



# Patterns of exploitation

## Policy brief on the latest trafficking trends and modus operandi

ANNIINA JOKINEN & ANNA-GRETA PEKKARINEN

This policy brief summarises the main findings of the report "Patterns of exploitation – human trafficking trends and modus operandi in Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Ukraine" edited by Anna-Greta Pekkarinen and Anniina Jokinen.

### Definitions

**TRAFFICKING FOR FORCED** labour refers to serious exploitation of a person's labour for the purpose of financial gain. Typically, a victim of trafficking for forced labour is made to work long hours with little or no pay, they may be abused, threatened, held in debt bondage, and their freedom of movement may be restricted.

**TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL** exploitation may consist of coercing a person into prostitution, exploiting a person in the sex industry, or subjecting them to other forms of sexual abuse.

### Premise

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS** driven by the possibility to make money on many levels and businesses profiting from this are not restricted to criminal organizations, but include also legitimate actors and businesses.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS** a gendered phenomenon. Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are mainly women and girls, whereas many of the identified victims of labour trafficking are men.

**IN GENERAL, HUMAN** trafficking operations involve a variety of costs at each stage of the process: recruitment, transportation and exploitation. Such costs are many times borne by the victim and may be disguised and inflated so that the victim becomes severely indebted, which makes them increasingly vulnerable to exploitation.



**#ELECT  
THB**

Enhanced Law Enforcement  
Cooperation and Training on  
Trafficking in Human Beings

### THE ELECT THB-PROJECT

(Enhanced Law Enforcement Cooperation and Training on Trafficking in Human Beings) is designed to improve the identifica-

tion and investigation of trafficking in human beings (THB) for sexual and labour exploitation and increase collaboration among law enforcement authorities and other key actors in order to combat such exploitation in Estonia, Latvia and Finland.



The project is funded from European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police, Grant Agreement Number 101021497.

**THE CONTENT** of the publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

# Labour trafficking

**ABUSIVE RECRUITMENT IS** one of the key risk factors for labour exploitation and trafficking: collecting excessive or made-up fees for securing the job, for travel documents and "service costs" etc. As a result, the worker may become indebted and more vulnerable to further exploitation.

**ASYLUM SEEKERS AND** undocumented migrants may feel compelled to accept job offers with poor terms and conditions. Undocumented migrants are often unwilling to report even serious abuse if this may result in their deportation.

**SOCIALLY MARGINALIZED PERSONS** such as those without a home, suffering from a substance dependency, or recently released from prison may be targeted by perpetrators who take advantage of the victims' psychological or socio-economic vulnerabilities.

**DOMESTIC WORK POSES** specific risks as it is a hidden form of employment (hidden from enforcement authorities as well as the general public) and in many countries a part of the informal economy.

**DIFFERENT SCHEMES AND** business structures are used by traffickers and exploiters to hide their illicit activities and evade taxes and social contributions in order to maximize their profits.

## These include:

**SCHEMES INVOLVING FRAUDULENT** posting of workers: getting a flexible workforce and underpaying them according to the lower wage level of the sending country.

**FORCED BOGUS SELF-EMPLOYMENT:** a situation where the conditions of work resemble an employment relationship but the worker is self-employed on paper and responsible for the risks and obligations related to self-employment, while the employer is able to cut costs.

**SUBCONTRACTING SCHEMES AND** use of letter-box companies: using such arrangements to e.g. hide the employment of third-country migrants without the right to work by employing them through a subcontracting chain that tracks down to another country (generally, an EU Member State).

**PAYMENT SCAMS SUCH** as wage kick-backs: paying the workers monthly according to all standards but e.g. requiring a portion of the wages to be paid back in cash or demanding inflated fees for housing, transportation, tools and work equipment etc.

**OTHER ARRANGEMENTS** / crimes associated with labour exploitation such as money laundering, accounting fraud, the falsification of documents, bribery, and extortion.

# Trafficking for sexual exploitation

**WHILE THE MODUS operandi** of labour trafficking and trafficking for sexual exploitation differ from one another, there are also many commonalities.

**RECRUITMENT OF POTENTIAL** victims mainly takes place online. Those looking to work in the sex industry are often recruited on the basis of false promises: after arriving in a foreign country with no money or local networks they are forced to agree to conditions that are much worse those agreed upon.

**EXPLOITATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES TAKING** place online are also increasingly common: ads for services of trafficking victims are often posted on the same sites as ads for persons selling sexual services making it a challenge for the authorities to spot the ads related to trafficking. Live streaming of sexual material poses similar problems, as it may be difficult to know whether the work is done voluntarily or not.

**FORCED MARRIAGE REFERS** to a situation in which a marriage is established without the free and full consent of one or both parties, or where one or both parties are unable to leave the marriage. In cases of trafficking for forced marriage, the victims are usually dependent on their spouses for money, housing, food, residence permits and can face multiple forms of exploitation from sexual exploitation to forced labour and domestic servitude.

## Key features:

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG** persons are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and to exploitation in forced begging and criminal activity. Children who have run away from home, foster care or an institution are particularly at-risk.

**THE SO-CALLED LOVER** boy method is commonly used and refers to a practice in which a typically male perpetrator seduces young, vulnerable girls and boys by pretending to have (romantic) feelings for them and eventually subjects them to exploitation.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL COERCION AND** trauma bond are often used by traffickers to control their victims in complex ways that can be difficult to detect, e.g. through isolation, threats and humiliation in combination with occasional kindness towards the victim.

**VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING** may be exploited in multiple ways. For instance, victims of sexual exploitation may be forced to sign paperwork to establish fraudulent companies or take out loans or credit cards or claim benefits that are then used by the perpetrators to fund their criminal operations.

GLOBAL EVENTS:

## COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine

**SINCE 2014 UNTIL** the full-scale invasion started in 2022, Ukrainian men, women and children have been exploited and trafficked within Ukraine and across borders for sexual exploitation as well as for labour exploitation in, e.g. construction, manufacturing and agriculture.

**AS OF 18** April 2023, over five million Ukrainian refugees have been registered for temporary protection or similar protection schemes in Europe. The EU Temporary Protection Directive and anti-trafficking measures in destination countries have potentially reduced the risk of exploitation of the refugees.

**EXPLOITATION OR TRAFFICKING** of Ukrainian refugees has not been detected to a larger degree at this point, but the risk of exploitation remains high.

**IN RELATION TO** the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions slowed down the cross-border movement of people, potentially affecting the exploitation of locals and migrants already residing in the country.

**GLOBALLY, THERE HAS** been a downturn in the number of identified victims of sex trafficking. This may suggest a decrease in sexual exploitation, but more likely the exploitation has moved to less visible and less safe locations, making it more difficult to detect.

**FEWER LABOUR INSPECTION** visits took place during the lockdown periods. Many companies suffered financially and had to furlough employees. Some workers had to find sources of income elsewhere while others risked their health by interacting with others during a pandemic.

### Looking into the future

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have had far-reaching effects on the global economy and the flow of people and goods. On a global level and in Europe, many persons are more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation because of inflation, unemployment and conflict.

**IT IS CRUCIAL** to keep an eye on the modus operandi of traffickers, facilitators and businesses who as a result of the crises may be more likely to resort to illegal means and exploitation of persons as a way to maximise their profits and to cut costs at the same time.

## Key recommendations for policy makers

☑ **Ensure that law enforcement has sufficient resources and skills to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking** within a reasonable time. Resources should also be secured for (multi-agency) work that enhances the authorities' capacity to recognize new trafficking-related trends and modus operandi.

☑ **Ensure that law enforcement has training on the dynamics of human trafficking, psychological control and trauma bond** as well as on victim-sensitive investigative interviewing techniques.

☑ **Ensure that victims of human trafficking have access to assistance and justice.** This may include, e.g., the possibility to apply for and to obtain a reflection period, a residence permit, legal aid and remedy, and to seek fair employment.

