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FILM MAKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE PROJECT

Research Study Report

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Abstract

This research, conducted as part of the Erasmus+ funded "FILM MAKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE" (FLIMSY) project, investigates human trafficking in Malta, Cyprus, and Latvia to inform the creation of impactful, research-based documentaries.

The FLIMSY project aims to equip participating organizations, survivors, and volunteers with the skills to produce films that raise awareness and inspire action against this complex crime. This report synthesizes relevant literature, government reports, key international monitoring and reporting mechanisms related to human trafficking, and stakeholder interviews to provide in-depth insights into the manifestations of human trafficking in each country, its root causes, and systemic factors that sustain it.

The findings reveal common challenges across the three countries, including gaps in legal framework implementation, victim identification, and access to specialized support services. Distinct contexts such as the geopolitical division of Cyprus and Malta's role as a transit country create unique vulnerabilities. Labour exploitation is identified as a key concern, particularly among migrant workers.

By bridging academic research with compelling storytelling, this report serves as a foundation for ethically responsible and transformative filmmaking, empowering filmmakers to create documentaries that challenge stereotypes, humanize victims' experiences, and promote effective solutions to combat human trafficking. The research highlights the importance of addressing systemic issues, prioritizing survivor voices, and fostering international collaboration to create lasting social change.

List of Acronyms

EU	European Union
FLIMSY	Film Making for Social Change
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRMs	National Referral Mechanisms
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Introduction

> *Trafficking in human beings destroys individuals' lives by depriving people of their dignity, freedom and fundamental rights. It is often a violent crime committed by organised crime networks. It should have no place in today's society.*
>
> European Commission, 2021

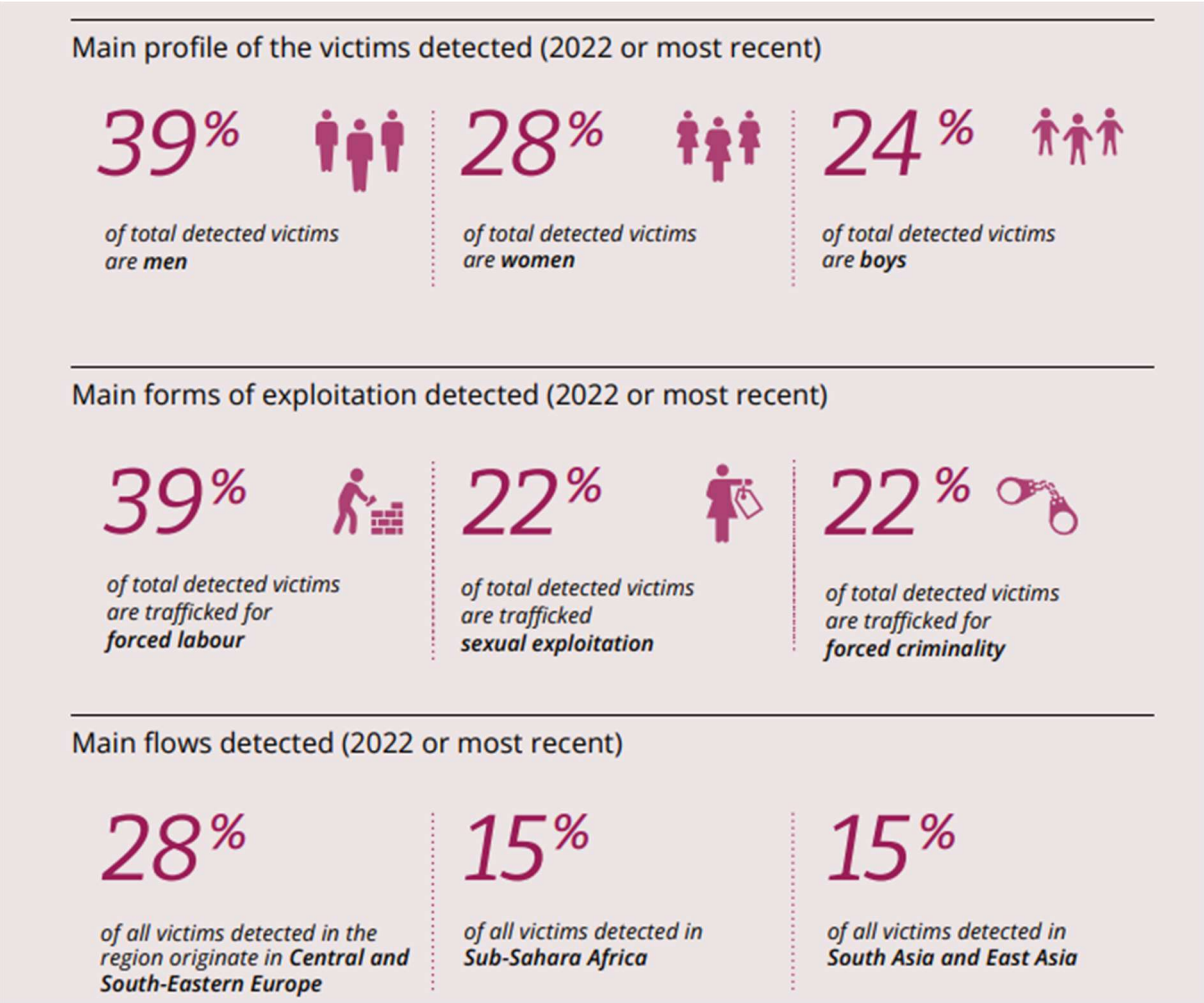
This research was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ funded project "FILM MAKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE" (FLIMSY), a collaborative initiative aimed at harnessing the power of film to raise awareness and inspire action against human trafficking.

FLIMSY brings together participating organizations, associate partners, survivors, and volunteers, equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and technical expertise to produce compelling and research-based documentaries.

A powerful documentary is not just a visual narrative—it is a tool for social transformation, grounded in evidence and lived experiences. This research report, based on primary data collected in Malta, Cyprus and Latvia, serves as the foundation for that mission, offering in-depth insights into human trafficking, its various manifestations, and the systemic factors that sustain it.

By bridging academic research with storytelling, this report ensures that the film emerging from this project is not only artistically engaging but also factually accurate, ethically responsible, and deeply transformative.

In its 2024 report on trafficking in persons, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024) presents the following global snapshot on human trafficking.



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024

A cursory look at such data alerts us to the need to consider victim demographics and vulnerability, different forms of exploitation, and regional trafficking flows. Trafficking includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, and, increasingly, exploitation for the purpose of engaging in criminal activities. Geographic trafficking patterns indicate socio-economic vulnerabilities as primary drivers.

Addressing human trafficking requires multi-pronged and multi-agency solutions, and this research is a concrete attempt to identify such solutions. This is because trafficking networks often operate across borders and sectors, exploiting gaps between migration, labour, social protection, and law enforcement systems.

The context highlighted the need to integrate labour protections, migration support measures, and stronger law enforcement into both the design and practical implementation of the research. The participating partners for this project are the Cross Culture International Foundation (CCIF) from Malta – lead partner, the Shelter "Safe House" from Latvia, and Sus Step Up Stop Slavery from Cyprus. A premise of the project when drafted was that social media is a powerful tool for awareness, but traffickers exploit it to recruit vulnerable individuals through deceptive online content. Traffickers use social media to lure victims with false job promises, targeting specific demographics for various forms of exploitation.

Existing anti-human trafficking films often fail to capture region-specific vulnerabilities, making it crucial to produce locally relevant documentaries.

Literature Review

> "*According to the latest available data, between 2017 and 2018, there were more than 14 000 registered victims within the European Union. The actual number is likely to be significantly higher as many victims remain undetected. Nearly half of the victims of trafficking within the European Union (EU) are EU nationals and a significant number of them are trafficked within their own Member State. The majority of the victims in the EU are women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation. Almost every fourth victim of trafficking in the EU is a child. The majority of traffickers in the EU are EU citizens and nearly three quarters of perpetrators are men. This crime brings high profits to criminals and carries with it enormous human, social and economic costs. In the EU, the economic cost is estimated to be up to EUR 2.7 billion in a single year*".
>
> European Commission, 2021, p. 1

> *Trafficking in human beings is a crime that devastates individuals' lives, depriving them of dignity, freedom and fundamental rights. According to Europol, 55 of the reported most threatening criminal networks engage in trafficking in human beings as (one of) their main activity(-ies). Furthermore, the 2024 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2 revealed that 74% of traffickers operate as groups and networks loosely connected in a business-type criminal relation or as structured criminal organisations, highlighting the predominant role of organised crime groups in trafficking activities. Trafficking is also often linked to other crimes, such as drugs trafficking, migrant smuggling, organised property crime, money laundering and document fraud.*
>
> *European Commission (2025), p. 1*

Human trafficking is a complex and multi-faceted crime that transcends borders, affecting vulnerable individuals globally. It is often driven by organized crime and fuelled by socio-economic inequalities, gender-based violence, and lack of viable opportunities. The international response to human trafficking has evolved through legal frameworks, policy interventions, and empirical research aimed at understanding the nature of trafficking, its root causes, and effective strategies for prevention, enhancing prosecutions and victim support.

This literature review on human trafficking presents a succinct overview of the existing legal frameworks and international responses, as well as the analyses and interpretations offered by various authors regarding differing perspectives on the issue of human trafficking. The review begins with a general examination of the topic and subsequently focuses on a brief survey of the literature related to Cyprus, Malta, and Latvia.

Legal and Policy Frameworks

The legal frameworks are based on the implementation of the Palermo Protocol (United Nations, 2000), EU Convention and Directive (See also the section on EU Important Sources of Information). The Palermo Protocol, adopted in 2000, marked a pivotal moment in the global fight against human trafficking, providing the first comprehensive international legal framework for prevention, victim protection, and criminal justice, and its impact continues to shape anti-trafficking efforts worldwide today.

Various literature has speculated or commented on the extent of implementation of the law. One such position is that the legal and policy responses to human trafficking have evolved within a framework that often prioritizes migration control over human rights protections. Gallagher (2015) critiques the Trafficking Protocol, highlighting its origins in migration management rather than as a human rights treaty. While the Protocol has been instrumental in shaping legal and political developments, its focus remains contentious. Bruch (2004) further argues that contemporary approaches to trafficking mirror historical biases, particularly the racist and sexist underpinnings of early anti-trafficking efforts. These approaches tend to emphasize victimization while grappling with definitional ambiguities. States have responded with a proliferation of international statements and agreements aimed at protecting so-called "innocent" women and to prosecute traffickers (Bruch, 2004). However, the efficacy of these frameworks remains debatable, particularly regarding their ability to address structural vulnerabilities that contribute to trafficking.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], (n.d.) recognizes human trafficking as a complex crime requiring a comprehensive response and has established a dedicated office to support participating States through policy development, capacity-building, and research. In 2013, the OSCE expanded its anti-trafficking framework by adding to prevention, protection, and prosecution, "partnerships" as a fourth pillar, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation, law enforcement collaboration, and joint efforts between public and private sectors. OSCE (2022) identifies National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs) as institutional mechanisms that help states identify human trafficking victims and ensure their protection, providing also guidance model adapt and apply such referrals to own national systems to ensure that NRMs meet the highest standards in both design and implementation.

Human trafficking is a serious human rights violation and security concern across the OSCE region, requiring coordinated action among governments, international bodies, and civil society. While initiatives such as the OSCE Action Plan and the development of National Referral Mechanisms have led to progress, gaps remain in victim identification and protection, and responses must continually evolve to avoid unintended harms and ensure a rights-based, democratic approach (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2004). This handbook draws on practical experiences to support the development and strengthening of National Referral Mechanisms as adaptable, rights-based tools for combating trafficking and protecting victims.

Root Causes and Socio-Economic Factors

Vulnerability is defined as the “likelihood that trafficking (or other abuses) will take place determined by certain factors which cause certain people in certain situations to be trafficked (International Centre for Migration Policy Development [ICMPD], 2022, p. 12)”. Vulnerability to trafficking arises from a complex interplay of factors including poverty, exclusion, discrimination, violence, harmful cultural practices, and weak legal protections—conditions often intensified by gender roles, stigma, and marginalization. Health conditions, disabilities, and psychological issues further increase susceptibility, especially where stigma or lack of access to support prevails. Migrants and children are particularly at risk due to isolation, fear, debt, disrupted support systems, and the absence of adequate protection mechanisms, which traffickers exploit for long-term profit (ICMPD, 2022).

Addressing human trafficking necessitates a broader understanding of its root causes and socio-economic drivers. The root causes of human trafficking stem from vulnerabilities such as poverty,

lack of legal migration avenues, and displacement due to armed conflict, persecution, or natural disasters, which push individuals into irregular migration and exploitation. Additionally, discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or gender deprives people of resources and opportunities, making them more susceptible to traffickers during migration or within their communities. (UNODC, n.d.) Gender inequality and violence against women further exacerbate susceptibility to exploitation, particularly in the sex trade (Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Interior, Asylum Service, n.d.). Surtees (2008) suggests that legal, social, and economic reforms must target traffickers' incentives, making exploitation less economically viable. More broadly, Piper (2004) underscores the need to tackle development issues at both macro and micro levels, advocating for engagement with development literature and gendered perspectives to uncover deeper structural determinants of trafficking. In a similar vein, Andrijasevic (2010) calls for a reconceptualization of migration and sex work, shifting the policy discourse towards themes of agency and citizenship. This perspective challenges traditional narratives that portray trafficked individuals solely as passive victims, instead recognizing their autonomy within constrained circumstances.

Forms and Mechanisms of Trafficking

Human trafficking encompasses various forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, trafficking for the purposes of criminal exploitation, domestic servitude, debt bondage, forced begging, forced marriage, illegal adoption, exploitation in surrogacy, and organ trafficking. Victims are often coerced through fraud or force, with traffickers exploiting vulnerabilities such as poverty, unstable immigration status, and lack of social support. These crimes are facilitated by organized criminal networks that prey on marginalized individuals and operate in hidden or isolated environments, making detection and intervention challenging (Human Rights Directorate, n.d.). Human trafficking operates both as a domestic and transnational crime with distinct patterns in source and destination regions. Winterdyk et al. (2012) highlight the global nature of trafficking, where certain regions function as exporters of victims while others serve as primary destinations. Within this framework, Di Nicola et al. (2009) explores the role of demand, particularly in foreign prostitution markets, noting how client expectations shape trafficking for sexual exploitation. Aradau (2008) critiques the securitization of trafficking, arguing that framing it as a security issue restricts the range of potential policy solutions. By problematizing trafficking through a security lens, responses often become reactive rather than proactive, limiting efforts to address underlying causes.

Challenges in Research and Data Collection

According to the International Organisation for Migration (n.d.), human trafficking is a hidden and often underreported crime, making it challenging to gather consistent and systematic data. Gathering information on cross-border trafficking is even more complex, as different countries may define trafficking in varying ways and categorize data inconsistently. In some cases, trafficking is linked to broader concepts like slavery or forced labour, leading to differing estimates of its prevalence. This highlights the ongoing need for countries to align their national laws with the standards set out in the Trafficking Protocol.

According to Surtees and Johnson (2021), many trafficking victims do not self-identify or actively avoid identification for a range of interrelated reasons. These include fear of retaliation from traffickers, who often use threats, violence, and psychological control to deter disclosure, including threats to victims' families. Victims may also distrust authorities due to prior negative experiences or misinformation from traffickers who portray authorities as harmful or punitive. The

physical and psychological impacts of trafficking—such as trauma, confusion, memory loss, and shame—further inhibit disclosure. Additionally, some individuals may not recognize their experiences as trafficking due to normalized exploitation or the hope of eventually being paid. Others may reject identification because it does not offer meaningful or desirable assistance, and in some contexts may lead to compulsory cooperation with law enforcement or restrictions on their freedom. These barriers highlight the need for trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and victim-centred identification approaches.

Counter-trafficking actors often handle sensitive personal data, necessitating robust frameworks to ensure secure sharing and victim consent for third-party access to such information. These challenges underline the importance of systematic approaches to data protection and legislative alignment to improve understanding and policy responses to trafficking.

One method used at country level is the Multiple Systems Estimation (MSE) which estimates both identified and unidentified victims. This method analyses anonymized lists of detected or presumed victims from various counter-trafficking actors, such as law enforcement, migration authorities, and victim-assistance providers. The data is disaggregated by age, gender, and type of exploitation (UNODC, 2018).

Reliable data collection remains a significant challenge in trafficking research. Laczko and Gramegna (2003) emphasize the persistent difficulty in producing accurate estimates of trafficking's scale, given the clandestine nature of the phenomenon. Tyldum and Brunovskis (2005) identify hidden populations as a primary barrier to data accuracy, as individuals may withhold information or provide misleading responses to protect themselves. Zhang (2009) further critiques the reliance on a limited number of reports, noting that gaps in empirical knowledge have often been filled by speculation. Goodey (2008) similarly argues that the lack of robust data undermines policy-making efforts, as the complexities of the trafficking "industry" complicate effective responses.

In the countries under consideration in this report, gaps in data persist. For example, according to the Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit [FIAU](2024), in Malta there is no data on the number of asylum seekers rescued at sea who may have experienced trafficking. The Advocates for Human Rights & Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2024) in Cyprus notice that Trafficking victims often go unidentified or retraumatized due to the lack of a standardized identification process. In Latvia, limited resources and education regarding victim identification in the society and law enforcement authorities hinder prosecution of traffickers (Herzog, 2019).

Prevention, Victim Support, and Rehabilitation

Efforts to combat trafficking must incorporate both survivor support and enforcement measures. GRETA, the Council of Europe's expert group on human trafficking, has in 2024 marked 15 years of impactful monitoring under the Anti-Trafficking Convention. Its rigorous evaluation process, including over 130 country visits, has driven legislative reforms such as criminalizing trafficking, introducing recovery periods for survivors, and ensuring they are not punished for crimes committed under duress. GRETA's work has also improved survivor identification procedures, established specialized shelters, and increased funding for assistance programs. Additionally, its focus on labour exploitation has heightened awareness, enhanced training, and strengthened protections for victims in this growing area of concern. Europol (2024) in its report *Decoding the EU's most threatening criminal networks* provides an analysis of the most threatening criminal networks across Europe. It maps these networks for the first time, detailing their organization,

criminal activities, and operations. The report also examines the characteristics of these networks that heighten their threat level. UNODC (2006) has long advocated for public information campaigns that include measurable objectives, for specific training to key stakeholders on identification and investigation, for enhanced collaboration between key stakeholders and more targeted efforts directed at warning specific groups or individuals believed to be at high risk of victimization.

Surtees (2008) advocates for a more strategic use of the criminal justice system, suggesting that research should expand beyond victim studies to include traffickers' behaviours. Data collected by victim assistance agencies, though abundant, is often underutilized due to a lack of systematic analysis (Laczko & Gramegna, 2003). Finally, Aradau (2008) calls for innovative interventions that move beyond traditional security measures, emphasizing the need to explore the intersection of security, politics, and subjectivity. These approaches challenge rigid frameworks, advocating for more holistic and transformative responses to trafficking.

By synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes clear that while significant advancements have been made in addressing human trafficking, ongoing challenges remain. The literature on human trafficking points to the need for evidence-based policies, enhanced victim support mechanisms, and stronger international cooperation. While legal frameworks have evolved, their effectiveness is often hindered by a lack of data and resources. Addressing trafficking requires a holistic approach, including socio-economic interventions, law enforcement strategies, and educational initiatives that empower communities to recognize and prevent exploitation. Research must continue to interrogate legal frameworks, socio-economic factors, and data collection methodologies to develop more effective and nuanced strategies.

EU Important sources of information

The European Union (EU) provides important sources of information, as summarised in the below table.

On 24 June 2024, the revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive was published in the Official Journal of the EU to reinforce the fight against trafficking in human beings.

On 14 April 2021, the European Commission presented a new EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025).

In 2020, the European Commission issued two studies on:

- the economic, social and human costs of Trafficking in Human Beings in the EU and
- reviewing the Functioning of Member States' National and Transnational Referral Mechanisms.

Both studies are key actions of the 2017 Commission Communication Reporting on the follow-up to the EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings and identifying further concrete actions.

Eurostat also publishes key statistics on trafficking in human beings.

Source: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/publications_en

The EU anti trafficking directive (2024) stresses that human trafficking is a serious crime linked to organized crime and a grave violation of fundamental rights, explicitly prohibited by the EU Charter. It emphasises that preventing and combating trafficking, while supporting victims regardless of origin, is a priority for the EU and its Member States, and therefore for Malta, Latvia and Cyprus. It points out that the root causes of trafficking are multiple, and include poverty, conflict, inequality, gender-based violence, lack of employment or social support, humanitarian crises, statelessness, and discrimination—factors that particularly endanger women, children, and marginalized groups. Cyprus, Malta and Latvia as Member States are obliged by this directive to establish referral mechanisms to detect, identify, and support trafficking victims, ensuring cross-border cooperation through a national focal point. These mechanisms should involve relevant authorities and organizations, outlining responsibilities and procedures. Victims must have access to safe shelters, and special attention should be given to victims with disabilities, particularly women and children. Assistance must be provided regardless of nationality or residence status, aiming for full reintegration through education, training, and employment opportunities (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024). One crucial advancement of the updated EU Anti-Trafficking Directive was enhanced efforts to prevent and address child trafficking, driven by alarming data showing that children account for 15% of reported trafficking victims in the EU.

The European Commission's strategy against human trafficking (2021-2025) acknowledges that while the EU has strengthened its response over the past decade, vulnerable individuals remain at high risk, with trafficking undermining society, law, and development across the EU and partner countries. It outlines a policy framework focused on victim protection and empowerment, criminal prosecution, and community safeguarding. It emphasizes adaptability to emerging trends and commits to swift responses as trafficking patterns evolve (European Commission, 2021).

The European Commission: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (2020) considers human trafficking to be at core a profit-driven crime that exploits vulnerable individuals through various means - from coercion and fraud to abuse of power - creating a chain of both knowing and unwitting participants. The impact extends far beyond the immediate victims, affecting the broader economy by diverting resources from legitimate activities and creating additional strain on public services. It acknowledges that even when victims appear to "consent," such consent is legally irrelevant when obtained through exploitative means. The concept of consent is absent from the legal definition relating to children and does not apply at all.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs et al. (2020) reveals that while systems generally demonstrate strong frameworks for victim identification and support, particularly for child victims, there's a notable gap in addressing EU citizens trafficked within their own countries - representing nearly a quarter of all registered victims. Two critical challenges emerge: coordination difficulties among the various actors and limited trust from victims, both of which significantly impact the effectiveness of victim referral.

Eurostat (2024) provides the following recent statistics:

- In 2022, there were 10 093 registered victims of trafficking in human beings in the EU and 2 097 convicted traffickers.
- In 2022, 63 % of registered victims of trafficking were female while only 22 % of convicted traffickers were female.
- In 2022, 37 % of registered victims of trafficking in the EU were citizens of Member States.

The data shows concerning patterns in human trafficking within the EU. Notable is the fact that there are a relatively low number of convictions (2,097) compared to identified victims (10,093) as is the gender imbalance among both victims and traffickers. This suggests challenges linked to prosecution and law enforcement, and could indicate challenges with evidence gathering, victim cooperation, gender specific considerations or complex cross-border investigations. Furthermore, the fact that 37% of victims are in the EU puts internal trafficking within the EU in the spotlight, potentially facilitated by freedom of movement policies.

We will now examine the region-specific contexts of Cyprus, Latvia, and Malta according to the **European Commission's 2025 progress report** (**European Commission, 2025)**.

Region-specific Context of Cyprus

The report highlights that in recent years, many African women and girls migrating to Cyprus have been subjected to forced prostitution by violent criminal groups, often arriving on student visas in the non-government-controlled area and subsequently exploited in private apartments, bars, and nightclubs (European Commission, 2025).

Region-specific Context of Latvia

The European Commission's (2025) progress report highlights the fact that in Latvia, nearly all victims were their own citizens. Latvia was identified as one of the four Member States where trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation was the predominant form of exploitation. It also saw an increase in victims of sexual exploitation of sub-Saharan origin.

Region-specific Context of Malta

Malta is highlighted as one of the countries that saw an increase of Latin American women and transgender people, being trafficked for sexual exploitation, as well as one of the countries that reported victims of sexual exploitation of sub-Saharan origin (European Commission, 2025).

Both Latvia and Malta are highlighted as having carried out awareness raising campaigns on trafficking in human beings through social and other media.

Country Contexts

We will now have a look at reports specific to the participating countries.

Human Trafficking in Malta

Human trafficking remains a significant challenge for Malta, a country that serves as both a destination and transit point for victims of trafficking due to its strategic location at the crossroads of European, Asian, and African migration routes (Government of Malta, 2022). The Maltese government has made efforts to combat this crime, but significant gaps remain in victim identification, prosecution, and protection.

Between 2017 and 2020, only 44 individuals were formally identified as victims of trafficking in Malta, with labour exploitation being the predominant form (77% of cases), followed by sexual exploitation (Government of Malta, 2022). However, the actual number of victims is believed to be much higher, as many cases go undetected. The majority of identified victims were foreign nationals, primarily from Ukraine and the Philippines, with migrant workers from Asia being particularly vulnerable to exploitation in sectors such as construction, cleaning, domestic work, and fishing (Government of Malta, 2022).

In 2022, Malta reported 22 victims of human trafficking, with 5 identified by the Malta Police Force and 6 suspected persons (Government of Malta, 2024). This data, collected by the National Statistics Office and published by Eurostat, highlights the ongoing issue of underreporting and the challenges in identifying victims. The 2021 statistics further reveal that all four identified victims were female non-EU nationals, exploited for labour, sexual, and other purposes (Government of Malta, 2024). These statistics underscore the need for improved victim identification mechanisms, particularly among vulnerable populations such as migrant workers and asylum seekers.

Despite increased efforts in investigation and prosecution, Malta continues to face challenges in securing convictions for human trafficking. In 2020, 16 investigations were initiated, including 8 for sex trafficking and 8 for labour trafficking, compared to only 5 investigations in 2019 (Government of Malta, 2022). However, the disparity between the estimated number of victims and the low rate of prosecutions and convictions remains a significant concern. The U.S. Department of State (2024a) reports that Malta was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in 2024 due to insufficient efforts in prosecuting traffickers and protecting victims. The government initiated fewer prosecutions in 2023 compared to previous years, and courts frequently overturned trafficking convictions on appeal due to administrative technicalities.

The Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) has also highlighted the need for Malta to strengthen its prosecution efforts, particularly in cases involving complicit officials and the use of psychological coercion as a means of trafficking (GRETA, 2023). GRETA's 2021 report emphasized the lack of effective, proportionate, and dissuasive penalties for traffickers, which undermines efforts to combat human trafficking and ensure victims' access to justice (Government of Malta, 2022).

Malta has established a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and a specialized shelter for trafficking victims, but gaps in victim protection persist. The government provides a two-month reflection period for victims to recover and consider cooperating with law enforcement, but only victims who cooperate are eligible for work permits and residency (U.S. Department of State, 2024a). The shelter, which can accommodate up to nine residents, requires victims to contribute financially to its operating costs, which experts argue may undermine victim recovery (U.S. Department of State, 2024a).

GRETA (2023) has urged Malta to improve victim protection by ensuring that victims have consistent access to free legal aid, compensation, and restitution. The government has never awarded restitution or compensation to trafficking victims, and legal aid is not available for victims seeking compensation from the state (U.S. Department of State, 2024a). Additionally, the lack of specialized shelters for child trafficking victims is a significant concern, as the government has not identified any child trafficking victims for three consecutive years (U.S. Department of State, 2024a).

Prevention efforts in Malta have focused on raising public awareness and improving coordination among ministries and civil society organizations. The Human Rights Directorate (HRD) has launched awareness campaigns to inform the public about trafficking indicators and how to report potential crimes (U.S. Department of State, 2024a). However, the government decreased funding for prevention efforts in 2023, allocating only €50,000 compared to €300,000 in previous years (U.S. Department of State, 2024a).

GRETA (2023) has recommended that Malta increase efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts and improve oversight of massage parlours, which are known to have a higher incidence of trafficking indicators. The government has also been urged to enforce labour regulations to prevent recruitment fees charged to workers, which increase their vulnerability to trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2024a). Additionally, the lack of coordination among ministries and the absence of a legal provision to ensure victims are not penalized for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked remain significant gaps in Malta's anti-trafficking framework (U.S. Department of State, 2024a).

Human trafficking in Malta is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach to address the gaps in victim identification, prosecution, protection, and prevention. While the government has made some efforts to combat trafficking, significant challenges remain, particularly in securing convictions, protecting victims, and reducing demand for exploitative labour and commercial sex. The recommendations from GRETA and the U.S. Department of State highlight the need for Malta to strengthen its legal framework, improve coordination among ministries, and ensure that victims have access to comprehensive support and protection.

An ongoing project, DISRUPT (Victim Support Europe, 2023), coordinated by the University of Malta addresses the critical challenge of technology-facilitated trafficking of children (THB) by enhancing digital evidence-based investigative and judicial responses across the EU. Funded by the European Commission's ISF programme, this 24-month initiative (2023–2025) unites five international partners to bridge gaps in legislation, institutional practices, and multidisciplinary cooperation. Through desk and field research, the project maps existing frameworks, identifies systemic shortcomings, and develops practical tools, including a manual for leveraging digital evidence in criminal procedures to mitigate reliance on child victim testimonies and reduce secondary victimization. Capacity-building workshops, a public-private partnership framework, and advocacy strategies aim to standardize best practices, foster cross-border collaboration, and raise awareness.

On 15 January 2025, the Council of Europe, the European Commission (DG REFORM), and the Directorate for Human Rights within the Prime Minister's Office of Malta co-hosted the Final Conference of the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) joint project titled *"Supporting Malta in the Design and Implementation of a New National Anti-Trafficking Strategy" (2022–2024)* (Council of Europe, 2025). The event marked the formal launch of Malta's National Anti-Trafficking Strategy and Action Plan (2024–2030), alongside the introduction of essential implementation tools developed under the project, including a Theory of Change, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Communication Strategy and Action Plan, and Implementation Guidelines.

Human Trafficking in Latvia

The existing literature on human trafficking in Latvia encompasses a range of government regulations, national action plans, and academic research, which collectively highlight legal frameworks, victim support mechanisms, emerging trends, and systemic challenges. Key reports and their contributions are synthesized below:

The foundational policy documents include Cabinet Regulation No. 344 (2019), which standardizes procedures for recognizing trafficking victims and accessing state-funded social rehabilitation services. Victims—regardless of exploitation type—are entitled to 180 days of comprehensive support (e.g., healthcare, shelter, legal aid), extendable via post-service consultations. Recognition criteria involve submissions from victims, law enforcement, or

specialist commissions, emphasizing procedural inclusivity (Latvia Cabinet, 2019). Complementing this, the 2021–2023 National Plan to Combat Trafficking adopts the "4P" model (prevention, prosecution, protection, partnership). Notable initiatives include extending reflection periods for third-country nationals, enhancing cross-border prosecution efforts, and improving data collection (Ministru kabinets, 2021). These frameworks underscore Latvia's structured yet evolving approach to victim protection and systemic coordination.

Shqau and Norvaiša's What Works report (2020) reveals disparities in victim rights based on legal status. EU citizens receive up to 180 days of rehabilitation, while third-country nationals may access rehabilitation only if they have a legal right to stay in Latvia. Those without legal status can request a 30-day reflection period by cooperating with the police, during which authorities assess their case and they may explore legal residency options, such as employment. Regardless of the length of their permitted stay, third-country nationals can receive rehabilitation services during that period. If criminal proceedings commence, a temporary residence permit (≥6 months) is granted. However, if proceedings are not initiated and no legal residency is secured, rehabilitation is discontinued. Non-cooperation with legal authorities increases the risk of deportation. Despite these limitations, all legally present victims retain access to social rehabilitation, language courses, and integration support, reflecting Latvia's commitment to equitable service provision albeit with citizenship-linked limitations.

Ministry of Welfare data (non-public but referenced) identifies labour exploitation as the predominant trafficking form (2019–2023), followed by sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Two Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)—Patvērums "Drošā māja" and Centrs MARTA—deliver rehabilitation services, with state funding peaking during 2020–2021 to address urgent cases. Financial metrics (e.g., €4,398 per beneficiary in 2023) highlight resource intensity, though limited public data availability restricts broader analysis of longitudinal trends or service efficacy.

Miruškina's research (2020) links labour exploitation to recruitment practices in migrants' origin countries (e.g., Tajikistan, India). Informal recruitment—reliant on oral agreements, unverified information, and trust in countrymen—exacerbates vulnerabilities. Promises of stable wages, accommodation, and documentation often clash with realities of debt bondage, withheld passports, and exploitative conditions. This disconnect underscores systemic gaps in migrant worker protections and the need for formalized recruitment oversight.

While Latvia's policies demonstrate progress, gaps persist: (1) Limited public access to trafficking statistics hinders independent analysis; (2) Labour exploitation dominates but lacks targeted prevention strategies; (3) Third-country nationals remain disproportionately vulnerable due to residency uncertainties. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes of rehabilitation services and the efficacy of cross-border partnerships in prosecution efforts. Strengthening data transparency and formalizing migrant recruitment channels are critical to addressing these challenges.

The Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia (2023) reported that in 2022, a total of 26 human trafficking cases were registered (12 by the State Police, 14 by NGOs or so called "social path"), primarily involving sexual and labour exploitation and exploitative sham marriages. In 2022, eight criminal proceedings were initiated under the article "human trafficking." Conviction rates remained low, with four first-instance convictions and one acquittal on appeal, highlighting systemic challenges in securing penalties (Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia, 2023). The Supreme Court Senate's analysis (2023) of court practices from 2014–2023 revealed that 14 individuals were convicted, though most received conditional sentences due to prolonged legal

proceedings, underscoring inefficiencies in judicial processes (Latvijas Republikas Augstākā Tiesa, 2023). GRETA's evaluation (2022) noted fluctuating investigation rates (3–7 cases annually between 2016–2019) and inconsistent penalties, emphasizing Latvia's need for stronger victim access to justice (GRETA, 2022).

The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia (2017) conducted a survey of municipal institutions, revealing fragmented identification of trafficking victims. Only 13% of local social services had experience handling trafficking cases, and inter-agency cooperation was weak, with limited awareness of NGO support roles (Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, 2017). A subsequent campaign by the Ombudsman (2022) highlighted digital trafficking risks, using real cases to illustrate how vulnerable individuals, such as single mothers, are lured into exploitation through deceptive online offers (Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, 2022). Lāca's (2019) report critiqued Latvia's support systems, noting barriers such as short reflection periods (30 days) for victims and insufficient long-term rehabilitation. The study advocated for empowering NGOs to identify victims and extending state-funded assistance to prevent re-trafficking (Lāca, 2019).

Such sources identify systemic gaps linked to low prosecution efficacy and institutional fragmentation. Furthermore, another gap can be more accurately framed not as inadequate victim support but rather as challenges in victim identification and a lack of long-term support, since comprehensive rehabilitation is available once a victim is identified, even without cooperation with authorities. While official records quantify case trends, academic studies emphasize structural reforms, such as enhanced training for officials and expanded rehabilitation programs, to address these challenges.

Human Trafficking in Cyprus

Human trafficking and gender-based violence (GBV) are significant issues in Cyprus, exacerbated by the island's geopolitical division and the lack of effective cross-border cooperation.

Cyprus is a destination country for human trafficking, with victims primarily exploited for sexual and labour purposes. The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) has made significant legislative strides in combating human trafficking, particularly with the enactment of Law 60(I)/2014 and its amendment in 2019, which increased penalties for trafficking and criminalized the use of sexual services from trafficking victims (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The RoC has also established a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and a National Action Plan (NAP) to coordinate efforts among government agencies and NGOs (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings [GRETA], 2020). However, despite these legal frameworks, the implementation remains inconsistent, with low conviction rates and limited access to justice for victims (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022).

In contrast, the northern part of Cyprus only criminalized human trafficking in 2020, and its legal framework lacks comprehensive measures for victim protection and support (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022). The northern part of Cyprus's institutional shortcomings, including the absence of a national action plan and specialized bodies, hinder effective responses to trafficking. This lack of cooperation between the RoC and the northern part of Cyprus, exacerbated by the island's frozen conflict, allows traffickers to exploit the porous Green Line, making it difficult for authorities to track and prosecute offenders (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022).

The Joint Contact Room (JCR), established in April 2009 under the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters with support from UNPOL, serves as a key mechanism for bi-communal cooperation in the Nicosia buffer zone (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). Over

nearly a decade, JCR members have processed more than a thousand cases involving collaboration between the two communities, enhancing trust and enhancing practical cooperation across the divide.

The majority of identified trafficking victims in Cyprus are women, primarily from Eastern Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, who are subjected to sex trafficking in private apartments, bars, and massage parlours (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Labour trafficking victims, often from North Africa and South Asia, are exploited in agriculture and domestic work. Asylum-seekers, particularly from Cameroon and Nigeria, are also vulnerable to trafficking, with many arriving via irregular routes and falling prey to exploitative employment agencies (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022).

The RoC has established shelters and support services for trafficking victims, including a government-run shelter for female victims and partnerships with NGOs to provide transitional housing (U.S. Department of State, 2024b). However, GRETA (2020) highlights significant gaps in victim protection, including delays in providing residence permits, financial assistance, and access to healthcare. The lack of systematic rehabilitation and integration measures further complicates survivors' recovery and reintegration into society.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a pervasive issue among asylum-seekers in Cyprus, particularly women and girls who face heightened risks during their migration journey and upon arrival. The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS, 2021) found that 50% of women asylum-seekers reported experiencing some form of SGBV, yet reception and integration policies fail to address their specific needs. The Pournara First Reception Centre, which serves as the primary entry point for asylum-seekers, lacks gender-sensitive support services, leaving women vulnerable to further exploitation and violence (MIGS, 2021).

The gendered nature of human trafficking is further compounded by the lack of awareness and training among frontline service providers. GRETA (2020) emphasizes the need for specialized training for police, prosecutors, and judges to ensure that trafficking cases are not downgraded to lesser offenses, which deprives victims of access to protection, access to justice and compensation. Additionally, the in-practice absence of legal aid and victim compensation funds in Cyprus further undermines victims' access to justice (GRETA, 2020). While the law allows for the provision of legal aid, in practice it is difficult to be approved as eligible to legal aid, following the application process.

The literature highlights several challenges in addressing human trafficking in Cyprus. The island's geopolitical division and lack of cooperation between the RoC and the northern part of Cyprus create significant barriers to effective law enforcement, investigation and victim identification and protection (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022). Additionally, the RoC's legal framework, while progressive, suffers from inconsistent implementation, with low conviction rates and limited access to justice for victims (U.S. Department of State, 2024b).

To address these challenges, several recommendations emerge from the literature. First, there is a need for enhanced cross-border cooperation between the RoC and the northern part of Cyprus to combat human trafficking effectively (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022). Second, the RoC should strengthen its implementation of the NRM and NAP, ensuring that victims are proactively identified and receive timely and comprehensive support, including access to legal aid, healthcare, and rehabilitation services (GRETA, 2020). Third, gender-sensitive policies and

training for frontline service providers are essential to address the specific needs of women and girls who are victims of trafficking and SGBV (MIGS, 2021).

Finally, raising public awareness about human trafficking is crucial to changing societal attitudes and reducing the demand for exploitative practices. As Hadjigeorgiou (2022) notes, many Cypriots do not recognize labour exploitation or understand that women in the sex trade are often victims of trafficking. Public information campaigns, particularly those targeting employers and landlords, can help shift perceptions and reduce the prevalence of exploitation.

Human trafficking and gender-based violence are pressing issues in Cyprus, with significant implications for victims, particularly women and asylum-seekers. While the RoC has made progress in establishing legal frameworks and support services, significant gaps remain in implementation and cross-border cooperation. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including effective legal protection, strengthening the effectiveness of operation of the NRM, enhanced expertise among front liners and professionals on human trafficking identification and trauma informed working methods, gender-sensitive policies, survivor-sensitive and trauma informed working methods as, and public awareness campaigns.

Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

An important Convention in the fight against trafficking is the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which was approved by the Committee of Ministers on May 3, 2005, as part of the Council's broader efforts to combat human trafficking (Council of Europe, 2005). It was made available for signature on May 16, 2005, and officially came into effect on February 1, 2008, after being ratified by ten countries. While drawing from existing international agreements, the Convention enhances victim protection by exceeding the minimum standards set in previous instruments. The Convention establishes a set of baseline measures to safeguard trafficked individuals, prevent trafficking, and prosecute perpetrators. For instance, trafficked persons have the right to a recovery and reflection period, along with various forms of assistance and protection that are not dependent on their willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. In certain cases, they may also be granted renewable residence permits.

Reflection on Films

Three films from Europe that address human trafficking, are Three Girls (2017), The Whistleblower (2010), and *Trade* (2007). They address human trafficking from different perspectives, exploring complex issues of exploitation, corruption, and vulnerability across various geographical contexts. Each film offers valuable insights for audiences and filmmakers who wish to engage with such socially important themes.

Three Girls (2017), directed by Philippa Lowthorpe, is based on the true story of three young girls in Rochdale, England, who were groomed, abused, and trafficked by a group of men. Despite repeated warnings, authorities failed to act for years, highlighting systemic failures in protecting vulnerable children. The film's emotional weight was instrumental in sparking national conversations about child exploitation in the UK. The points of views of survivors to ensure accuracy and avoid sensationalism is crucial in maintaining respect for the experiences of those affected by trafficking, as is the important role of whistleblowers.

The Whistleblower (2010), directed by Larysa Kondracki, is based on true events, and follows Kathryn Bolkovac, a UN peacekeeper in Bosnia, who uncovers a sex trafficking ring involving UN officials, highlighting corruption and the exploitation of vulnerable women. Her efforts to expose the truth led to threats and losing her job. The film not only explores the personal toll of human trafficking but also exposes the deep-rooted systemic corruption within international institutions. *The Whistleblower* serves as a reminder of how films can act as a platform for social change by revealing institutional complicity in trafficking.

Trade (2007), directed by Marco Kreuzpaintner, is a German-Mexican co-production that follows a 13-year-old Mexican girl kidnapped by traffickers and her brother's desperate search to rescue her. Along the way, he teams up with a Texas cop whose daughter was also trafficked, revealing the transnational nature of the crime. The film's global perspective features the international dimensions of trafficking, highlighting the cross-border networks that perpetuate such crimes, as well as the use of the Internet for sex-slave auctions.

Oleg offers a compelling case study in the intersection between personal vulnerability and structural exploitation, particularly as it relates to human trafficking and forced labour in contemporary Europe (*Oleg*, 2019). The protagonist's decision to migrate alone in search of economic opportunity reflects broader patterns of labour migration driven by precarity and limited opportunities at home. The film illustrates how such individuals, especially those lacking social support or legal protections, can easily become victims of coercion and abuse. Set in Brussels, it reveals the presence of modern-day slavery within the heart of the European Union, showing how impersonal labour systems can create conditions for extreme exploitation. The physical and psychological violence inflicted on Oleg by his trafficker exemplifies the inhumane treatment that no person should ever be subjected to.

From creating emotionally engaging narratives to ensuring authenticity and respect for the subject matter, these films put forward the power of film to address human trafficking and to advocate for change.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this research project aimed to comprehensively address the complex issue of human trafficking across three countries: Malta, Cyprus, and Latvia.

The approach was grounded in established research methodologies as outlined by Creswell (2014), who pointed out the importance of integrating multiple data sources to enhance validity in the research design. Researchers employed different Intelligence Gathering Techniques to triangulate data sources. Detailed examinations of real trafficking cases provided context for understanding patterns and trends. Engaging with vulnerable communities allowed researchers to observe potential trafficking indicators first hand. Monitoring social media platforms aided in identifying emerging trends related to trafficking networks. Gathering accounts from survivors enriched the qualitative data pool and highlighted personal experiences of trafficking.

A first step was to collect date through:

1. Official Records & Case Files. According to what was available, this involved police reports, court cases, and national crime databases to extract quantitative data on trafficking incidents.
2. Official, institutional and intergovernmental reports.

3. Government and NGO Reports. This involved reviewing existing reports and publications to identify trends and gaps in trafficking data.
4. Relevant academic literature.

A second step was to collect original qualitative primary through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including law enforcement officials, local NGOs, survivors, and community leaders. This method was chosen for its ability to capture nuanced perspectives on human trafficking, as highlighted by Lim, (2024), who noted the value of qualitative insights in understanding complex social issues. Forty semi-semi structured interview per country were done, based on convenience sampling. According to possibilities of access, researchers endeavoured to cover the following categories in the semi structured interviews.

1. Law Enforcement Agencies: Police, border control, and immigration authorities
2. Government Entities: Ministries of Justice, Social Services, and Labour
3. Local NGOs and Shelters: Organizations providing victim assistance, legal aid, and rehabilitation services
4. Healthcare Providers: Hospitals, clinics, and mental health services interacting with trafficking survivors
5. Social Workers and Psychologists: Professionals assisting with survivor recovery
6. Survivors (Where Ethical and Appropriate): Trafficking survivors willing to share their experiences
7. Community Leaders: Religious figures, educators, and local activists
8. Counter-Trafficking Organizations: National and international bodies involved in prevention, intervention, and advocacy
9. Others.

The interviews focused on:

- Types of trafficking prevalent in specific regions.
- Demographic groups most vulnerable to trafficking.
- Local perceptions of trafficking and existing support mechanisms.

Stories from survivors were also collected as part of the research process.

Templates were provided with the skeleton questions that could be employed during the interview process. The interviews were designed to be flexible, allowing participants to share their experiences and insights freely. The researchers, which were the participating partner NGOs, were encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Questions were added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remained relevant and insightful. The different templates used are found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved thematic coding for the qualitative interviews and stories.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Consent forms were obtained from all participants, ensuring ethical compliance as recommended by the American Psychological Association (2020). The consent form used is found in Appendix B.

The research team also engaged in continuous dialogue amongst the partnership to ensure culturally sensitive approaches were employed.

Limitations of the Study

One of the key challenges encountered during the research process was the bureaucratic nature of obtaining information from government departments. Access to key informants required formal authorization from department heads or individuals in positions of authority, which proved to be a time-consuming process. In several instances, the necessary approvals were granted only after the research deadlines had passed, rendering some planned interviews unusable.

Additionally, certain interviews conducted with government employees had to be discarded due to participants' refusal to sign consent forms, citing a lack of official authorization. This presented a significant limitation, as it restricted access to valuable insights from personnel directly engaged in areas relevant to the study. For example, attempts to secure interviews with prison officers and migration officials were met with considerable administrative hurdles, including being referred from one department to another, being required to submit formal written requests, and ultimately receiving no responses.

These constraints limited the study's ability to capture critical perspectives from government departments that are at the forefront of addressing human trafficking. Consequently, the absence of these voices may have impacted the comprehensiveness of the findings, particularly regarding institutional responses and frontline experiences in combating trafficking.

Conclusion

The research aimed to produce valid and reliable findings that could inform anti-trafficking initiatives, policy-making, advocacy efforts against human trafficking, and project goals. The research findings form the basis of the creation of advocacy films and documentaries to raise awareness and prevent human trafficking.

Results and Analysis

This chapter puts forward the results of the interviews that took place in Malta, Latvia and Cyprus.

Interviews Malta

The data put forward by the researchers in Malta (Cross Culture International Foundation) was analysed and the following 7 themes were elicited.

1. Prevalence and Forms of Human Trafficking
2. Vulnerable Populations
3. Systemic and Legal Challenges
4. Awareness and Institutional Responses
5. Economic and Migration Drivers
6. Technological Influences
7. Victim Support and Rehabilitation

Below is a short description of each theme, along with quotes and inputs taken from the supplied data, sometimes edited or paraphrased for clarity.

Prevalence and Forms of Human Trafficking

This theme encompasses the various types of trafficking prevalent in Malta, including labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude.

> *"Labour exploitation remains one of the most rampant issues in Malta, particularly in sectors heavily reliant on seasonal and low-wage labour, such as tourism." (MT30I)*

> *"Sexual exploitation... mainly affects women from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and non-EU nations, exposing victims to forced prostitution." (MT7I)*

> *"Domestic servitude is a form of human trafficking... Migrants working in domestic roles face exploitation with long hours and very low wages." (MT33I)*

> *“Areas with concentrated entertainment venues such as Paceville and San Giljan have higher risk of exploitation affecting many foreign workers.” (MT35I)*

Vulnerable Populations

This theme highlights the demographic groups most at risk, including migrants, women, children, and third-country nationals (TCNs).

> *"Migrant workers from Africa and Asia... are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, especially those without legal documentation." (MT25I)*

> *"Women, children, and young boys are prone to trafficking." (MT14I)*

> *"Third Country Nationals (TCNs)... face a heightened vulnerability to trafficking, particularly those from Asia, Africa, and South America." (MT3A)*

> *“There is lack of awareness and preventative initiatives against human trafficking in the iGaming industry”. (MT35I)*

Systemic and Legal Challenges

This theme addresses gaps in legislation, enforcement, and systemic issues exacerbating trafficking vulnerabilities.

> *"Legal gaps in Malta's immigration system... exclude migrants from labour protections under Maltese law." (MT30I)*
>
> *"The 10-day window period for TCNs to find new employment drives desperate people to be trafficked." (MT5B)* (Note: At the time of the research, the applicable window period was 10 days. However, this has since been updated to 30-60 days).
>
> *"Weak regulatory oversight... enforcement of labour laws remains inconsistent." (MT30I)*

Awareness and Institutional Responses

This theme covers the lack of awareness, training, and institutional efforts to combat trafficking.

> *"A lot needs to be done in Malta about raising awareness... few campaigns exist." (MT14I)*
>
> *"Most policemen do not know trafficking indicators, making it difficult to apprehend perpetrators." (MT15I)*
>
> *"Training for Police has been stepped up... with changes in command at higher levels." (MT6C)*

Economic and Migration Drivers

This theme focuses on economic disparities, migration patterns, and deceptive recruitment practices.

> *"Economic factors... combined with deceiving recruitment practices entrap people." (MT8C)*
>
> *"Migrants borrow large sums for recruitment fees, leaving them indebted." (MT24F)*
>
> *"Malta's geographic location... serves as a transit hub for migrants from Africa and Asia." (MT26I)*

Technological Influences

This theme explores technology's dual role in facilitating trafficking and aiding prevention.

> *"Traffickers use technology to recruit victims... it is also used for raising awareness." (MT14I)*
>
> *"Social media platforms can employ AI to detect trafficking patterns in messages." (MT4I)*

"Technology enables organizations to report exploitation efficiently." (MT23I)

Victim Support and Rehabilitation

This theme highlights challenges in providing support, legal aid, and rehabilitation for survivors.

"Victims are unaware of services or fear deportation if they seek help." (MT26I)

"Uncertainty about legal status... prevents access to integration programmes." (MT8C)

"Psychological, medical, and legal support are crucial for rebuilding lives." (MT41F)

Interviews Cyprus

The data put forward by the researchers in Cyprus (Sus Step Up Stop Slavery) was analysed and the following 12 themes were elicited.

1. Awareness and Understanding of Human Trafficking
2. Types and Prevalence of Trafficking
3. Vulnerable Groups and Demographics
4. Drivers of Trafficking
5. Challenges in Victim Identification and Support
6. Role of Law Enforcement and Legal Gaps
7. Support Systems and Services for Victims
8. Prevention and Awareness Efforts
9. Collaboration and Resource Limitations
10. Survivor Stories and Anecdotes
11. Psychological Impact and Trauma
12. Reintegration and Long-term Recovery

Below is a short description of each theme, along with quotes and inputs taken from the supplied data, sometimes edited or paraphrased for clarity.

Awareness and Understanding of Human Trafficking

This theme captures the level of awareness and understanding of human trafficking among community leaders, NGOs, and other stakeholders in Cyprus.

"Yes, there are reports that vulnerable women displaced from Ukraine are trafficked into prostitution. Also, African women are trafficked for sexual exploitation and men from various Asian countries are victims of labour trafficking." (CYCatG01)

"I am a survivor and it's a big problem here. I know many women personally who have been trafficked, and we are still waiting to be recognised." (CYSur01)

"He knows that the authorities don't try to stop it. He is aware of it being common in Africa and in Cyprus." (CYCatGMS07)

"The police don't need to care because it's the migrant community—they don't see the local victims." (CYCatCUNHCR)

"He was a child when his uncle trafficked him for domestic servitude. He still needs psychological support for this trauma." (CYCatGMS07)

Types and Prevalence of Trafficking

This theme focuses on the different forms of trafficking (e.g., sexual exploitation, forced labour) and their prevalence in various regions of Cyprus.

"Victims of sexual exploitation. Larnaka and Nicosia are the areas we know of as we work in these." (CYCatC01)

"Mainly sexual but also labour and underreported forced marriages." (CYCatECar)

"In Nicosia, as in the rest of Cyprus, the most prevalent forms of human trafficking are sexual exploitation and forced labour." (CYCatC03)

"We see three main types of online exploitation: sextortion, AI blackmail, and manipulated pornographic images shared in schools." (CYCatACybPol)

"Forced marriages of Syrian girls are a grey area—they don't see themselves as victims because it's cultural." (CYCatCUNHCR)

Vulnerable Groups and Demographics

This theme identifies the specific demographic groups most at risk of trafficking, such as women, children, migrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

"Mostly migrant women and children." (CYCatC01)

"Within the last 5 years, 15 children were referred to Caritas as victims of sexual exploitation." (CYCatECar)

"Migrant women, African. In Nicosia and Larnaca there are some girls who are currently being trafficked for sexual exploitation." (CYCatGMS07)

"The youngest boy we helped was 12. Last year, the average age was 13–14." (CYCatEHFC01)

"African migrant women are both victims and bosses—they exploit other Africans in prostitution rings." (CYCatGMS07)

Drivers of Trafficking

This theme explores the underlying factors that contribute to human trafficking, such as economic hardship, migration patterns, and legal gaps.

"Vulnerability and destitution of asylum seekers and economic migrants often leads them into situations of exploitation in various forms." (CYCatG01)

"Economic factors. Minors try to find work to send money back home but are not legally allowed to work if under the age of 16." (CYCatEHFC01)

"Economic issues, financial problems, victims in the south didn't start as being trafficked but due to poverty and vulnerabilities they become victims in the south." (CYCatGMS07)

*"***'s agency brings women from Nepal, forces them to work 15-hour days, and threatens deportation if they complain." (CYCatGICL01)*

"AI bots prey on lonely boys, recording them for extortion. It's a global problem, but we can't prosecute the networks." (CYCatACybPol)

Challenges in Victim Identification and Support

This theme highlights the difficulties in identifying trafficking victims and the challenges faced in providing them with adequate support.

"Identification of victims by the police continues to be extremely low compared to the referrals." (CYCatG01)

"Victims often go unidentified or are retraumatized instead of being protected, partly due to a lack of services and untrained officials." (CYCatC03)

"The police don't need to care because it's the migrant community and that they don't see the local victims." (CYCatCUNHCR)

"Victims of forced labour don't come forward—they don't even know they're trafficked." (CYCatCUNHCR)

"It takes up to 5 weeks for a child to feel comfortable to disclose abuse." (CYCatEHFC01)

Role of Law Enforcement and Legal Gaps

This theme examines the role of law enforcement in combating trafficking and the legal gaps that hinder effective action.

"The police and the Attorney General's office have a poor knowledge of the anti-trafficking laws and particularly of the Istanbul Convention." (CYCatG01)

"The HTPD needs proper training and understanding into trafficking cases. There needs to be better screening, proper legal representation, good translators, psychological support, etc." (CYCatC01)

"Legal processes could be simplified, victims often face lengthy and retraumatizing court processes to seek justice." (CYCatC03)

"The police suggested interviewing victims at our centre to make them feel safe—but the victims refused." (CYCVatEFPA01)

"Traffickers exploit the divide between north and south Cyprus. Police can't pursue them across borders." (CYCatCUNHCR)

Support Systems and Services for Victims

This theme focuses on the support systems available to trafficking victims, including shelters, legal aid, and psychological support.

"We provide psychological and psychiatric support, legal support; we bridge the gap between victims and services including: sws, asylum services, mental health providers, schools, hospitals, banks, police, labour office, international court of protection, landlords, etc." (CYCatC01)

"Red Cross provide free psychological support to each client. Red Cross has 9 therapists who work on a voluntary basis throughout Cyprus." (CYCatERC01)

"UNHCR provide community outreach and visits, identifying cases who need access to their rights." (CYCatCUNHCR)

"We provide workshops on consent, sexual health, and saying 'no'—these empower survivors." (CYCatEHFC01)

"Our psychologists limit sessions to 4 clients a day because trauma work is exhausting." (CYCVatEFPA01)

Prevention and Awareness Efforts

This theme covers the strategies and initiatives aimed at preventing human trafficking and raising awareness within the community.

"We deliver awareness workshops in schools, attend various events hosted by other NGOs where we are able to deliver speeches to new audiences to help raise awareness." (CYCatC01)

"I actively speak to my work colleagues and friends and like to stay up to date and informed about the current trafficking trends." (CYCatG03)

"UNHCR staff stationed at Pournara offer counselling services, identifying vulnerabilities, screening and advice including identifying trafficking indicators." (CYCatCUNHCR)

"We train teachers, parents, and health workers on sexual abuse and other tailor-made topics." (CYCVatEFPA01)

Collaboration and Resource Limitations

This theme explores the collaboration between different organizations and the limitations in resources that hinder anti-trafficking efforts.

"We don't work on trafficking as a main activity. Reach of Your Group. How extensive are the groups or communities that you oversee or influence?" (CYCatG01)

"At present we are surviving on sporadic donations. We are not able to meet all the needs of the women." (CYCatC01)

"External doners and UN funding. How do resource limitations impact your ability to provide support? Negotiate with management to employ more social advisers to help support vulnerable asylum seekers." (CYCatCUNHCR)

"UNHCR relies on volunteers to reach Syrian communities—but we lack funding to scale this." (CYCatCUNHCR)

Survivor Stories and Anecdotes

This theme includes personal stories and anecdotes from trafficking survivors, providing a human perspective on the issue.

> *"I am a victim of sexual exploitation, but I know there are many types of trafficking. My reasons were for a better way of life, but I was tricked by someone I trusted, and they forced me into sleeping with many men." (CYSur01)*

> *"A lady from Nepal Katmandu used an agency who helped provide her the opportunity to travel from her country and work in Zara (Mall of Cyprus). Upon arrival they are taken directly to the mall to work; despite being tired and travelling for many hours." (CYCatGICL01)*

> *"A Nigerian lady's family sent her to the north where she was trafficked. She came to the south where her boss made her sleep at the Maronite Church in Limassol. She was washing herself at the beach." (CYCatGICL01)*

Psychological Impact and Trauma

This theme addresses the psychological impact of trafficking on survivors and the challenges they face in processing trauma.

> *"The trauma that the migrant women have experienced are more severe and there are more repeated, intense trauma incidents from childhood to adulthood including physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence." (CYCVatEFPA01)*

> *"Victims face so much uncertainty, living below the poverty line and still have responsibilities to take care of their children and possibly family back home." (CYCatC02)*

> *"Psychological and Emotional Challenges such as trauma and PTSD that creates emotional distress. This can hinder their ability to reintegrate into society, trust others or build healthy relationships." (CYCatC03)*

> *"Migrant women dissociate severely—some stop bathing or self-care due to trauma." (CYCVatEFPA01)*

> *"Children arrive pregnant or with STIs after being drugged and raped during smuggling." (CYCatEHFC01)*

Reintegration and Long-term Recovery

This theme focuses on the challenges survivors face in reintegrating into society and the support needed for their long-term recovery.

> *"We work with other organisations that deliver workshops such as leadership programs, empowerment topics, how to access the labour market as well as learning new skills such as nail beauty, seamstress skills and jewellery making." (CYCatC01)*

> *"Despite attempts, they face a broken system, racism, discrimination and a lack of prospects. They also worry about their children and the limitations Cyprus may have for them." (CYCatC02)*

> *"Housing issue is the number one priority, giving recommendations for social housing for years and unfortunately not very successful... Without it, survivors face re-trafficking." (CYCatCUNHCR)*

"Even recognized victims are forgotten—no jobs, no school spots for their kids." (CYCatECar)

Interviews Latvia

The data put forward by the researchers in Latvia (Shelter "Safe House") was analysed and the following 10 themes were elicited.

1. Forms and Prevalence of Human Trafficking in Latvia
2. Vulnerable Groups and Risk Factors
3. Recruitment and Deception Tactics
4. Challenges in Identifying and Supporting Victims
5. Support Systems and Rehabilitation
6. Psychological Impact and Trauma
7. Legal and Policy Challenges
8. Prevention and Public Awareness
9. Role of Healthcare in Identifying Trafficking
10. Survivor Stories and Long-Term Impact

Below is a short description of each theme, along with quotes and inputs taken from the supplied data, sometimes edited or paraphrased for clarity.

Forms and Prevalence of Human Trafficking in Latvia

Human trafficking in Latvia manifests primarily in labour and sexual exploitation, with emerging trends in forced criminal activities and sham marriages.

> *"The main forms of human trafficking are labour and sexual exploitation. Forced criminal activities are on the rise, while forced marriages are becoming less common." (Acronym LV37B)*
>
> *"Labour exploitation is the most common form of human trafficking, followed by cases of sexual exploitation, sham marriages, and coerced criminal activities, such as drug trafficking." (Acronym LV9_13(SSH)F)*
>
> *"Latvia functions as both a source country, with citizens exploited abroad, and a destination country, with victims from Central Asia working in sectors like construction and catering." (Acronym LV37B)*

Vulnerable Groups and Risk Factors

Vulnerable groups include migrants, socially disadvantaged individuals, and those with limited education or financial resources, often lured by false promises of employment.

> *"Vulnerable groups in Latvia include those in financial insecurity, people with mental disorders, and children from out-of-home care." (Acronym LV39B)*
>
> *"Victims often come from disadvantaged or abusive families, leading to a lack of awareness about dangerous situations and red flags." (Acronym LV38E)*
>
> *"Young people often seek job opportunities that sound appealing but are highly suspicious. Their ambitions, internet usage habits, and fearlessness are factors that malicious individual can exploit." (Acronym LV2G)*

Recruitment and Deception Tactics

Traffickers often use deception, false job offers, and confiscation of documents to control and exploit victims.

> *"Initially promised jobs in Germany, they ended up in Latvia after paying a large sum for documents. Upon arrival, their travel documents were confiscated, and they were taken directly to a restaurant where they were forced to work long hours under exploitative conditions." (Acronym LV26F)*

> *"Desperate for a job, she responded to a misleading Facebook ad. Initially promised a customer service role, she discovered on her first day that the job involved being a 'camera lady.'" (Acronym LV40I)*

> *"They were given contracts in Latvian, which they signed without understanding. Initially, they worked under strenuous conditions, receiving irregular cash payments." (Acronym LV6F)*

> *"The means of exploitation prevented her from escaping the situation. She was controlled – she couldn't go anywhere alone without permission, her passport was taken away, and she owned nothing." (Acronym LV1F)*

Challenges in Identifying and Supporting Victims

Victims often face barriers such as fear, language barriers, and lack of trust in authorities, making it difficult to seek help.

> *"Victims often don't exhibit obvious trauma or disclose their experiences. Many don't recognize their experiences as trafficking and delay seeking help until situations worsen." (Acronym LV36I)*

> *"Asylum seekers and refugees often distrust Latvian institutions, fearing retaliation or loss of status if they report exploitation." (Acronym LV32I)*

> *"Victims often avoid seeking help due to fear and threats against themselves or their families." (Acronym LV30D)*

> *"When police finally reached her and later she was referred to a social rehabilitation service provider, she was extremely frightened and couldn't trust anyone." (Acronym LV1F)*

Support Systems and Rehabilitation

NGOs and government programs provide essential support, including housing, legal aid, and psychological counselling, but resources are often insufficient.

> *"The center provides a 180-day rehabilitation program, which begins with ensuring victims' safety, including secure housing with undisclosed locations." (Acronym LV8E)*

> *"They received critical support through a six-month rehabilitation program, including legal aid, social work assistance, secure housing, and help finding legal employment." (Acronym LV6F)*

"An organization provided essential support, including housing, food, medical care, and legal assistance. This help allowed them to stay in Latvia temporarily and legalize their residency." (Acronym LV26F)

Psychological Impact and Trauma

Victims of trafficking often suffer from severe psychological trauma, requiring long-term mental health support.

"Short-term needs include establishing a sense of security, while long-term needs focus on trauma recovery, which often extends beyond the six-month program available." (Acronym LV38E)

"The experience left R.D. in a state of confusion and deteriorating mental health, exacerbated by a lack of medication during imprisonment." (Acronym LV35F)

"Trafficking victims face severe psychological challenges, such as anxiety and distrust. Mental health support is crucial for recovery." (Acronym LV30D)

Legal and Policy Challenges

Legal frameworks and policy implementation face challenges, including inconsistent interpretations of laws and insufficient funding for anti-trafficking efforts.

"Challenges in combating trafficking include the lack of a unified understanding of the problem across different sectors. Training and knowledge sharing are crucial, but inconsistent interpretations of legal frameworks hinder effective application." (Acronym LV14_20(OCD)F)

"While employment agencies are no longer allowed to charge fees for job placement, no significant reforms have been implemented." (Acronym LV37B)

"The legal status of victims is a major barrier to providing assistance. Victims often have visas tied to their exploitative employers, and when they leave or are dismissed, they become illegal residents." (Acronym LV9_13(SSH)F)

Prevention and Public Awareness

Public awareness campaigns and education are crucial in preventing trafficking, but resources for such initiatives are often limited.

"Prevention efforts should focus on educating the public about trafficking risks, safe job practices, and legal rights." (Acronym LV21I)

"One impactful prevention initiative was a social campaign at Riga Central Market, where volunteers depicted trafficking victims in a staged scene." (Acronym LV28I)

"Prevention efforts focus on mentoring and equipping youth with knowledge about safe employment, emphasizing long-term planning and financial stability." (Acronym LV24G)

Role of Healthcare in Identifying Trafficking

Healthcare professionals play a critical role in identifying trafficking victims through signs of physical and psychological abuse, but training is often lacking.

> *"Signs of trafficking include visible injuries, malnutrition, overwork, and psychological symptoms like anxiety, depression, and apathy." (Acronym LV31D)*
>
> *"Healthcare professionals need guidance on identifying victims, understanding their behaviour, and managing abusers' influence." (Acronym LV30D)*
>
> *"Key indicators in healthcare include lack of identification documents, secrecy, and avoidance of personal questions." (Acronym LV33D)*

Survivor Stories and Long-Term Impact

Survivors of trafficking often face long-term challenges, including financial instability, legal issues, and psychological trauma.

> *"R.D. works physically demanding jobs and hopes to resolve his financial issues to achieve stability. His story highlights the vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers and the long-term impacts of trafficking." (Acronym LV35F)*
>
> *"The survivor found the strength to escape by selling jewelry and obtaining a passport with the help of a sympathetic person from her religion." (Acronym LV25F)*
>
> *"Despite immense fear and language barriers, she managed to flee to a neighboring country and eventually reached Europe, seeking asylum in Latvia." (Acronym LV25F)*

Stories

The following stories were captured as part of the research..

1. Story of Anna (name changed)

2. Story of Lelde (name changed)

3. Story of Linda (name changed)

4. Story of Mia (name changed)

5. Story of Laila (name changed

6. Story of Ahmad (name changed)

7. Story of Ralfs (name changed)

8. Story of Charity Maziwepi (name changed)

The stories can be found in full in Appendix C.

A thematic analysis was conducted on the stories provided, and the following 7 key themes emerged:

1. Exploitation and Human Trafficking
2. Loss of Freedom and Control
3. Psychological Manipulation and Grooming
4. Physical and Psychological Abuse
5. Economic Vulnerability as a Risk Factor
6. Resistance and Escape
7. The Role of Support Networks

Below is a short description of each theme, along with direct quotes from the stories.

Exploitation and Human Trafficking

The stories provided involved individuals being lured into exploitative situations often under false pretences.

> *"As promised by the Roma lady, somebody was waiting for her at the airport. A man."* (Story of Anna)

> *"She was at the brothel and explained what kind of work she would need to do. Anna had no other choice."* (Story of Anna)

> *"She used to live and work in Zambia for a European couple… However, they gave her a contract which in essence was below the minimum wage."* (Charity Maziwepi)

Loss of Freedom and Control

Victims often had their passports confiscated or were physically confined, stripping them of personal agency.

> *"They took possession of her passport and used to open her mail."* (Charity Maziwepi)

> *"She had no money, no phone, no bravery and no power to save herself or even look for help."* (Story of Anna)

> *"When Ralfs arrived in Brazil, he was met by a man who took him to an apartment… For two weeks, Ralfs lived locked in the apartment, unable to go outside."* (Story of Ralfs)

Psychological Manipulation and Grooming

In the stories, exploiters built trust with victims before introducing them to abuse.

> *"The trust was built, Anna felt loved and she had a sense of family that she was so desperately looking for."* (Story of Anna)

> *"Mark did not hit her, he did not force her to do anything, but step by step he convinced Lelde that it was a great idea to earn money."* (Story of Lelde)

> *"Linda felt like she had found a second mother, someone who cared about her."* (Story of Linda)

Physical and Psychological Abuse

Many victims endured both physical harm and long-term psychological trauma.

> *"She developed hypertension and edema in her feet. She also got knee problems as a result of going up and down the stairs."* (Charity Maziwepi)

> *"Anna was in such shock that she could not speak for several months, she lost her sense of reality and meaning of life."* (Story of Anna)

> *"Linda still couldn't fully grasp that what had happened to her was a crime."* (Story of Linda)

Economic Vulnerability as a Risk Factor

In the stories provided, many victims were financially struggling and were lured with false promises of better opportunities.

> *"Mia wanted to buy her own apartment, to have a place of her own."* (Story of Mia)
>
> *"Ahmad and the others need extensive help. First, they require food and proper accommodation."* (Story of Ahmad)
>
> *"Loans became a part of her life—quick loans to cover the end of the month, with the hope of repaying them the next."* (Story of Linda)

Resistance and Escape

Despite severe exploitation, survivors found ways to resist or escape with external support.

- **Quote:** *"Her escape came when she had been given her annual leave, she decided not to go back to her country."* (Charity Maziwepi)
- **Quote:** *"Anna spoke with her client and convinced him to help her. Anna's client was from Germany and he took her there."* (Story of Anna)
- **Quote:** *"One day, Laila learned about a church group... She joined the community and became close with some of the people there."* (Story of Laila)

The Role of Support Networks

NGOs, social workers, and communities played crucial roles in recovery.

> *"With the help of police, NGO workers arranged the first meeting with Lelde, to explain to her about the help and services."* (Story of Lelde)
>
> *"NGO workers tried to feed her, but all she wanted was a cigarette."* (Story of Linda)
>
> *"An NGO in Sweden contacts authorities in Latvia, informing them about Mia's situation."* (Story of Mia)

Discussion Interviews and Stories

The analysis of the human trafficking interviews reveals multiple intersecting themes, each of which links with the key points put forward in the short literature review and the EU sources.

Discussion Interviews

The ensuing discussion attempts to situate the themes that emerged from the interviews, within the broader policy framework, bringing to light the interplay between country specific experiences and systemic responses. It first discusses the counties one by one and then considers them together.

Interviews Malta

The stakeholder interviews suggest that Malta's legal and policy frameworks, while comprehensive on paper, often struggle to balance migration control with human rights protections. This reflects a tension highlighted in the literature review by Gallagher (2015), who

critiques the Trafficking Protocol's origins in migration management, potentially overshadowing human rights considerations. Stakeholders noted that the focus on border security and immigration enforcement can sometimes hinder the identification and protection of trafficking victims, particularly among asylum seekers and irregular migrants. This observation aligns with the U.S. Department of State's (2024a) report, which downgraded Malta to the Tier 2 Watch List due to insufficient efforts in prosecuting traffickers and protecting victims, underscoring the practical challenges in implementing existing laws.

The stakeholder interviews underscored the critical need for comprehensive victim support and protection services in Malta but also revealed significant gaps in their availability and accessibility. While Malta has a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and a specialized shelter, as mentioned in the literature review, stakeholders pointed out that these resources are often insufficient to meet the needs of all victims. This is consistent with GRETA's (2023) recommendations, which urge Malta to improve victim protection by ensuring consistent access to free legal aid, compensation, and restitution, services that are currently lacking. The interviews also highlighted the need for specialized services for child victims of trafficking, an area where the government has not identified any victims for several years (U.S. Department of State, 2024a). Stakeholders emphasized the importance of proactive identification efforts and trauma-informed care to ensure that victims receive the support they need to recover and reintegrate into society, in accordance with the EU anti-trafficking directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024).

The stakeholder interviews highlighted the need for more targeted and effective prevention and awareness campaigns in Malta. While the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) has launched public awareness campaigns, as noted in the literature review, stakeholders suggested that these campaigns often lack specificity and fail to reach vulnerable populations. This highlights the importance of addressing the root causes and socio-economic factors that contribute to trafficking, as highlighted by Surtees (2008), who suggests targeting traffickers' incentives to make exploitation less economically viable. Stakeholders emphasized the need for collaborations between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to develop and implement prevention strategies that address the specific vulnerabilities of different groups, such as migrant workers, asylum seekers, and individuals in precarious employment situations.

The stakeholder interviews revealed that labour exploitation is a pervasive issue in Malta, particularly in sectors such as construction, cleaning, domestic work, and fishing. This aligns with the Government of Malta's (2022) report, which indicates that labour exploitation is the predominant form of trafficking in Malta. Stakeholders noted that migrant workers from Asia are particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to factors such as debt bondage, lack of awareness of their rights, and fear of deportation. This underscores the need for stronger enforcement of labour regulations and improved oversight of recruitment agencies to prevent exploitation, a recommendation echoed by GRETA (2023). Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of providing migrant workers with access to legal assistance and information about their rights in a language they understand, as well as promoting ethical recruitment practices.

The stakeholder interviews pointed to significant challenges in prosecuting trafficking cases and collecting reliable data in Malta. This is consistent with the literature review, which notes that Malta continues to face challenges in securing convictions for human trafficking, despite increased efforts in investigation and prosecution (U.S. Department of State, 2024a). Stakeholders attributed this to factors such as evidentiary difficulties, lack of specialized expertise, and administrative technicalities that lead to overturned convictions. This call attention to the need for stronger collaboration between law enforcement, prosecutors, and the

judiciary to ensure that trafficking cases are effectively investigated and prosecuted. Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of improving data collection and analysis to better understand the scope and nature of human trafficking in Malta, as highlighted by Goodey (2008), who argues that the lack of robust data undermines policy-making efforts.

Malta being downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in 2024 signals the urgency for the government to act decisively to enhance efforts to combat trafficking. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of different interventions and to develop evidence-based strategies for preventing and combating human trafficking in Malta. This includes continued dialogue with stakeholders, rigorous evaluation of existing programs, and a commitment to addressing the root causes of exploitation, in alignment with the EU anti-trafficking directive's emphasis on prevention, protection, and prosecution (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024).

Interviews Cyprus

The stakeholder interviews highlighted a perceived lack of comprehensive awareness and specialized training among frontline professionals in Cyprus. This aligns with GRETA's (2020) emphasis on the need for specialized training for police, prosecutors, and judges to ensure trafficking cases are not downgraded, and victims are afforded appropriate protection.

Awareness and evidence-based policy requires robust data, the lack of which in Cyprus is a consequence of the failure of the setup of the recommended infrastructure by the Government - specifically the failure to appoint a national rapporteur, as data gathering is within the ambit of this role. The literature review features this point, noting that a lack of robust data and understanding undermines policy-making efforts (Goodey, 2008). The interview data suggests this extends to practical application in Cyprus, where a deeper understanding of trafficking indicators and victim identification protocols is needed across various sectors, including law enforcement, social services, and immigration.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that public awareness campaigns are often limited in scope and effectiveness. This resonates with Hadjigeorgiou's (2022) observation that many Cypriots do not recognize labour exploitation or fully understand the realities of sex trafficking. The literature review emphasizes the importance of raising public awareness to change societal attitudes and reduce the demand for exploitative practices. The stakeholder perspectives indicate that targeted campaigns are needed, focusing on specific sectors and demographics to address prevailing misconceptions and promote a culture of vigilance. Changing societal attitudes will reduce the demand that fosters sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and other forms of trafficking.

The stakeholder interviews pointed to significant challenges in identifying and prosecuting trafficking cases in Cyprus. Low conviction rates were attributed to several factors, including evidentiary difficulties, resource constraints, and a lack of specialized expertise. This echoes the U.S. Department of State (2024) report, which notes that despite legal strides, implementation remains inconsistent with low conviction rates and limited access to justice for victims.

The interviews also revealed concerns about the potential conflation of trafficking with other offenses, such as illegal migration or prostitution. This is consistent with the literature review's critique of legal frameworks that prioritize migration control over human rights protections (Gallagher, 2015). Stakeholders emphasized the need for a more victim-cantered approach. This is in line with Article 26 of the Convention (Council of Europe, 2005) which ensures that trafficking

victims are not penalized for offenses they were compelled to commit as a result of their exploitation.

The stakeholder interviews show the importance of providing comprehensive survivor support and protection services in Cyprus. While the RoC has established shelters and support services (U.S. Department of State, 2024b), the interviews revealed gaps in the availability of specialized services, particularly for male victims and victims of labour trafficking. This is consistent with GRETA's (2020) findings, which highlight significant gaps in victim protection, including delays in providing residence permits, financial assistance, and access to healthcare.

The interviews also highlighted the need for more culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of providing victims with access to psychological support, legal aid, and vocational training to facilitate their recovery and reintegration into society. This resonates with the EU anti-trafficking directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024), which stresses the importance of providing victims with assistance regardless of nationality or residence status, aiming for full reintegration through education, training, and employment opportunities.

The stakeholder interviews revealed challenges in coordinating and collaborating among different government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations in Cyprus. This need for enhanced collaboration within the ROC is consistent with the literature review's emphasis on the need for collaboration to combat human trafficking effectively (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022; OSCE, n.d.). Stakeholders emphasized the need for a more integrated and coordinated approach, with clear roles and responsibilities for each actor. The interviews also highlighted the importance of information sharing and joint training initiatives to improve the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts.

The stakeholder interviews highlighted the impact of Cyprus's geopolitical division on efforts to combat human trafficking. The lack of cooperation between the RoC and the northern part of Cyprus creates significant barriers to effective law enforcement and victim protection (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022). However, lack of cooperation is a political issue, while the protection of survivors is a legal obligation on ROC and is not related to the frozen conflict. In this respect, the UN has established a criminal cooperation channel that can be used for this purpose. The Joint Contact Room (JCR), operating in the Nicosia buffer zone since 2009 under the auspices of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters and supported by UNPOL, provides a practical mechanism for bi-communal police cooperation and information exchange in criminal cases, including those related to trafficking (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.).

Stakeholders emphasized the need for innovative approaches to cross-border cooperation, including joint training initiatives and information sharing agreements. The interviews also highlighted the vulnerability of asylum-seekers to trafficking, particularly those arriving via irregular routes. This is consistent with the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS, 2021) findings, which reveal that asylum-seekers, particularly women and girls, face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence during their migration journey and upon arrival.

Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of different interventions and to develop evidence-based strategies for preventing and combating human trafficking in Cyprus. This includes continued dialogue with stakeholders, rigorous evaluation of existing programs, and a commitment to addressing the root causes of exploitation.

Interviews Latvia

The stakeholder interviews revealed that while Latvia has established comprehensive legal and policy frameworks, challenges persist in their practical implementation. This aligns with the literature review, which notes that despite legal strides, implementation remains inconsistent, with low conviction rates and limited access to justice for victims (Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia, 2023; GRETA, 2022). Stakeholders highlighted issues such as bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of coordination among different agencies, hindering the effective enforcement of anti-trafficking laws.

The interviews also pointed out that the 30-day reflection period for third-country nationals is often insufficient, as noted by Lāca (2019). This short period can limit victims' ability to cooperate with law enforcement and access necessary support services, undermining the intended protections. The literature emphasizes the need for longer reflection periods and more comprehensive rehabilitation programs to prevent re-trafficking (Lāca, 2019).

The stakeholder interviews showed the importance of victim support and protection services, yet gaps were identified, particularly in specialized services for specific victim populations. This resonates with the findings from the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia (2017), which revealed fragmented identification of trafficking victims and weak inter-agency cooperation. Stakeholders noted that while NGOs like Patvērums "Drošā māja" and Centrs MARTA provide crucial services, as highlighted in the literature review, their resources are often stretched, limiting the scope of their impact.

The interviews also emphasized the need for more culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care. Stakeholders stressed the importance of providing victims with access to psychological support, legal aid, and vocational training to facilitate their recovery and reintegration into society, aligning with the EU anti-trafficking directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024). Furthermore, stakeholders highlighted the need for improved mechanisms to identify and support victims of labour trafficking, which often goes undetected compared to sexual exploitation.

The stakeholder interviews revealed a need for more effective prevention and awareness campaigns to enhance public understanding of human trafficking. This aligns with the literature review, which emphasizes the importance of raising public awareness to change societal attitudes and reduce the demand for exploitative practices (European Commission, 2021). Stakeholders noted that many people are unaware of the signs of trafficking, particularly in labour exploitation, and that targeted campaigns are needed to address specific sectors and demographics.

The interviews also highlighted the importance of educating vulnerable populations about the risks of trafficking and providing them with the tools to protect themselves. Stakeholders emphasized the need for collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to develop and implement effective prevention strategies. The Ombudsman's campaign on digital trafficking risks (2022) was cited as a positive example of raising awareness through real-life cases, as noted in the literature review.

The stakeholder interviews indicated that labour trafficking is a significant issue in Latvia, often linked to recruitment practices in migrants' origin countries, as noted by Miruškina (2020). Stakeholders emphasized that informal recruitment practices, reliance on oral agreements, and unverified information exacerbate vulnerabilities. Promises of stable wages, accommodation, and documentation often clash with the realities of debt bondage and exploitative conditions.

The interviews also highlighted the need for formalized recruitment oversight and stronger protections for migrant workers. Stakeholders stressed the importance of addressing systemic gaps in migrant worker protections and ensuring that recruitment agencies are held accountable for their practices. The literature review underscores the need for legal, social, and economic reforms to target traffickers' incentives and make exploitation less economically viable (Surtees, 2008).

The stakeholder interviews revealed persistent challenges in prosecuting trafficking cases and collecting reliable data. This is in line with the literature review, which notes low conviction rates and systemic challenges in securing penalties (Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia, 2023; GRETA, 2022). Stakeholders attributed this to evidentiary difficulties, resource constraints, and a lack of specialized expertise among law enforcement and judicial officials.

The interviews also highlighted the need for improved data collection and analysis to better understand the scope and nature of human trafficking in Latvia. Stakeholders stressed the importance of making trafficking statistics publicly accessible to facilitate independent analysis and inform policy-making efforts. The literature review emphasizes that the lack of robust data undermines policy-making efforts and complicates effective responses (Goodey, 2008).

Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of different interventions and to develop evidence-based strategies for preventing and combating human trafficking in Latvia. This includes continued dialogue with stakeholders, rigorous evaluation of existing programs, and a commitment to addressing the root causes of exploitation.

Comparative analysis of themes

The discussions for Cyprus, Malta, and Latvia, while context-specific, reveal common threads in their experiences with human trafficking, as well as distinct challenges shaped by their unique circumstances. A central finding is that all three countries grapple with similar overarching themes:

- **Legal and Policy Frameworks:** All three discussions highlight that while these countries have legal and policy frameworks in place, significant gaps remain in implementation. There is a tension between migration control and human rights protection, impacting victim identification and access to support.
- **Victim Identification and Support:** All three discussions point to the importance of victim support, but also identify gaps in specialized services, particularly for specific victim populations (e.g., male victims, child victims, victims of labour trafficking). Culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care is emphasized as a critical need.
- **Prevention and Awareness:** The need for more targeted and effective prevention and awareness campaigns is a common thread. General campaigns are often seen as insufficient, and there's a call for strategies that address specific vulnerabilities and demographics.
- **Challenges in Prosecution:** All three countries face challenges in prosecuting trafficking cases, leading to low conviction rates. This is often attributed to evidentiary difficulties, resource constraints, and a lack of specialized expertise.
- **Challenges in Data Collection:** Data collection is a persistent challenge, hindering the understanding of trafficking patterns and effective policy-making.

Distinct Country-Specific Aspects:

- **Cyprus:** The division of the island and the lack of cooperation between the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and the northern part of Cyprus pose unique challenges to cross-border law enforcement and victim protection.
- **Malta:** The discussion emphasizes the country's role as a transit point for victims due to its location, making migrant workers and asylum seekers particularly vulnerable to exploitation.
- **Latvia:** The discussion highlighted labour exploitation is a significant issue, often linked to recruitment practices in origin countries, as well as a high incidence of victims being own citizens.

Integration with Literature Reviews:

The integration of stakeholder interviews with the literature reviews consistently revealed that:

- The challenges identified by stakeholders are supported by existing research and reports from organizations like GRETA and the U.S. Department of State.
- The need for a multi-faceted approach, encompassing prevention, protection, and prosecution, is reinforced by both the stakeholder perspectives and the academic literature.
- Gaps in data collection and analysis hinder evidence-based policy-making, as highlighted by Goodey (2008).

Looking at Cyprus, Malta, and Latvia as a whole, these discussions underscore the complex nature of human trafficking and the need for nuanced, context-specific approaches. While each country faces unique challenges, they share common vulnerabilities and struggles in implementing effective anti-trafficking measures.

The findings highlight the importance of:

- **Strengthening national referral mechanisms:** Streamlining victim identification and referral processes is crucial.
- **Investing in specialized services:** Tailoring support services to the specific needs of different victim populations is essential.
- **Promoting inter-agency coordination:** Enhancing collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations is critical for a coordinated response.
- **Prioritizing prevention efforts:** Addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination, is essential for long-term prevention.
- **Improving data collection and analysis:** Gathering reliable data is necessary for understanding trafficking patterns and informing evidence-based policy-making.

Ultimately, the discussions reveal that combating human trafficking requires a sustained commitment to protecting vulnerable populations, prosecuting traffickers, and addressing the underlying factors that make individuals susceptible to exploitation. This requires strong political will, adequate resources, and a collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders. While each country's context is unique, the similarities in their challenges and proposed strategies highlight

the potential for shared learning and collaboration across the region. By sharing best practices, developing joint training initiatives, and working together to address transnational trafficking networks, Cyprus, Malta, and Latvia can strengthen their collective efforts to combat human trafficking.

Discussion Stories

The analysis of the human trafficking stories reveals multiple intersecting themes, each of which links with the key points put forward in the short literature review and the EU sources.

The ensuing discussion attempts to situate the themes that emerged from the stories, within the broader policy framework, bringing to light the interplay between individual experiences and systemic responses.

Exploitation and Human Trafficking

The analysis of the stories demonstrates the deceptive means by which victims are lured into exploitative situations. The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712) emphasizes that human trafficking is inherently linked to organized crime and a violation of fundamental rights. The European Commission (2021) further acknowledges that trafficking undermines law and development, reinforcing the systemic nature of these exploitative practices. The narratives illustrate how traffickers manipulate socio-economic vulnerabilities, a reality that aligns with policy concerns regarding the persistence of trafficking despite legal frameworks designed to combat it.

Loss of Freedom and Control

A critical feature of human trafficking is the stripping of personal agency through physical confinement and confiscation of identification documents and psychological coercion and false promises. As evidenced in the narratives, victims experience severe restrictions on movement, reinforcing their dependency on traffickers. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (2020) highlights the coercive nature of trafficking and the legal irrelevance of "consent" when obtained through exploitation. This supports the directive's emphasis on referral mechanisms that identify victims and ensure their access to support structures, particularly when they are unable to seek help independently.

Psychological Manipulation and Grooming

Traffickers frequently employ psychological manipulation to build trust before subjecting victims to exploitation. This grooming process is evident in the narratives, where victims initially perceive traffickers as caregivers, mentors, or romantic partners. The European Commission (2021) acknowledges that trafficking patterns evolve, often incorporating more sophisticated psychological tactics to ensure victim compliance. The narratives underscore the necessity of victim-cantered interventions that account for psychological trauma and social conditioning, in line with the legal definition and case law that recognizes coercion and the abuse of a position of vulnerability

Psychological Impact and Barriers to Recovery

The long-term impact of trafficking extends beyond economic and physical harm, manifesting in psychological trauma and chronic health conditions. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs et al. (2020) notes that while victim identification frameworks exist, gaps remain in addressing the needs of trafficked individuals, particularly regarding trust in support systems. The narratives confirm that trauma often inhibits victims from recognizing their own victimization, delaying their access to support services. This finding underscores the need for enhanced victim protection mechanisms, as mandated by Directive (EU) 2024/1712.

Economic and Personal Vulnerability as Risk Factors

The role of economic precarity in facilitating trafficking is well-documented in the literature and reinforced by EU data. Eurostat (2024) reports that a significant proportion of victims are EU citizens trafficked within their own countries, suggesting that economic hardship is a key driver of internal trafficking. The narratives illustrate how victims, often facing financial instability, are enticed by false promises of employment and financial security. The European Commission (2021) highlights economic vulnerability as a risk factor, necessitating policy responses that integrate economic empowerment strategies with anti-trafficking efforts.

The stories reveal key personal-situational vulnerabilities that heighten trafficking risk: childhood trauma that eroded self-worth and trust in protective systems, while economic precarity forced reliance on exploitative enticements. Emotional manipulation by traffickers posing as caregivers weaponized victims' desires for belonging and stability. Age-specific risks such as minor status and romantic naivety were exploited by a partner normalizing transactional sex. Finally, systemic gaps, like delayed access to trauma-informed care or initial dismissal as "consenting", prolonged harm by failing to address intersecting vulnerabilities of gender, poverty, and coercion. Such stories highlight the need for a multi-layered approach that can mitigate key vulnerabilities. The amended Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712) highlights the need for Member States to pay due regard to intersectional discrimination and to the resulting increased vulnerability, through providing specific measures where intersecting forms of discrimination are present.

Resistance and Escape

Despite extreme coercion and methods of control, such as physical control and threats made to the victims and their families, some survivors demonstrate agency by seeking escape or negotiating their release. The stories illustrate the complex decision-making processes involved in escaping trafficking situations, often requiring external assistance. The EU framework emphasizes cross-border cooperation and referral mechanisms to facilitate victim recovery (Directive (EU) 2024/1712). However, the effectiveness of such mechanisms depends on victims' ability to access them, highlighting the importance of proactive victim identification and outreach efforts.

The Role of Support Networks

Victim recovery is significantly influenced by the presence of support networks, including NGOs, social workers, and law enforcement agencies. The European Commission's strategy (2021-2025) emphasizes victim protection and empowerment as a core policy priority. However, the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs et al. (2020) identifies trust deficits as a major barrier to effective intervention. The narratives reinforce this finding, demonstrating that survivors often struggle to engage with formal support services due to previous experiences of betrayal or coercion. These insights suggest that enhancing trust-building measures and community-based interventions may improve the effectiveness of support systems.

Discussion Conclusion

Analysing both the stakeholder interviews and the victim stories across Cyprus, Malta, and Latvia, a consistent narrative emerges: while legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms exist to combat human trafficking, their effectiveness is hampered by implementation gaps, resource constraints, and a lack of public awareness.

The interviews underscore the challenges in victim identification, the need for specialized and culturally sensitive support services, and the difficulties in securing prosecutions. Juxtaposed with these systemic issues, the stories powerfully illustrate the devastating impact of trafficking on individuals, highlighting their vulnerability to exploitation and the long road to recovery, underscoring that a truly effective anti-trafficking strategy must prioritize both systemic reform and individualized, trauma-informed care, as supported by the EU's and Member States' emphasis on prevention, protection, and prosecution.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An overarching theme emanating from the research is the need to **Enhance Collaboration and Information Sharing.**

All three countries' stakeholder interviews highlight the fundamental need for increased international collaboration and information sharing as a cornerstone of effective anti-trafficking efforts. This includes formal and informal channels, recognizing the transnational nature of human trafficking. FLIMSY is one such project that privileges transnational cooperation to be part of the solution of the scourge of Trafficking in Human Beings.

Specific Strategies Proposed through the data gathered include:

1. **Joint Training Initiatives:** This is a recurring recommendation across all three countries. Stakeholders emphasize the value of joint training programs for law enforcement, judicial officials, and other relevant actors from different countries. These initiatives would enhance the capacity to identify, investigate, and prosecute trafficking cases effectively, while also promoting trust and understanding.

2. **Targeted Training:** Awareness-raising campaigns should be designed with a sector-specific approach to maximize impact. Rather than relying solely on general awareness efforts, initiatives should focus on industries such as construction and tourism, where tailored messaging can lead to more meaningful engagement and action.

3. **Harmonization of Legal Frameworks:** The Latvian interviews specifically mention the need for aligning legal standards across jurisdictions to facilitate smoother cooperation in investigations and prosecutions involving multiple countries. This includes ensuring that laws are compatible and that there are clear procedures for cross-border collaboration.

4. **Standardized Data Collection and Sharing:** The underlying need for improved data collection and analysis is present in all the three participating countries. Harmonizing data collection methods and establishing secure channels for sharing data internationally would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of trafficking patterns and trends, enabling targeted interventions.

5. **Addressing Geopolitical Challenges (Cyprus):** The Cyprus interviews uniquely emphasize the need for innovative approaches to cross-border cooperation due to the island's division. This includes finding ways to collaborate even without formal diplomatic relations, potentially through international organizations.

6. **Strengthening National and International Partnerships:** The need to foster collaboration among national stakeholders, service providers, and civil society to create a unified response against trafficking. This involves sharing best practices and resources across borders.

7. **Strengthening National Referral Mechanisms:** Strengthening NRMs is crucial to ensuring timely identification, protection, and comprehensive support for trafficking survivors, addressing systemic gaps that prolong harm and hinder recovery.

8. **Awareness Campaigns**: The need to launch awareness campaigns that not only target potential victims but also educate the general public about trafficking issues. These campaigns should be coordinated internationally to maximize their impact.
9. **Targeted, multi-sectoral approach**: This is necessary to address human trafficking in identified high-risk areas and industries. This should include enhanced monitoring and enforcement efforts, as well as tailored awareness and prevention initiatives aimed at both employers and workers. Collaboration between government agencies, law enforcement, and industry stakeholders is essential to develop sector-specific strategies that mitigate exploitation risks and strengthen protective measures.

The stakeholder interviews across Cyprus, Latvia, and Malta converge on the need for greater international cooperation to combat human trafficking effectively. The proposed strategies focus on building capacity through joint training, aligning legal frameworks, improving data collection and sharing, and fostering collaboration among various actors.

Regarding the stories provided, the discussion reveals that the themes emerging from human trafficking narratives are strongly reflected in EU policy and literature. While legal frameworks and strategic policy initiatives provide a robust foundation for combatting trafficking, persistent challenges remain, particularly in victim identification, psychological support, and economic resilience. The narratives highlight the lived realities of trafficking victims, reinforcing the need for a holistic, survivor-centred approach that integrates legal protections with socio-economic interventions. Strengthening coordination among stakeholders and enhancing victim trust in support services remain key areas for policy development and practical intervention.

Reflections for Filmmakers and Documentary makers

This research concludes with some reflection points tailored to filmmakers and documentary makers who will be using this research as part of the "FLIMSY" project. Partners considered the interviews with survivors, the stories of survivors, and the recruitment methods of exploitation as research findings that could be impactful to portray visually. Other key aspects that emerged as particularly powerful for visual representation include the confiscation of documents, long working hours, payment of exorbitant recruitment fees, and wages that are lower than the stipulated minimum. Additionally, a recurring theme was the reluctance of exploited migrants to report their situations. Many fear repercussions from perpetrators who are often from the same cultural background, as well as strict surveillance and threats. Others hesitate to come forward due to the fear of deportation and police investigations. These insights could provide compelling narrative elements while ensuring participant confidentiality.

These reflections aim to bridge the gap between academic research and compelling storytelling.

Embrace Nuance and Complexity

The research highlights that human trafficking is not a monolithic issue but manifests differently in each country, shaped by specific socio-economic and geopolitical contexts. Your film(s) ought to reflect this nuance. Avoid simplistic narratives and instead, delve into the complexities of the issue in each location.

Think questions:

- *How can you visually represent the specific vulnerabilities that exist in Malta, Cyprus, and Latvia, as revealed by the research?*

- *How can a multi-narrative approach be applied to showcase the different facets of trafficking in each country?*

Humanize the Data:

The research provides a wealth of data on trafficking patterns, legal frameworks, and systemic challenges. The references provided offer further details. However, data alone will not move audiences. Your challenge is to humanize this data by connecting it to individual stories.

Think questions:

- *How can you weave the statistics on labour exploitation in Malta, for example, into the personal narrative of a survivor?*
- *What infographics or animated data visualizations can be used to present key findings from the research in an engaging and accessible way? What further research is necessary?*

Centre Survivor Voices Ethically

- The voices of survivors are central to this project. Ensure that their stories are told with respect, dignity, and ethical consideration. It is vital to prioritize safety and well-being. Obtain informed consent, provide support resources, and avoid sensationalizing their trauma.

Think questions:

- *How can you empower survivors to tell their own stories in their own words?*
- *What techniques can be used to protect the identities of survivors while still conveying their experiences?*

Challenge Stereotypes and Misconceptions:

The research reveals that public awareness of human trafficking is often limited and that misconceptions abound. Your film(s) should actively challenge these stereotypes.

Think questions:

- *How can you dispel the myth that trafficking only involves sex work?*
- *How can you best include showcasing the stories of labour trafficking victims and highlighting the systemic factors that contribute to their exploitation?*

Focus on Systemic Issues, Not Just Individual Perpetrators

While individual traffickers are responsible for their actions, the research underscores the importance of addressing the systemic factors that enable trafficking to thrive. Your film(s) should explore these broader issues.

Think questions:

- *How can you expose the role of recruitment agencies, employers, and other actors in facilitating labour exploitation?*

- *What investigative journalism techniques can you employ to uncover corruption and impunity within the system?*

Inspire Action and Promote Solutions

A powerful documentary does more than just raise awareness; it inspires action. Your film(s) should highlight potential solutions and empower viewers to make a difference. This is good educational practice.

Think questions:

- *How can you showcase the work of NGOs, government agencies, and other organizations that are working to combat human trafficking?*
- *How can you film be a call to action, encouraging viewers to support anti-trafficking initiatives, report suspected cases, and advocate for policy changes?* (Some action points are found in the following section).

Visually Represent the Research

Think questions:

- *How can you transform key findings into visual elements?*
- *Can you use maps to illustrate trafficking routes or data visualizations to show the prevalence of certain types of exploitation?*

Engage the Audience Emotionally

While intellectual understanding is important, emotional engagement is key to creating a film that resonates with viewers.

Think questions:

- *How can you use music, cinematography, and editing to evoke empathy and compassion for trafficking victims?*
- *How can you best use personal stories and intimate moments to connect with viewers on a human level?*

Contextualize Local Realities

Think questions:

- *How will you balance universal themes of exploitation with the unique cultural, economic, and political contexts of Cyprus, Malta, and Latvia?*
- *How will you represent each country authentically and avoid stereotypes?*
- *Regarding Cyprus, how can you address the complexities arising from the island's division?*

By considering such reflections, filmmakers can create documentaries that are not only informative and engaging but also ethically responsible and deeply impactful. The "FLIMSY" project has the potential to make a significant contribution to the fight against human trafficking,

and such films and documentaries can play a vital role in raising awareness, inspiring action, and promoting lasting transformative change.

Action Points

If this research has inspired a new passion in you to become part of the change you want to see, here are some action points you can take.

General

1. Attend a training session on human trafficking, in particular commit to learn the types and indicators of human trafficking, and what makes specific groups vulnerable to trafficking.
2. Training is available here:
    a. This training manual is designed to help those professionals and community groups who may come across vulnerable migrants in Europe. By going through the training, participants will understand and be more equipped to be able to respond and protect vulnerable migrants from harm. The target groups are people working in frontline services who may across vulnerable children and adults from abroad. It was developed as part of Effective Education for Persons working with Vulnerable People project. Funded by Erasmus +. https://eepwvpccif.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/eepwvp-english-manual.pdf
    b. Courses in human trafficking prevention are available here: https://elearning.ccifmt.org/contact/
3. If you believe someone may be a victim of human trafficking, call!
    a. If you are in Malta and believe someone may be a victim of human trafficking, call 179 or report an emergency to law enforcement by calling 112.
    b. If you are in Cyprus and believe someone may be a victim of human trafficking, call 1497 (hotline) or report an emergency by calling 112 or 1460.
    c. If you are in Latvia and believe someone may be a victim of human trafficking, call +371 28612120 (24/7 hotline) or report an emergency to law enforcement by calling 112.
4. Be an ethical consumer or procurer. Consider researching companies to check out whether they are involved in sweatshop labour or child labour. Encourage companies to take steps to prevent human trafficking in their supply chains.
5. Volunteer and support non-profits working in the sector.
6. Join a mailing list so that you stay informed on the latest human trafficking news.
7. Fundraise for an anti-trafficking organisation.

Organisations

1. Host an awareness-raising and action taking event. One medium can be a film or documentary event or a book reading event. Consider targeted events for parents, schools, health care providers, journalists, community members, and so on.
2. Work with educational specialist to encourage your schools to include human trafficking in their curricula and support them in developing such resources.
3. Use your social media platforms to raise awareness about human trafficking.

4. Become a mentor to someone going through a difficult time – it is easier to become a victim in vulnerable times.
5. Create partnerships with anti-trafficking leaders – whether faith based, or locality based – and act collectively.
6. Advocate, advocate and advocate! Learn from advocacy best practice to become more impactful in transforming the policy framework.

Businesses

1. Actively provide jobs, internships, skills training, and other opportunities to trafficking survivors.
2. Pro-actively research and prevent trafficking in your supply chains.

Students

1. Make your campus a hub for activity on raising awareness about human trafficking and initiate action, both on campus, and by linking with your local community.
2. Consider doing your dissertation or thesis on a human trafficking.
3. Check out your curricula and ask for changes during your regular study unit evaluations. E.g. are you studying health care? If yes, is your curriculum adequate with respect to identifying the indicators of human trafficking and providing assistance to victims.

Media

1. You have huge power, and you play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and conversation around human trafficking. Use it and use it responsibly.
2. Learn from media best practices on how to report stories on human trafficking.

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Appendix A - Semi-structured Interviews Templates

A. Law Enforcement Agencies: Police, border control, and immigration authorities
B. Government Entities: Ministries of Justice, Social Services, and Labor
C. Local NGOs and Shelters: Organizations providing victim assistance, legal aid, and rehabilitation services
D. Healthcare Providers: Hospitals, clinics, and mental health services interacting with trafficking survivors
E. Social Workers and Psychologists: Professionals assisting with survivor recovery
F. Survivors (Where Ethical and Appropriate): Trafficking survivors willing to share their experiences
G. Community Leaders: Religious figures, educators, and local activists
H. Counter-Trafficking Organizations: National and international bodies involved in prevention, intervention, and advocacy
I. Others

Questions Category A. Law Enforcement Agencies: Police, border control, and immigration authorities.

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Awareness of Human Trafficking

How would you describe your understanding of human trafficking? What types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) are most common in your area?

2. Prevalence and Geographical Focus

Which geographical areas in your region show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

3. Vulnerable Groups

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

4. Drivers of Trafficking

In your opinion, what are the main drivers of trafficking in your country (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

5. Current Trends

What patterns or trends have you observed in human trafficking cases recently? Are there particular areas or types of trafficking that are becoming more prevalent?

6. Challenges in Law Enforcement

What are the biggest challenges your department faces in identifying, investigating, and prosecuting human traffickers?

7. Victim Trust and Support

What strategies or actions does your department use to gain the trust of victims of trafficking?

8. Collaboration with Other Agencies

How does law enforcement collaborate with other agencies, such as NGOs or international bodies, to combat human trafficking effectively?

9. Officer Training

What kind of training do officers receive to help them recognize and respond to human trafficking cases?

10. Data Collection and Analysis

How does your department collect and analyze data on human trafficking cases? Are there any challenges in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of this data?

11. Your Questions

Questions Category B. Government Entities: Ministries of Justice, Social Services, and Labour

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Awareness of Human Trafficking

How would you describe your understanding of human trafficking? What types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) are most common in your area?

2. Prevalence and Geographical Focus

Which geographical areas in your region show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

3. Vulnerable Groups

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

4. Drivers of Trafficking

In your opinion, what are the main drivers of trafficking in your country (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

5. Legislation and Policy

What recent laws or policies have been enacted to combat human trafficking, and how effective have they been in addressing the issue?

6. Funding for Anti-Trafficking Efforts

How is funding allocated to support anti-trafficking efforts, including victim support services and law enforcement?

7. Interagency Coordination

How do different government agencies coordinate their efforts to address human trafficking? Are there any challenges in ensuring effective cooperation?

8. Public Awareness Campaigns

What initiatives or programs are in place to raise public awareness about human trafficking and its impact?

9. Program Evaluation and Effectiveness

How does the government measure the effectiveness of its anti-trafficking programs and policies? What key performance indicators are used?

10. Your questions

Questions Category C. Local NGOs and Shelters: Organizations providing victim assistance, legal aid, and rehabilitation services

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Types and Prevalence of Trafficking

What are the most common types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) present in your area?

Which geographical areas show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

2. Vulnerable Groups and Drivers

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

What do you think are the main drivers of trafficking in your country (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

3. Victim Support Services

What services does your organization provide to survivors of human trafficking (e.g., legal aid, housing, psychological support), and what challenges do you face in delivering these services?

4. Trends in Trafficking

Have you noticed any recent trends in the types of trafficking victims you assist (e.g., changes in demographics, forms of exploitation)? Are there new challenges emerging?

5. Collaboration with Law Enforcement and Government

How does your organization collaborate with law enforcement and government agencies to support trafficking victims? What improvements could be made to these partnerships?

6. Funding and Resource Allocation

What are your main sources of funding, and are they sufficient to meet the needs of trafficking survivors? How do resource limitations impact your ability to provide support?

7. Awareness and Prevention Efforts

What efforts is your organization making to prevent human trafficking and educate the community? What programs or initiatives have been the most successful?

8. Rehabilitation and Reintegration

How does your organization support survivors in reintegrating into society? What challenges do survivors face when attempting to rebuild their lives?

9. Feedback from Survivors

How do you collect feedback from trafficking survivors about the services you provide, and how do you use this feedback to improve your programs?

10. Your Questions

Questions Category D. Healthcare Providers: Hospitals, clinics, and mental health services interacting with trafficking survivors

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Awareness and Types of Trafficking

How would you describe your understanding of human trafficking? What are the most common types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) you encounter in your area?

2. Prevalence and Vulnerable Groups

Which geographical areas show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases based on your healthcare interactions?

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

3. Identification of Victims

How do you identify potential victims of human trafficking in a healthcare setting? What signs or physical health indicators lead you to suspect that a patient could be a trafficking victim?

4. Barriers to Care

What barriers do trafficking victims face in accessing healthcare, and how can these barriers be addressed?

5. Training for Healthcare Providers

What training do healthcare professionals at your facility receive to recognize signs of trafficking and respond appropriately?

6. Collaboration with Law Enforcement and NGOs

How does your facility collaborate with law enforcement and NGOs when a trafficking victim is identified? Are there any challenges in ensuring proper coordination?

7. Addressing Mental Health Needs

How do you address the mental health needs of trafficking survivors, and what specialized care or mental health services do you provide to them?

8. Your questions

Questions Category E. Social Workers and Psychologists: Professionals assisting with survivor recovery

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Understanding Trafficking in the Region

What are the most common types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) present in your area?

Which geographical areas show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

What are the main drivers of trafficking in your country (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

2. Identifying Victim Needs

How do you identify the immediate and long-term needs of trafficking victims? What assessments or methods do you use to determine their requirements?

3. Referral and Specialized Services

At what stage do you typically refer victims to other services (e.g., medical care, legal assistance, housing)?

What are the most common specialists (e.g., medical professionals, legal aid, trauma therapists) that trafficking victims get referred to?

4. Workload and Client Capacity

How many clients can you effectively service at one time, given your resources and capacity?

What is the current waiting period for clients to receive support or services?

5. Trauma Processing and Client Background

Have you noticed any correlation between how clients process trauma and their specific backgrounds (e.g., cultural, socioeconomic, gender)? How do you tailor your approach to address these differences?

6. Client Demographics and Origins

Which countries or regions do most of your trafficking clients come from? Are there particular migration patterns or routes linked to trafficking cases you encounter?

7. Psychological Impact and Self-Care

How do you personally manage the emotional and psychological challenges of working with trafficking survivors? What strategies do you use to disconnect from the traumatizing experiences of the victims and maintain your own mental well-being?

8. Your questions

Questions Survivors Category F. (Where Ethical and Appropriate): Trafficking survivors willing to share their experiences

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Story Sharing and Confidentiality

Are you willing to share your story with us?

Are there any specific details or parts of your story that you would prefer to keep private or that you believe should be removed to protect your identity or safety?

2. Trafficking Experience

How many other victims did you encounter while being trafficked?

At what point did you realize that you had been deceived and trafficked?

What types of threats, manipulation, or coercion were used to keep you in that situation?

3. Freedom and Restrictions

Did you have access to your travel documents, or were they taken from you?

Were you able to move freely, or was your movement restricted in some way?

4. Survival and Escape

What personal strengths or external support helped you survive and eventually escape?

What were the main challenges you faced in leaving the trafficking situation?

5. Help and Support

From your perspective, what could have been done differently to help you sooner or more effectively?

Did you receive any assistance or intervention while you were being trafficked? If so, what kind of support would have been most helpful at the time?

6. Post-Trafficking and Recovery

How did you navigate the process of recovery and reintegration after escaping?

Have you been able to access services like medical care, psychological support, or legal aid? How useful have these services been in your recovery?

7. Current Life and Advocacy

Do you follow up on cases of reported human trafficking?

Have you participated in any advocacy or awareness-raising activities to help other victims?

What message or advice would you offer to others who might be in a similar situation?

8. Others

Questions Category G. Community Leaders: Religious figures, educators, and local activists

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. Awareness of Trafficking

Are you aware of human trafficking as an issue in your community?

What are the most common types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) present in your area?

2. Prevalence and Demographics

Which geographical areas in your region show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

3. Drivers of Trafficking

What do you believe are the main drivers of human trafficking in your country or community (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

4. Indicators of Trafficking

What signs or indicators have you observed that suggest human trafficking might be happening within your community?

5. Addressing the Problem

What steps have you taken to address the issue of human trafficking within your group or community?

6. Helping Victims

How do you or your organization help individuals who may be victims of trafficking?

If you suspect human trafficking, are you familiar with the appropriate process to report it to authorities?

7. Support Systems

Where do asylum seekers, migrants, or other potentially vulnerable groups go to receive spiritual, educational, or support services?

What support networks exist in your community to protect or assist victims of human trafficking?

8. Prevention Strategies

What strategies or initiatives have you put in place to prevent human trafficking within your community?

How do you raise awareness about human trafficking and engage with local populations to reduce its occurrence?

9. Collaboration and Resources

How do you collaborate with other organizations (e.g., NGOs, law enforcement, government) to combat human trafficking?

Are there sufficient resources, such as funding and training, available to support your anti-trafficking efforts?

10. Reach of Your Group

How extensive are the groups or communities that you oversee or influence?

How do you engage with vulnerable populations like migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to offer them support or protection?

11. Your Questions

Questions Category H. Counter-Trafficking Organizations: National and international bodies involved in prevention, intervention, and advocacy

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee. Some questions may be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

Prevalence and Demographics

1. Types of Trafficking

What are the most common types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) present in your area?

2. Geographical Prevalence

Which geographical areas show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

3. Vulnerable Demographics

What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

4. Drivers of Trafficking

What are the main drivers of human trafficking in your country (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

5. Victim Reporting

Based on your experience, who are human trafficking victims most likely to report their case to (e.g., law enforcement, NGOs, healthcare providers)?

6. Training and Capacity

Are your staff sufficiently trained to handle cases of human trafficking and provide the necessary support to victims?

7. Cooperation

How productive and seamless has the cooperation been between your organization and other stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement, government bodies) in handling trafficking victims?

8. Policies in Place

What policies or frameworks are currently in place to address the needs of human trafficking victims?

9. Referral Mechanism

Is the referral mechanism clear and effective enough to deal with cases of human trafficking? How do you manage referrals between various agencies and organizations?

10. Reporting and Record Keeping

How does your organization manage the reporting and record-keeping of human trafficking cases? Are there any challenges or areas for improvement in ensuring accuracy and thoroughness?

11. Court and Prosecution Success

Have there been successful cases of human trafficking that have gone through the court system and led to prosecutions? What factors contributed to these successes?

12. Follow-Up

Does your organization follow up on reported human trafficking cases? How is the progress of these cases monitored over time?

13. Areas for Improvement

In your view, what areas in anti-trafficking work need improvement? Are there any gaps in victim support, legal processes, or collaboration?

14. Prevention Strategies

What do you consider the most effective ways to prevent human trafficking in both transit and destination areas? Are there any successful programs or interventions that could be scaled up?

15. Your questions

Questions Category I. Others.

This set of questions serves as a flexible guide for the interview. The researcher is encouraged to adapt the questions based on the expertise and experience of the interviewee.

In particular for this section, questions will need to be added or omitted to allow for a more tailored and in-depth conversation, ensuring the discussion remains relevant and insightful.

1. What are the most common types of trafficking (e.g., labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude) present in your area?

2. Which geographical areas show the highest prevalence of trafficking cases?

3. What are the main drivers of trafficking in your country (e.g., economic factors, migration patterns, legal gaps)?

4. What specific demographic groups (e.g., women, children, LGBTQ+ people, migrants) are most vulnerable to trafficking in your region?

5. What initiatives or programs have been implemented to prevent trafficking in your area?

6. How effective are the current education or awareness efforts around human trafficking in your area?

7. What barriers or gaps exist in current anti-trafficking legislation or programs?

8. How does your organization collaborate with other stakeholders (government, law enforcement, NGOs) in combating human trafficking?

9. What policy changes do you believe would have the greatest impact on reducing human trafficking?

10. What role does technology play in human trafficking cases, both in facilitating and combating it?

11. Your questions

Appendix B: Consent Form for Participation in Research Interviews

Project Title: FILM MAKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Principal Investigator(s): [Insert Names Here]

Research Institution: [Insert Institution Name Here]

Contact Information: [Insert Phone Number/Email Here]

Purpose of the Research:

You are being invited to participate in a research study about understanding human trafficking patterns and victim support systems. This study is being conducted as part of a broader project aimed at equipping participating organisations, survivors and volunteers with skills, competences and awareness needed to be able to produce a documentary/film for raising awareness on human trafficking.

Participation

Your participation will involve a [choose: face-to-face /online] interview that is expected to last approximately 45mins. During this interview, we will ask you questions related to human trafficking trends, victim services, and other questions related to the objectives of the project.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequences.

Confidentiality

All information collected during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed in any reports or publications resulting from this research unless you explicitly give permission for this. The data will be stored securely and will only be accessible to the research team.

Do you consent to have your interview recorded?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

Do you consent to be quoted anonymously in research reports or publications?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

If applicable: Do you consent to your name being used in reports or publications?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

Risks and Benefits

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this interview. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point, you may stop the interview. While there is no direct benefit to you, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of human trafficking issues, which will help improve policies and services.

Use of Data

The information you provide will be used solely for research purposes, which will guide the documentary/film for raising awareness on human trafficking. It may be included in reports, publications, presentations, or other forms of dissemination related to the project. Your data will not be shared with third parties outside the research team without your consent.

Your Rights

You have the following rights as a participant in this study:

- The right to withdraw from the study at any point.
- The right to refuse to answer specific questions.
- The right to request that any part of your data be omitted from analysis or publications.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant, please contact:

[Insert Researcher's Name & Contact Information] or

Heddy Bvumburah. heddy@ccifmt.org (Project Coordinator) or

Vincent Caruana. censuemergency@gmail.com (Research Coordinator)

Participant Consent

I have read and understood the information provided above. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have and have received satisfactory answers. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research under the conditions outlined.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher Declaration

I confirm that I have fully explained the research study to the participant and have answered all questions they have raised. I believe that they fully understand what is involved and freely consent to participate.

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C – Stories

1.Story of Anna (name changed)

Anna from a very young age lived in an orphanage, because her parents did not take very good care of her. She was caring for herself as much as she could. When she was just 14 years old, the age when you start to think about relationships and feelings, she was raped by two grown men by the river not so far from the orphanage. The guilt and shame stopped her from seeking any help from adults or her caretakers. Days and even years went by, Anna was growing older and decided that she wanted to earn some money. She was looking at the places and people with whom to belong and feel protected. At that moment she already befriended one Roma lady with a few minor children. Anna started to take care of the children and the Roma lady paid her some small money. The trust was built, Anna felt loved and she had a sense of family that she was so desperately looking for. As soon as Anna turned 18, a Roma lady started to convince her to work in Greece in a cafe. Anna trusted her and did not even raise a question about the fact that she did not speak any English and had never worked or lived in a bigger city. Lady arranged the travel for Anna, and she did not need to pay for anything, Anna was taken care of. At her young age, she did not fear the unknown, she was excited about the possibility of earning money, meeting new people, and even finding love and building a family. Anna's biggest dream was children of her own. Manipulating with the possibility of making Anna's dreams come true, the Roma lady had Anna's trust and full control of her decision-making and behavior.

It was Anna's first-time leaving Latvia and traveling by plane. She was excited and scared at the same time. When Anna arrived in Greece, her illusions broke into pieces. As promised by the Roma lady, somebody was waiting for her at the airport. A man. Anna was feeling different feelings at the same time, she was scared, she wanted to be at home, she also wanted to be brave and she wanted to not let down her second mother - the Roma lady. At that moment, Anna still thought that the choices were in her hands. Anna went with the man who was waiting for her. Her heart was racing, and a bad gut feeling did not leave her all the trip to the "house". They arrived at the apartment complex; it was dark and located in a "bad" part of the neighborhood. Seeing other people, mostly men, Anna's fear became bigger, but it was already too late. Anna was raped by several men that day. She was at the brothel and explained what kind of work she would need to do. Anna had no other choice. She had no money, no phone, no bravery and no power to save herself or even look for help. Anna was selling herself for other men. After some time, Anna found out she was pregnant from one of the clients. When Anna was six months pregnant, her pimp took her to some illegal place. Anna thought she will have a baby there, but instead, it was illegal abortion. Anna was in such shock that she could not speak for several months, she lost her sense of reality and meaning of life. As time went by, Anna was still forced to work till one day she had the courage to speak up and try to save herself. She spoke with her client and convinced him to help her. Anna's client was from Germany and he took her there after Anna risked her life to get her passport back. In Germany, Anna really started to work in a cafe till one day, she met some Latvian people who helped her to go to the embassy. There Anna explained everything to them and begged them to help her go back to Latvia. Anna did not ask for any other help, she did not even want to initiate any criminal proceedings or be involved in them. Of course, criminal proceedings were initiated in Greece, other girls were saved and guilty people were prosecuted. As for Anna, she was back in Latvia. With the lack of money, skills, support and with a lot of traumas, life was not easy for Anna. She tried to build relationships, but somehow all of them were violent. Anna had a baby boy from one of her relationships that did not last. Now Anna needed to take care of not only herself but also a child. In desperation, Anna decided to sell her body again, as it was the only solution she knew would work for sure. From time-to-time Anna used this income making to feed herself and her child. Time went by and Anna met another man who also married her. Somehow violence was part of this relationship as well and Anna with her child seeked help in a crisis center for women with children. In the hands of a caring social worker, Anna started to share her experience. The social worker directly knew that the violence,

Anna was experiencing in her life was part of something more serious. Social workers knew what human trafficking was and directly knew the signs of that. The social worker decided to contact an NGO that offers social rehabilitation for victims of human trafficking - the organization “Shelter “Safe House””. The social worker contacted the organization, gave the details that showed possible human trafficking experience and asked for the next steps. Now social worker needed to encourage and empower Anna to meet with the workers of the NGO and tell them the story and receive help. After some time and trust building, Anna agreed to meet the NGO. A lawyer and a social worker from an NGO went to the crisis center and met Anna. They spoke with Anna about her daily life, about her child and any other daily activities and made her feel safe. They explained to Anna what kind of support they offer and what they need from Anna's side. Anna told the NGO workers her story, and asked for social rehabilitation services that included very comprehensive support, such as legal advice, housing etc. When social rehabilitation was granted, Anna was brought to the capital of Riga, provided with housing, regular psychological support from specialists and daily guidance by social worker and social rehabilitator. All Anna's needs were met, but Anna also needed to work very hard to do everything for her new life in the capital - school for her child, family doctor, social services, work and daily practical items. Everything was too much and Anna collapsed and NGO workers discovered that Anna had a big problem with alcohol that she did not mention before. Anna's biggest fear was to lose her child. She was used to hiding her demons and asked for help in a very specific way. Anna also feared rejection - any kind of rejection. Anna was motivated to use help, to go to specialists, even those who Anna fears - psychiatrist. In the end Anna was on medication that helped her do her daily tasks and even to start work. Anna has a long way to go and long therapy needed, but it is in her hands to cooperate and work with her trauma for, probaby, the rest of her life.

2.Story of Lelde (name changed)

Lelde is a 16 years old girl. She lives with her grandparents who are her legal guardians, as her real parents left her. So Lelde is calling her grandmother as a mom and grandfather as a dad, as she has lived with them since the age of a baby. Lelde is a typical teenager who thinks her parents do not understand her, control her too much and in Leldes case, she thinks it is even worse, as they are old. Lelde goes to a professional school in an average size city, that is quite big, but somehow everyone knows everyone. Of course at the age of 16, most girls, including Lelde, have mainly one thing on their minds - boys. There is this 20 year old boy, who is attractive, everyone kind of knows him, and he is considered a bad boy, a cool boy and his name is Mark. Thing that makes Mark bad - he is dealing drugs. Lelde started to date Mark and could not believe that he chose her as a girlfriend. Soon Lelde was offered drugs. As many people used them in her school, she did not think it was such a big deal. She started to use different drugs, some of them very strong. Of course, drugs are not the cheapest thing to buy and use, Mark was losing money. Soon he had an idea to gain back the money. He convinced Lelde to provide some sexual services to some of his clients. Lelde could not believe that her boyfriend could ask her that. Mark did not hit her, he did not force her to do anything, but step by step he convinced Lelde that it was a great idea to earn money. He had a complete plan that also met Leldes needs. Lelde did not want to miss school and also she needed to be home every evening at 9 pm so her mom and dad would not have any suspicion. It gave a very small window for the work, but Mark decided that for the beginning it would be okay. So Mark started to arrange clients for Lelde. Some of them had houses in their city and he took Lelde there, some of them came from other cities, even other countries and their “meetings” were arranged in hotels. At the beginning it was very difficult for Lelde, as she loved Mark and could not imagine having sex with other men, let alone older men who could easily be her father. Drugs helped to overcome the fear. Mark gave her half of the earnings. When Lelde realized she could earn good money, she started to lose this feeling of shame, because Mark said he loved her and it was for the benefit of both of them. As Lelde had “met” already most of the clients of Mark, he decided to expand their business and seek clients online. He decided and acted behind Lelde's back. Mark made advertisements on special websites. The nightmare started when these applications were found by

someone from her school. Rumors spread and soon Lelde was called a whore and prostitute. Lelde did not know what to do. Of course soon her mom and dad found out as well. All this situation by Lelde, by her family, friends and society in general was interpreted as acts of her consent and choice, and nobody raised a question or paid any attention to the fact that Lelde was a minor and Mark is 4 years older. Of course Lelde's mom and dad started to control Lelde and not let that happen again, because it was a big shame for the family. One day Mark stole Lelde's mom's phone. Mom asked him several times to give the phone back before she went to the police. Mark did not give the phone back and mom went to the police. There she told everything and police recognised that it is human trafficking, including a minor. Mark was arrested, Lelde was recognised as a victim of human trafficking by police and explained that she can receive social rehabilitation services from the NGOs. Lelde was okay with that, but her mom and dad did not trust anyone. With the help of police, NGO workers arranged the first meeting with Lelde, to explain to her about the help and services. In this meeting Lelde participated without her parents. Lelde was a hyperactive, typical teenager, who stressed out very strongly that she does not have a good relationship with her parents. NGO workers started to build a relationship with Lelde and her mom. During social rehabilitation, Lelde received practical help, psychological help, guidance to the specialists (such as going to forensic psychiatric examination) and she received legal support during the criminal proceedings. When social rehabilitation started, NGO workers noticed the high risk of re- trafficking as Lelde did not feel as a victim that much, as she earned good money. Because of the good work of police (supportive police workers) and social rehabilitation, Lelde started to pay more attention to her school and grades. She started to focus on her future. That made her relationship with her mom much better. In the last meeting with NGO workers, Lede was calm, spoke about her school practice in summer and other things she plans for the future. She had trust in adults in her life, and she felt safe.

3.Story of Linda (name changed)

Linda grew up in a violent household. Her father, a former soldier, struggled with anger issues that he took out on his wife and two daughters. Linda stopped attending school in the 5th grade. As she grew older, like everyone else, she began earning money and building relationships, but her childhood traumas followed her, unnoticed. She struggled with a lack of self-confidence, people-pleasing tendencies, and a deep need to be cared for and loved.

Linda had several relationships, but one was particularly special, and she had a daughter with that man. Later, she entered into another relationship. Throughout her life, Linda moved to different cities, following job opportunities. However, with little education, Linda could only secure simple, practical jobs, all while hiding a significant secret—she barely knew how to write. She compensated for her lack of education by taking good care of herself, always dressing well, keeping a fresh manicure, and maintaining a good haircut. But money was never enough.

She also wanted to be a good mother, to take her daughter on trips and provide her with enriching experiences. Loans became a part of her life—quick loans to cover the end of the month, with the hope of repaying them the next. Her debt slowly grew until one day her bank account was blocked.

One day, Linda met a woman. Linda was in her 40s, but this woman was even older. They became friends, and Linda felt like she had found a second mother, someone who cared about her. Linda knew little about this woman, except that she had a son and knew how to make money and avoid financial problems. As trust grew between them, the woman offered Linda a chance to earn money. She knew Linda had money problems, recognized her beauty, and understood how easy it was to manipulate her. The woman suggested that Linda work as a prostitute.

Linda was terrified that everyone would find out, especially her boyfriend at the time. The woman assured Linda that her work would remain a secret and that she would earn good money, which was the

most important thing—she would be able to take care of herself and her daughter. Reluctantly, Linda agreed and started the work.

The woman and her son took Linda and other women to their clients. Linda and the other women lived together in an apartment. The apartment was very nice—nicer than any place Linda had ever lived in. Of course, clients also came to the apartment. The money started coming in, and the woman shared some of it with Linda. She treated the women as if they were her daughters—or at least, that's how the women felt. They went on trips to different cities, the woman bought them new clothes and paid for their manicures. They also drank alcohol together, and soon, violence followed. The woman began hitting and pushing the women.

The woman was an experienced criminal, involved in fraud as well. Due to one of her fraudulent activities, she and her son were investigated and eventually caught by the police for fraud and possible human trafficking. The police raided their apartment in the middle of the night. Linda was scared and confused. After being questioned at the police station, she was taken to an NGO for further support.

Linda was brought to the NGO early in the morning with nothing but the clothes she was wearing—no phone, no ID, no belongings, no home—nothing. When Linda woke up, she was frightened and unwilling to cooperate. NGO workers tried to feed her, but all she wanted was a cigarette. They explained the available help and asked her to fill out a form for rehabilitation. It was just a simple form, but it terrified Linda, as she was asked to do something she could barely manage. It took hours for the NGO workers to get Linda to cooperate. Word by word, she filled out the form, ate some lunch, and was taken to a place where she could stay for a while.

Linda needed all the help she could get—clothes, a phone, a new ID, food, medical care, psychological support, work, and a place to live. It wasn't easy for Linda to accept help, and it was even harder to admit that the woman, her "second mother," was a criminal who had done terrible things to her. Linda was suffering from Stockholm syndrome.

Since the woman was in jail (as a safety measure taken by the police), the NGO workers could do their best to help Linda and rebuild her confidence. After several months, Linda's life began to improve—she saw doctors, started taking care of her health, worked through her psychological traumas, found a job, and began to stabilize her life.

Then one day, the police called to inform Linda about the first court hearing. Linda's confidence wavered. The NGO's lawyer reassured her, explaining that she would be supported throughout the entire process. The worker also mentioned that the suspects were mostly in jail and that there would be a videoconference with them.

When Linda and the NGO worker went to court, Linda started shaking as soon as she saw the woman in the courtroom. Her confidence vanished, and she felt a strong urge to forgive and forget. Linda couldn't imagine that the woman would be imprisoned because of her; she saw it as her fault. Linda still couldn't fully grasp that what had happened to her was a crime.

The criminal proceedings are ongoing, and Linda continues to receive a lot of support to rebuild her confidence.

4.Story of Mia (name changed)

Mia is a young and beautiful woman in her 20s. She was an only child and grew up with a complex relationship with her parents. Her father was always busy with work and various business ventures, providing a good life for the family. Neither Mia nor her mother fully understood what these businesses entailed. Mia's mother, constantly worried about running out of money, was always saving and hiding it. They had grown accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle, but the family dynamics were strained.

Mia's father raised her to be a strong woman, but this sometimes involved violence and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Mia and her mother were dependent on him, and Mia knew that her father was the dominant figure in the family. From a young age, Mia learned that money was the most important thing for a good life and for maintaining peace in the family.

Mia began studying and working. While her education was free, her job didn't provide enough income to support the lifestyle she aspired to. Though she could get by on her earnings, Mia was raised to achieve more. She wanted to buy her own apartment, to have a place of her own. Determined to find a way to earn money faster than through regular work, she started exploring other opportunities.

Through her network, Mia met people who made big money by selling themselves abroad. This seemed like an option for Mia, as she didn't want anyone to know what she was doing. The network was well-organized, always in need of new girls, but getting in wasn't easy. Mia refuses to remember the initial process, as it reminds her of how weak and vulnerable she was. She refers to this phase as the "break-in" process. During this time, girls experience violence, rape, nonstop service demands, and other inhumane acts. Those who survive become strong and seemingly unbreakable.

After surviving the "break-in" process, Mia started working. She traveled from Latvia to Sweden for three weeks at a time, returning to Latvia for two weeks to rest. This arrangement was perfect, as it didn't raise any suspicion with her family. Mia explains that during those three weeks, she barely sleeps or eats, constantly being taken from one client to another. She loses her sense of time and reality. It's difficult and, upon reflection, Mia realizes it's inhumane. But the money is good, allowing Mia to not only live comfortably but also buy her own place and even a car. She knows that a regular job could never afford her this lifestyle.

However, Mia also understands that her body won't last long in this line of work. Every time she returns from Sweden, she decides not to go back. But then, after some internal debate, she convinces herself to go "one last time." This cycle repeats constantly until one day, legal authorities intervene. An investigation into the criminal network in Sweden leads to several arrests, and several girls, including Mia, are rescued.

An NGO in Sweden contacts authorities in Latvia, informing them about Mia's situation. The process of convincing Mia to accept help begins, but it's challenging because Mia doesn't see herself as a victim. She views herself as an experienced prostitute who knows what she's doing. Mia is smart and doesn't show her vulnerabilities. Her cooperation with the NGO is almost business-like. She provides them with all the information they ask for, follows the process, and cooperates like a "perfect client."

Mia attends psychological consultations, meets with a social worker, and gradually allows her true self to emerge. It becomes clear that Mia has big dreams for her future—she wants to make money, but she wants to do it in a way where she is in control and can use her intellect and talents. The NGO workers encourage Mia to pursue education and training. She begins taking courses in beauty procedures and later enrolls in business courses. Step by step, Mia starts building a plan for her future.

She receives psychological support to build her confidence and address her issues with relationships, legal support for starting her own business, and ongoing social worker support to navigate opportunities and other challenges. Mia has developed an attachment to the place she's living and to the community she's in. Although she's still a young woman in her 20s, Mia has big dreams and the courage to make them a reality. It's important for her to find new ways and solutions to achieve something significant, earn money, and avoid disappointing both her family and herself.

Story of Laila (name changed)

Laila is a young woman in her 20s with a complicated past. As a child, her mother struggled with alcoholism and neglected Laila and her siblings. When Laila was just four years old, she was placed in

an orphanage. A few years later, when her older brother turned 18, he took her out of the orphanage to try to care for her. However, Laila grew up without a mother or father figure, and her relationships with her siblings were complicated since they lived under different circumstances. Laila had to learn how to take care of herself, but this also meant she rarely received advice from adults.

Some of her decisions led to positive outcomes, such as studying at a vocational high school to become a horse caretaker. She loved animals because they never disappointed or betrayed her, unlike people with whom she often struggled. Laila was direct and unfiltered in expressing her thoughts, which often made it difficult for her to get along with others, especially employers.

After finishing school, Laila started looking for work, but it was challenging because she lacked essential skills like money management and communication. She went from job to job, longing to work with horses or any other animals. Throughout her life, Laila dealt with trauma, which led to mental health issues such as depression and panic attacks. Navigating the real world alone was not easy for her. She didn't know her rights as a worker and had little choice but to trust others.

Laila eventually found her dream job at a horse stable. She was open about her situation, telling her employer that she had no place to live, no friends, and no family. This made her vulnerable. While most people might have wanted to help her, her employer chose to exploit her vulnerability. He allowed Laila to sleep in a small, unsuitable room, making it clear that he was doing her a favor.

Laila started working, taking care of the horses, but the stable manager also asked her to do many additional tasks like cleaning and organizing. Laila didn't keep track of her hours and wasn't given a work contract, even though she knew she should have one. When she asked about it, her employer kept delaying, saying it would come later. Laila also didn't know how much she would be paid. With no money for food, her employer gave her around 20 euros a week.

When the month ended, Laila expected her salary, but it wasn't paid. It was difficult for her to confront her employer—she was young, small, and lacked knowledge and confidence. Whenever she asked about her pay, the employer would say that her permanent employment hadn't been decided yet, and he accused her of being lazy or doing more harm than good. Laila worked for six months without pay, feeling trapped with no friends, family, money, or guidance on what to do.

One day, Laila learned about a church group that offered various community activities. She didn't plan to ask for help—she just wanted to make some friends. She joined the community and became close with some of the people there. Laila explained her situation to someone she trusted, who immediately recognized that her situation was not normal. This person found the contact information for an NGO that assists victims of human trafficking and explained Laila's situation to them.

The NGO workers arranged a meeting with Laila and offered to help. She readily agreed, as she finally had people in her life who were advising and supporting her. Laila received legal assistance to report her employer to the police for investigation. She also received support from social workers to help her find another job and a place to live.

Laila found a job and her first apartment, which excited her. However, she struggled with the practical aspects of living on her own, as these were big steps, and she was afraid. She needed a lot of mental support, which she received through consultations with a psychologist and meetings with the church community. This community entered Laila's life at the perfect time, helping her learn practical skills, communication, socialization, and other abilities she had previously lacked. She is also learning how to trust people and make better judgments.

Social rehabilitation provided Laila with the resources she needed to start her adult life—a place to live, food, clothes, work, and other necessities. Laila still faces challenges, especially with her mental health. She finds it difficult to attend work daily, stay positive, and build relationships. She missed out on her

childhood and still doesn't feel entirely ready for adulthood. But now, Laila has a supportive community where she can seek advice, help, and friendship.

Unfortunately, the police did not recognize Laila's situation as a case of human trafficking and did not initiate criminal proceedings. However, with the help of the NGO, Laila received the rehabilitation and support she needed.

6.Story of Ahmad (name changed)

Ahmad is from Tajikistan. He has a wife and five children, and as the head of the family, he is the sole provider. Like many other men in Tajikistan, Ahmad was searching for work opportunities abroad. He only speaks Persian and understands a bit of Russian. Through a friend, he learns about job opportunities in Europe, specifically in Latvia. Although Ahmad knows little about Latvia, he, like many others, views all of Europe as wealthy and full of opportunities.

Ahmad and several other men agree to go to Latvia to work as key makers. Everything is arranged by a respectable man from Tajikistan who also has a business in Latvia. Ahmad is concerned because he is not a key maker, but the man reassures him that it's not important and that he will handle all the paperwork. Ahmad has no reason to doubt him and trusts him completely. In Tajikistan, verbal agreements are often considered stronger than written contracts, so no formal agreement is made between Ahmad and the man in Latvia. Verbally, they and the other men from Tajikistan agree to pay 150 Euros each for this opportunity, along with 10% of their monthly salaries. The man also promises to help them with all necessary documents, travel arrangements, accommodation, and other essentials, with the costs deducted from their salaries. Ahmad agrees to these terms.

Upon arriving in Latvia, Ahmad and the other men are taken to an apartment where they must wait until their documents are ready. The first surprise comes when they discover that the company doesn't need key makers but rather bricklayers. Ahmad and the others need to be trained for this job, so they start doing bricklaying and other tasks as part of their training, without receiving any payment. When Ahmad asks about his salary, he is told that their work is of poor quality, so they are not paid. The company also makes it clear that Ahmad and the other men owe money for their accommodation and documents.

Ahmad and the others continue waiting for the promised job. The company sends some workers to Germany and others to the Netherlands, revealing that they are being managed by an agency rather than directly employed. Ahmad remains in Latvia. He and about 10 other men live in a small apartment, waiting for work. They have no money, no food, and no means to survive.

One day, Ahmad decides he can't continue living like this and starts looking for help. He is afraid to go to the police because the man who offered him the job warned him that the police in Latvia are corrupt and hostile toward foreigners. Ahmad eventually finds an NGO that works with migrants. When he goes for a consultation and shares his story, the NGO workers recognize the signs of human trafficking, as they also work with trafficking victims. Ahmad is worried about the consequences of his actions but feels he has no other choice.

When the NGO and police visit the apartment, they find it in terrible condition, far too small for the number of men living there. The men have only eight potatoes left, their only food, and haven't eaten for several days. Although the police investigate the situation, they do not classify it as human trafficking. However, the NGO does and grants the men social rehabilitation.

Ahmad and the others need extensive help. First, they require food and proper accommodation. They also need significant legal support because they don't know their rights, how to apply for work, or their work rights. They have no information about the job market or laws in Latvia. As third-country nationals, they only have work visas, which are invalid without employment. Ahmad and his colleagues have 30 days to find another employer under the conditions set for third-country nationals by migration

law. With the support of the NGO's lawyers, Ahmad finds work for himself and his colleagues. The NGO lawyers also advise Ahmad on his rights and assist the employer in correctly hiring third-country nationals. Additionally, the lawyers help Ahmad and his friends file a civil court case.

During social rehabilitation, Ahmad and some of the other men agree to attend consultations with psychologists, a rare step for men from third countries, especially those who are religious. Ahmad's bravery in reaching out for help broke new ground in Latvia, exposing the exploitation of workers from third countries. His actions inspired others to fight for their rights, leading to the discovery of several similar cases.

It wasn't easy for Ahmad to ask for help, to trust people in Europe, or to trust the system, but he took the risk and was ultimately saved. Now, a few years after his social rehabilitation, Ahmad and some of his colleagues are still in Latvia, learning the Latvian language and culture. Despite his experience of exploitation, instead of harboring anger or resentment, Ahmad has grown to love Latvia. He appreciates the support and help he received and has learned to trust its institutions and people.

7.Story of Ralfs (name changed)

Ralfs comes from a small town. He had a difficult childhood, especially during his school years. In school, Ralfs tried to fit in with the popular boys, which often got him into trouble. After completing the ninth grade, he enrolled in high school but was quickly expelled for drinking alcohol at school with other boys. Ralfs' mother had been working abroad since he was young, so there was no one to properly raise him. Ralfs began to indulge not only in smoking and drinking but also in drugs. He decided to join his mother in England.

In England, Ralfs worked hard and earned good money. Although he had a good life, his problem with drugs worsened. His health deteriorated, and he began experiencing hallucinations. Doctors diagnosed Ralfs with schizophrenia. After this diagnosis, all of Ralfs' family members turned away from him, ashamed that he was mentally ill. Ralfs tried to live his life in various ways, but his condition frequently worsened, leading to multiple hospitalizations in psychiatric facilities. Ralfs now has a disability; his illness affects both his memory and cognitive abilities, particularly his decision-making.

One day, a Latvian man contacted Ralfs online and offered him a job as a courier in Brazil. Ralfs agreed, especially because the man not only bought him a plane ticket to Brazil but also arranged for someone to take him from his home to the airport. When Ralfs arrived in Brazil, he was met by a man who took him to an apartment. When Ralfs asked when he could start working, the man told him he had to wait. For two weeks, Ralfs lived locked in the apartment, unable to go outside. The man had taken Ralfs' documents. After two weeks, the man gave Ralfs a backpack and told him he had to fly to South Africa. Ralfs was worried that he was being asked to smuggle drugs because he had heard about such things. He checked the bag, but it only contained blankets, so he agreed to carry it.

In South Africa, Ralfs was detained by the police because the blankets he was carrying were soaked with drugs. Ralfs ended up in a South African prison, where he spent several months until he was released when the case was not pursued further. Once on the streets without documents, money, or a phone, Ralfs lived on the streets for a long time, begging. One day, he ended up in a church where the staff began caring for him and trying to find out where he was from and how to help him. By this time, Ralfs' mental health had deteriorated, and he was experiencing hallucinations and delusions. Meanwhile, the church staff had contacted the Latvian embassy, which began arranging for Ralfs' return to Latvia. The embassy got in touch with an NGO that works with victims of human trafficking. When Ralfs arrived in Latvia, he was met by representatives of the NGO, as none of his family members wanted to help him. Ralfs was emaciated, frightened, and silent. He had no documents, and his health was poor, so he was placed in a psychiatric hospital for a month of treatment.

Now, Ralfs has access to medication, has organized his documents, and has found a job and a place to live. He also has access to specialist support.

8.Story of Charity Maziwepi (name and places changed)

Charity Maziwepi is a survivor of domestic servitude. She used to live and work in Zambia for a European couple that had a holiday home in Livingstone. Whilst there she worked for them for 5 years looking after their property when they were abroad and also being a house help when they were on holiday. Most of the couple's extended family used to come on holiday throughout the year. The European couple then relocated to Malta from France in 2013 and asked her to join them as their domestic worker in 2014. They processed all her visa requirements and bought her ticket to come here. However, they gave her a contract which in essence was below the minimum wage and she was now required to work 15/16 hour days as the villa the couple bought was too huge to clean and also catering to their house needs. They took possession of her passport and used to open her mail. They gave her a room in the villa to stay hence they could call upon her anytime to do chores. Her day started at 7am and ended at 11:30pm or midnight. She not only tended to the house chores but was also responsible for the upkeep of the garden. She only had 1 day off on a Sunday which in essence was not a day off as she only had the morning off and then had to prepare their dinner and iron their clothes. If she was sick and went to the clinic and was given a sick note and told to take a bed rest, the employer would tell her to work and was not given time to rest. As a result she developed hypertension and edema in her feet. She also got knee problems as a result of going up and down the stairs in the house as there was no lift. Because she was not allowed to socialise she had no idea that there were a lot of people from her country.

One day on a Sunday morning during her off time she met a fellow countryman and they swapped numbers. It was this countryman who opened Charity's eyes and told her that she was trapped in domestic servitude. This fellow countryman also gave her contact details to other countrymen who used to send her messages of solidality. Her escape came when she had been given her annual leave, she decided not to go back to her country but decided to spend the two weeks with her fellow countrymen. When she was leaving for her annual holiday she was ordered to leave behind her Maltese Identification so as to make sure she would not apply for another job or apply for the free Maltese bus pass.

During that time she saw a job online for a cleaner and she applied and was interviewed and offered the job. When she told her employer that she was leaving all hell broke loose, they refused her access to her clothes and stuff that was in the house and they refused to give pay for that month. She managed to retrieve her stuff in the house and get her pay with the intervention of the Police and DIER. That month her salary was more after DIER instructed the employer to pay her according to the stipulated minimum wage regulations. She now works for an employer who gives her time off as well as pay her as stipulated by the law, gets time off and she also now knows her human rights.