sin. Namely, the term did not reflect the possibility that such woman could have been pushed, recruited, bought, sold, transferred or hidden for the purposes of sexual or economic exploitation to make a profit or benefit for other (primarily male) persons, and not herself.

The Statute specified when women are wanton women; their behaviour was strictly controlled and they had to be invisible to public and hidden from it. ("It is prohibited to wanton women to stand and walk in front of the brothel, ... to walk down streets or public places, or scandalize the public in any way or any place; they are prohibited to address men passing by the brothel, either from the window or door, and call them to come in.")

The analysis of this document shows that for the legislator, the basic matrix was founded in the patriarchal model, where classification between inside-outside exists; the ones who were outside, in this case in the place where forbidden activities happened, bore the names which violated and destroyed

their identity, and when they were outside of this area, they were closer 'to us', i.e. the legislators themselves, and terms indicating such persons had no negative dimensions.

One form of this complex social problem such as human trafficking has to do with (forced) prostitution, beside illegal labour, servitude, coercive marriage, pornography, begging or exploiting with the purpose of performing criminal activities. According to definition, human trafficking is "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation".

The basic theme here is control over another person, as expression of interhuman relations in which one person wears out and destroys another person for profit. Today, we do not have a law, but we have data in the media, today's basic form of presentation and informing of the public on phenomena happening in society. Is such reporting under the influence of the basic patriarchal inside-outside model of thinking, as we have proved to be legislative practice one century ago, or has something changed about it?

If we look at today's newspapers³², we can see that the phenomenon itself has not changed a bit, while relationships and meanings when language is in question have gone through substantial change.

In the original scheme, in which a person has control over another person, as described in the Statute from 1893: there are female persons (ženskinje) – wanton woman – brothel – master of the house – the police, while in today's scheme there are also some other links in the chain of human trafficking. The basic characteristics of both schemes, however, is that the persons in the chain are directed towards one another.

³² This paper also includes the analysis of the printed media from the previous research. The method of the analysis is based on a sample of 285 texts published in the period from 1 May to 31 October 2008 in six Belgrade daily newspapers (Politika, Danas, Večernje novosti, Blic, Press and Kurir).

Table 9. Names found in the media for actors in the human trafficking chain

person	person	person	person
<i>under control</i>	<i>who controls</i>	<i>who uses services</i>	<i>who represents the law</i>
girl underage girl woman lady of the night prostitute victim white slave love seller easy woman human flesh sex worker	pimp owner pander employer procurer organizer	client customer consumers of sex services	the police guardians of the order (law enforcement officers) members of the public order and peace department

We can see that a process (chain) is in question, which directly or indirectly includes people who do not do good for one another. Human trafficking may be considered as a process where personality and human traits are eliminated and destroyed.

We can see that the largest number of terms is reserved for the commodity – i.e. person under control. For the names found in the newspapers, we looked up in the Dictionary to make an assessment to what extent the meanings are at the same time the property of the community which uses them and a part of a patriarchal matrix, which the authors of newspaper articles subconsciously transfer into their texts on trafficking in women³³.

Girl – Pursuant to the aforementioned “Prostitution Statute”, we can see that a female person younger than 16 years of age cannot be in the brothel, while ženskinja (female person) who manages the brothel may not be younger than 40 years of age, which means that the girls were forbidden to be in the brothel. Today, mainly girls or underage girls are victims of the human trafficking chain, in which they are found against their own free will. If we study the way in which the author of the text uses this word, then we can see that at the beginning of the newspaper text, a person under control is designated as a girl. In the Dictionary, according to the main meaning of the word, it is “a young unmarried female person” (p. 257). The author of the text continues to identify her as a girl until she is enslaved in the trafficking chain, when her status is changed most frequently into victim.

³³ Goldman, Emma, 2001. Anarchism and Other Essays, «The Traffic in Women», Autonomous Women’s Centre, Belgrade, 81-97 (text published for the first time in 1910).

Pimp³⁴ - The Dictionary says that the main meaning it is a “procurer, pander, the one who profits from earnings of easy women”, while the other is “owner of a brothel; bawd” (p.671). The newspaper article says that the “pimp arranges prostitutes for potential clients.” All terms related to persons who control a woman are reserved for male persons (there is no word for female pimp in Serbian), and the pimp has all the time all characteristics of a human being.

Prostitute v. – 1. “to induce another to sexual intercourse”; 2. “to disgrace; to dishonor” (p.1076)

Prostitute oneself v. – 1. “to (be) get(ting) engaged in prostitution”; 2. “to be disgraced. To be dishonored” (p.1076)

Prostitute n. – the one engaged in prostitution, wanton woman, whore; corrupt, deceitful person having no principles (p. 1076). In the Dictionary, the pimp and the prostitute are considered to be two professions. From the description of the meaning of **pimp** and **prostitute**, we can see that his profession is connected to her work (profits from earnings of easy women), and his personality is not degraded. Thus, the word pimp, today, does not have such negative connotation as the word prostitute. We can establish this from the term employer or the organizer of trafficking, a term which indicate social approval of a job. It is probably out of desire to provide the same treatment for prostitutes that the use of the term sex workers is promoted”.

The police – “public authority in charge of maintaining peace, the system in power and order” (p. 966). In the text we can find the example for the use of this word (“The police are powerless if the victim does not wish to cooperate”), from which it can be seen that those who are supposed to maintain order and peace for all citizens may perform their duties only if a prostitute lets them do it, which brings into question meaning of their work. There are also other terms for these persons that exercise control over other persons.

Guardians of the order (Law enforcement officers) – A guardian of the order is defined in the Dictionary as a “person charged with maintaining, upholding something, protector, safeguard; a guardian angel, who protects and guides a particular person” (p. 1521). If we know that the police is a link in the chain of maintaining and expanding of trafficking in women, than the explanation in the Dictionary makes us believe that the illusion of maintaining order is within

³⁴ We can learn from other texts that it is possible for a woman to have the role of a pimp, and the usual term is the French word *madam*.

their power. ("In spite of the efforts of law enforcement, there is a danger that the prostitution shall always find a way to survive.")

From the examples in texts and from the Dictionary definition, one could conclude that the police is also the part of trafficking in the terms that it does not maintain order, but protects sometimes the pimps and those who control women. We need a different determinant of these authorities, by which it could be demonstrated that they do not perform well their duty of maintaining order.

Lady of the night – A girl becomes a lady of the night in the text to indicate the time when the ones who control her engage her.

Women – "a human being able to give birth, opposite sex of men, married person, wife, an adult female person" (p. 369).

Only in several cases the term women is used for persons under control ("Although these women are engaged in illicit activities, the police treat them attentively and correctly"). The term was used to justify police activities.

Easy woman – "a woman of loose morals in relation to men" (p. 369). We can see that even here the criterion of her behaviour is a man.

Victim – what is offered as a gift to god as a sign of gratitude or for asking mercy; someone who suffers harm; unselfish giving, helping someone, self-sacrifice (p. 375). A girl becomes a victim in the author's text when she is enslaved in the chain of trafficking ("Trafficking victim generally does not want to reveal her "employers"). This means the end of a process in which she loses the characteristics of youth and femininity (the noun victim is used both for male and female persons).

Slaves – A slave is a person who without any resistance suffers unlimited domination of another person. In slavery, the owner had complete property rights to the slave (p.1168), he could kill and cripple the slave not being accountable to anyone. A slave is a person who silently works and suffers disempowerment, humiliation, injustice, brutality. Thus, the slave is no more a person (in the sense from the heading in the table above). The term designates the last stage in the process of a person under control when such person is not enabled to demonstrate her personality or femininity. In the process of

trafficking in human beings, in this case women, she loses all characteristics of a person, but is still alive. Can we expect any changes regarding this? In one of the newspaper texts we have read, given these facts, it probably will not be possible. ("The white slavery path is changeable, because it helps it to survive.")

Live flesh – A term used for women and girls in the trafficking process aimed to demonstrate that it is the last stage when a person under control and influence of violent control measures becomes something similar to unlive matter and only an echo of a human being.

Terms *sex worker*, *consumers of sexual services*, *members of the public order and peace department*, have originated in an effort to change through the language or with the help of the language the mental presentation, primarily of the actors in the prostitution process, but also in the whole chain of human trafficking. To offer a term which suggests that a job is in question. In some countries, prostitution is legalized and the issue settled in this way. In this example, I would like to draw attention that a team of experts is necessary to provide another terminology related to human trafficking, that would reflect relationships which exist between the persons in the chain.

The analyzed texts show that the authors of newspaper articles document in fact their personal position when this process is in question, because in their memory are kept meanings of the words generally accepted in the community, and this thesis is proven with the help of the Dictionary. A good deal of texts demonstrate negative attitude of the author toward persons under control, in this case women, and almost positive one when the police and persons who control women are in question.

In order to change the angle of the journalists on the phenomenon of trafficked women, their attention should be drawn to several processes which happen concurrently with the text writing. Firstly, they understand a woman in the chain of trafficking to be a person who has lost human characteristics, while the ones who control her never do; the destroying of a woman until she becomes a victim and commodity or flesh goes exactly through maintaining the one who controls her.

It could be concluded that the basic cognitive matrix copied in the text of the authors or the meanings given in the sentences have not changed a lot when

the media communicate facts on phenomena related to sale and trafficking in women. The moment a person enters into the trafficking chain, she loses characteristics that she belongs to us, human characteristics, because subjected to trade are exactly characteristics of a human being: body, honour, reputation, power. She loses this. In their texts, authors confirm that human traits of a person are lost under control of another person, in this case a male person, for profit. Tangible assets are a driving force when torturing of other people is in question. A considerable number of texts have been published by ASTRA, but also other women NGOs, to educate and explain what trafficking in people really is, how young persons can easily fall into the trafficking chain and how to prepare them not to fall into the chain. In such texts, the terminology is cautious and the women in the chain respected. Such texts are an example to others how to write on the same phenomenon.

If we would like to recommend how human trafficking should be addressed in the print media, in fact we really do not know who the authors to whom are given to. It is not transparent who the authors really are. We are concerned because only few articles are signed with the full name of the author, while there are much more those in which the authorship is invisible (either author's initials are found under the texts or there are only information on the news agency source). Do the authors fear the control of those who are part of the trafficking chain?

One more thing deserves our attention, i.e. the photos which accompany the articles. They mostly back up the stereotype of women in the trafficking chain. The photos show women in mini skirts and deep cut neckline blouses, high heel shoes, mostly without a face or head. However, the analysis of photographs requires other knowledges than the linguistic ones, and should be made by photography experts in the newspapers.

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USEFUL INFORMATION

Recommendations for reporting on cases of trafficking in human beings

This chapter is envisaged as a summary of key information on human trafficking and guidelines for ethical reporting on the subject.

WHAT IS TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS?

- Human trafficking is one of the most lucrative criminal activities.
- Anyone can become a victim of human trafficking, regardless of gender, age, nationality, religious and other beliefs, level of education and place of residence.
- Not all illegal migrants are victims of human trafficking, but human trafficking and illegal migration are often related processes; either victims of human trafficking are illegally transferred across borders, or illegal migrants fall victims of traffickers due to coercion by organizers of illegal migration.
- The key element of human trafficking is exploitation.
- There are two most common types of exploitation of victims of human trafficking: sexual exploitation and labour exploitation, and a combination of these two types of exploitation is not rare either.
- Traffickers often take the victims to an unfamiliar environment, far from their place of residence, and sometimes to a place where the victims do not speak the language, to control them more easily and to prevent their escape.
- The most common control mechanisms are: confinement/isolation; threat and use of violence / intimidation, including threats against the victim's family; debt slavery - the obligation to repay (often fabricated) debts;
- Victims are sometimes forced to commit criminal acts, then we speak of a form of human trafficking called forced commission of crime.
- In addition to physical exploitation, victims always experience psychological trauma.
- Human trafficking survivors need long-term professional help in rehabilitation to reintegrate into society. However, in some cases, even when all the kinds of help and support are available, it is not possible to eliminate the damage caused by the trauma they experience.

HOW TO REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS - THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISTAKES, AND HOW TO PREVENT THEM

- In addition to international conventions and other acts that directly or indirectly apply (also) to human trafficking, it is important to know how a national legislation tackles the issue.
- Human trafficking can be addressed through several aspects: economic, political, women's rights/human rights, legal, security, organized crime, etc. For your article, choose the aspect that has been written about the least. There is more chance that you will say something new.
- The readers, and unfortunately sometimes journalists and editors, often do not differentiate between illegal migration, international prostitution, and trafficking in women.
- Trafficking in women is mostly reported on after the public finds out that a victim of trafficking, mostly a woman was forced into prostitution, but usually that does not lead to an extended analytical reporting on the phenomenon of human trafficking.
- Many media articles are superficial, stimulate primitive passions, and encourage or follow alleged affairs.
- In a sensationalist approach to reporting, journalists often reveal the identity of victims of human trafficking, which leads to their additional stigmatization and revictimization, and stereotypes and assumptions about the profile of victims of human trafficking prevail over investigative journalism.
- Real names, whereabouts or other information that could reveal the victim's identity must be omitted from any media release.
- It is paramount that the victim of human trafficking cannot be recognized in a photo or video.
- The victim, who is already severely traumatized, humiliated and harmed, is further victimized by irresponsible public presentation of information about his/her situation of exploitation.
- A victim of human trafficking interviewed by a journalist has the right to:
 - › know who s/he is talking to;
 - › know the purpose of the interview;
 - › refuse to answer a question or to provide only information that s/he considers relevant;
 - › know what is being noted or recorded and review the material before it

is published and delete or amend any information/statements previously made.

- The journalist must know what the victim does not need to know: what the potential dangers are for him/her if s/he agrees to speak publicly, especially in front of the cameras.
- The victim should be warned about possible effects of publishing the story, and s/he should certainly be provided with professional legal advice and any other necessary advice.
- If the victim, for any reason, is not able to assess the possible risks of publishing the article, journalists and editors must think about the best interests of the victim and do all to protect them from retraumatization.
- Adhere to ethical standards of journalism when interviewing a victim of human trafficking.
- Do not pressurise the victim you are interviewing in any way that could be harmful to him/her.
- Ask questions that are commensurate with the age of the victim (especially for child victims).
- Do not ask questions about sexual abuse (especially when the victim is a child).
- If the victim requests, be ready to end the conversation at any time.
- Do not publish any material that may directly or indirectly harm the victim or someone from his/her immediate surroundings.
- Avoid stereotypes and sensationalist approach.
- Do not publish photos showing the victim of human trafficking in a sexual context, especially if the victim is a child.
- The media houses or news agencies that have comprehensive written procedures for dealing with sensitive cases, including human trafficking, act most professionally. Therefore, the recommendation to the editors is to develop victim protection procedures in reporting and ethical reporting standards.
- If a journalist is working on a story for a media house that does not have procedures for protecting victims in reporting on their situation, or if it is an independent journalist, the so-called „freelancer“ - the journalist should have a clear personal code of reporting based on general professional and ethical standards, including procedures in reporting on human trafficking.
- If a journalist is working on a story about a specific victim, it is important not to reveal the victim’s identity, address, or contacts to anyone, including other journalists, even when the story has already been published.
- If the story could endanger the victim, the journalist must not publish the

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- story. Sometimes the victim's life literally depends on the journalist's actions.
- Victims' stories are the most interesting stories about human trafficking, but when working on such stories, a journalist must know that the victim's safety is the most important, and that the victim should be understood, not pitied.
 - The journalist should know when, what, and how to ask the victim, but also when to just keep quiet and listen.
 - Collaborate with other journalists dealing with this topic, including those from other countries. You will often give each other information that will gain the real value only when exchanged, and you will all get an important story.
 - Ask your colleagues who have experience in reporting on human trafficking for advice.
 - Collaborate with experts who deal with trauma, especially those whose work is related to the issue of human trafficking.

Useful literature

On the following pages, you can find a list of literature, documents, and websites that provide the opportunity for more in-depth information on the issue of human trafficking and reporting on it.

- [Trafficking in Persons Report](#), US State Department
- [Country reports and evaluation rounds](#), GRETA – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe
- [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- [The Global Organized Crime Index](#) – in general, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
- [The Global Organized Crime Index 2023](#), Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2023)
- [The vulnerable millions: Organized crime risks in Ukraine's mass displacement](#), Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2023)
- [Mind the gap: Analysis of research on illicit economies in the Western Balkans](#), Saša Đorđević, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2023)
- [Exploited in plain sight: An assessment of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child protection responses in the Western Balkans](#), Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2021)
- [Ethical Storytelling on Gender Based Violence](#), Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (2022)
- [Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women](#), Journalists against Violence against Women, UNDP (2021)
- [Why survivors of trauma shouldn't speak to the media: Survivors of Human Trafficking and the Media](#), Blue Dragon Children's Foundation (2022)
- [Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings](#), GRETA – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe (2022)
- [GUIDANCE NOTE on the entitlement of victims of trafficking, and persons at risk of being trafficked, to international protection](#), GRETA – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe (2020)
- [Human trafficking victims in criminal proceedings – Analysis of Judicial Practice for 2022](#), ASTRA (2023)

- Human Trafficking Victims in Criminal Proceedings – Analysis of Judicial Practice for 2021, ASTRA (2022)
- Human Trafficking Victims in Criminal Proceedings – Analysis of Judicial Practice for 2020, ASTRA (2021)
- Human trafficking in Serbia: Overview of the situation in the context of the 21st century, ASTRA (2022)
- Would you really buy this? The mass case of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation in Serbia: Reinventing Slavery in the 21st century, ASTRA (2022)
- Indian Workers Exploited in the Serbian Road Construction Industry, ASTRA (2022)
- Challenges of recognition of the status of human trafficking victim in the Republic of Serbia, ASTRA (2022)
- Assessment of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia, Liliana Sorentino, ASTRA (2019)
- Preživeti nasilje – Posledice po psihičko i fizičko zdravlje žrtava porodičnog nasilja i trgovine ljudima, grupa autorka/ki, ASTRA (2016)
- Human trafficking trauma and psychotherapy – Collection of paper, ASTRA (2013)
- Human Trafficking in The Republic of Serbia: Report for the period 2000-2010, ASTRA (2011)
- In front of the Screens: Research on gender-based violence in the digital environment, NGO Atina (2022)
- Human (Child) Trafficking – A Look Through the Internet Window, ASTRA (2006)
- Compendium of good practices in addressing trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, GRETA (2020)
- O položaju i iskustvima sezonskih radnica u poljoprivredi u savremenoj Srbiji. Može li se ovoriti o elementima strukturnog nasilja, Lara Končar, Fakultet Političkih Nauka Univerziteta u Beogradu (2020)
- Standardne operative procedure za postupanje sa žrtavama trgovine ljudima, Kancelarija za koordinaciju aktivnosti u borbi protiv trgovine ljudima u Direkciji policije Ministarstva unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije (2018)
- Radna eksploatacija – određenje pojma, razgraničenje od drugih sličnih pojava i njihov međusobni odnos, Ljubinka Kovačević (2018)
- Univerzalni međunarodni standardi o zabrani dečijeg rada i njihova primena u pravu Republike Srbije, Ljubinka Kovačević (2017)
- „Jednom jeste dovoljno“, istraživačka studija na temu sekundarne viktimizacije žrtava krivičnih dela, Marjan Vijers

- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW Convention
- UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
- Human Rights Standards for the Treatment of Trafficked Persons
- Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women, WHO (2003)
- Women’s Rights are Human Rights, Special Issue on Women’s Rights, UN (2014)
- The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy Trafficking in women, women’s migration and violence against women, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1997/44, UN, EcoSoc (2000)
- Getting at the Roots: Stopping Exploitation of Migrant Workers by Organized Crime, Patrick A. Taran and Gloria Moreno-Fontes, ILO (2002)
- Human Rights Standards for the Treatment of Trafficked Persons, GAATW (1999)
- Human Traffic, Human Rights: Redefining Victim Protection, Anti-Slavery International (2002)
- Domestic Slavery, prepared by John Connor, Ireland, Group of the European Peoples Party for the Council of Europe Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2001)
- The Trafficking and smuggling of refugees: the end game in European asylum policy?, John Morrison and Beth Crosland, UNHCR (2003)
- National Referral Mechanism for Assistance and Protection of Trafficked Persons, La Strada Express, Moldova (2005)
- Identification of Trafficked Persons, La Strada Express, Moldova (2006)
- (Re)integration of the trafficked persons: a process or result? La Strada Express, Moldova, (2007)
- Trgovina ljudima u Srbiji, Viktimološko društvo Srbije i OEBS Misija u Srbiji, (2004)
- Eksploatacija dece. Kratak vodič s posebnim osvrtom na Fakultativni protokol uz Konvenciju o pravima deteta o prodaji dece, dečjoj prostituciji i dečjoj pornografiji, Centar za prava deteta (2006)

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- [Trafficking In Children For Sexual Purposes From Eastern Europe To Western Europe](#) ECPAT EUROPE LAW ENFORCEMENT GROUP (2001)
 - [Državni mehanizmi za upućivanje žrtava trgovine ljudima](#), OSCE ODIHR, Poland (2006)
 - [Hopes Betrayed: Trafficking of Women and Girls to Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina for Forced Prostitution](#), Human Rights Watch (Martina Vandenberg), (2002)
 - [Trafficking in Human Beings in Southeaster Europe \(Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova and Romania\)](#), Barbara Limanowska, UNICEF/UNOHCHR/OSCE – ODIHR (2002)
 - [Reference Guide for Anti-Trafficking Legislative Review with Particular Emphasis on South Eastern Europe](#), Angelica Kartusch, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights Vienna (2001)
 - [Victims of Trafficking in the Balkans](#), IOM (2001)

Fictional and documentary films, TV series addressing the issue of human trafficking

- Lilya 4-Ever (2002)
- Trading Woman (2003)
- Bought and sold (2003)
- Inhuman Traffic (2004)
- Human Trafficking, 1 + 2 (2005)
- Paths of slavery in the south of Serbia, RTS (2005)
- Human Trafficking (2005)
- Trade (2007)
- One Life No Price, UNODC (2007)
- The Jammed (2007)
- Taken (2008, 2017-2018)
- The Whistleblower (2010)
- The Dark Side of Chocolate (2010)
- Sestre / The sisters (2011)
- Nefarious: Merchant of Souls (2011)
- Enslaved: An MTV EXIT Special (2011)
- Trade of Innocents (2012)
- Shady Chocolate (2012)
- Sex Trafficking in America (2014)
- The True Cost (2015)
- Sicario (2015)
- Traffickers: Inside the Golden Triangle (2016)
- Trafficked (2016)
- Priceless (2016)
- I Am Jane Doe (2017)
- Buoyancy (2019)
- The Vow" (2020)
- "The Silence" (2021/22)

Organizations and institutions working on combating human trafficking

Non-governmental organizations in Serbia

ASTRA – Anti-trafficking Action

NGO Atina – Citizens Association for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and All Forms of Gender Based Violence

Child Rights Centre

Grupa 484

Victimology Society of Serbia

Anti-trafficking (AT) Network

- Center for Girls – Niš
- SOS for Women and Children Victims of Violence – Vlasotince
- Center for Girls – Užice
- Human Rights Committee Vranje
- PAOR Zrenjanin
- Women's Forum – Prijepolje
- Community Development Center LINK – Sombor
- NVO Ternipe – Bela Palanka

Freedom Has No Price – Novi Sad

Okular – Čičevac

Women's Association LEON – Pirot

Impuls – Tutin

Government Institutions

Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection

Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Republic of Serbia

- Labor Inspectorate

Ministry of Interior, Republic of Serbia

- Organized Crime Combat Department

Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, Republic of Serbia

Ministry of Justice, Republic of Serbia

Ministry of Health, Republic of Serbia

Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development, Republic of Serbia

Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, Republic of Serbia

Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Republic of Serbia

International Networks and Organizations

European Union External Action

Council of Europe, Serbia

OEBS Mission in Serbia

UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

ECOSOC – United Nation Economic and Social Council

Anti-Slavery International

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime

International Labour Organization

La Strada International - European Platform of Non-Governmental Organizations against Human Trafficking

The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) – Alliance of Organizations from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean Islands, and North America

ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes)

ICAT (Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons)

ChildX

IOM Serbia

Red Cross Serbia

Save the Children

UNICEF Srbija

International Rescue Committee, Serbia

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Serbia

Non-Governmental Organizations in the Region

Kosovo Women Network

La Strada, Moldavija

La Strada, Czech Republic

Open Gate, North Macedonia

Animus Association, Bugaria

"Vatra" Psycho-Social Centre, Albania

Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, Albania

New Road, Bosna i Hercegovina

Association "Land of Children", Bosna and Hercegovina

International forum of solidarity EMMAUS, Bosna and Hercegovina

Foundation LARA, Bosna and Hercegovina

Women's Rights Center, Monte Negro

LEFÖ, Austria

Center for Combating Human Trafficking KEY, Slovenia

Women's Room, Croatia

Reaching Out, Romania

Fragments of different Journalists' Codes of Ethics

A. From the Code of Ethics of PCC (UK Press Complaints Commission) (www.pcc.org.uk/cop/practice.html)

[...]

3. Privacy

- i) Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications. Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual's private life without consent.
- ii) It is unacceptable to photograph individuals in a private place without their consent.

Note - Private places are public or private property where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.

4. Harassment

- i) Journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit.
- ii) They must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist; nor remain on their property when asked to leave and must not follow them.
- iii) Editors must ensure these principles are observed by those working for them and take care not to use non-compliant material from other sources.

[...]

6. Children

[...]

- ii) A child under 16 must not be interviewed or photographed on issues involving their own or another child's welfare unless a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult consents.
- iii) Pupils must not be approached or photographed at school without the permission of the school authorities.
- iv) Minors must not be paid for material involving children's welfare, nor parents or guardians for material about their children or wards, unless it is clearly in the child's interest.
- v) Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.

7. Children in sex cases

1. The press must not, even if legally free to do so, identify children under 16 who are victims or witnesses in cases involving sex offences.
 2. In any press report of a case involving a sexual offence against a child -
 - i) The child must not be identified.
 - ii) The adult may be identified.
 - iii) The word "incest" must not be used where a child victim might be identified.
 - iv) Care must be taken that nothing in the report implies the relationship between the accused and the child.
- [...]

9. Reporting of Crime

- (i) Relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime should not generally be identified without their consent, unless they are genuinely relevant to the story.
 - (ii) Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children who witness, or are victims of, crime. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.
- [...]

11. Victims of sexual assault

The press must not identify victims of sexual assault or publish material likely to contribute to such identification unless there is adequate justification and they are legally free to do so.

12. Discrimination

- i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
- ii) Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

B. From the Code of Ethics of the Union of Publishers (www.media-accountability.org/library/Czech_Republic.doc)

[...]

3. Protection of personality

Any kind of discrimination or offence due to sex, race, colour of skin, language, faith or religion, political or other views, national or social origin, pertinence

to a national or ethnic minority, property, kind or other position is not in accordance with ethics

4. Protection of privacy

4.1. The press respects privacy including the intimate sphere.

4.2. If the privacy of a certain person touches public interest, and this person due to its social activity or position has become a person of public interest, the privacy of such a person may be, in individual cases, discussed in the press. Nevertheless it is necessary to observe, that personality rights of other people are not infringed.

4.3. Special protection must be given to victims of criminal acts and accidents. Respect for the victims and their relatives has priority before release of identifying information or photographs.

[...]

7. Children

7.1. Protection of the privacy of children has priority over the value of the information. When reporting the press must always have consideration for the interests of children and teenagers.

7.2. Reports on offenses of teenagers must not make it more difficult or prevent their possible return to society.

C. From the Code of Ethics of the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (www.nuns.org.yu/dokumenti/index.jsp)

[...]

This Code particularly condemns any advocacy and/or justification of the use of violence to any end.

[...]

The use of inadequate, disturbing, pornographic contents and contents that may have detrimental effect on children is strictly forbidden.

