Report on Trafficking in Human Beings in Southeast Europe

2019

MIRAGE TASK FORCE
Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration
The 2019 Report on Human Trafficking in Southeast Europe provides the overview of the scale and nature of trafficking in human beings in Southeastern Europe and is covering the year 2018. The main purpose of this Report is to support the competent law enforcement authorities in completing their understanding in order to tackle trafficking in human beings at regional level. The Report is addressing relevant characteristics of trafficking in human beings for the year 2018 and was drafted based on information provided by the 11 SELEC Member States.

The restricted version of the herein report is available for law enforcement and judicial use only and is disseminated to SELEC Member States, Operational and Strategic Partners.
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### Summary

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Key findings

SELEC Member States continue to represent countries of origin for the victims of human trafficking exploited particularly in Western EU countries. At the same time the Member States are facing as well internal trafficking in a serious extent.

The social and economic vulnerability are acting as the main facilitating factors in the recruitment of victims, while the Internet and social media have been highly used by the criminal networks in order to optimize the recruitment process, as well to advertise the services provided.

Deceit, false promises of employment opportunities or promises of shared financial gain and the lover boy method are the main recruitment methods.

Although rarely, the use of violence is used during the exploitation phase in order to control the victims; other methods include threat of violence against family members, emotional dependence, debt bondage and drug addiction.

Data at regional level is placing sexual exploitation and exploitation for forced labor on top of the exploitation purposes identified as well in 2018.

UK, Germany and Italy are the main countries of exploitation for the victims of human trafficking from SELEC Member States, particularity adults. Nevertheless, other countries including Spain, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, France and Belgium were also reported.

A total of 1,671 victims of human trafficking were identified and reported by SELEC Member States for 2018 (11% decrease compared with the previous year).

1,067 national police investigations and 259 international investigations related to trafficking in human beings were conducted in 2018.

ADULTS
1,100 identifications (66%)

MINORS
437 identifications (26%)

Nationals exploited in other countries:
608 victims (36%)

National victims of internal trafficking:
503 victims (30%)

Foreign victims exploited in the Member States: 174 victims (11%)

Type of exploitation

- Sexual: 51%
- Labour: 30%
- Other: 14%
- Begging: 2%
- Street crime: 2%
- N/A: 1%

Traffickers and Criminal Networks

< Traffickers are acting either individually, but also as a group, which may be either an OCG or a groups without a defined organization structure.

< 595 traffickers were charged or prosecuted and 170 convicted in 2018.

< The current tendency is towards small networks brought together by the same interests.

< The traffickers generally share the same nationality with the victims.

< The criminal networks are characterized by flexibility and mobility, acting simultaneous in various areas from one country or at international level.

< The OCGs are displaying an increased orientation towards the use of social media in the recruitment phase, as well as during exploitation.
Trafficking in human beings remains a serious issue and a major priority not only for law enforcement authorities in Southeastern Europe, but also worldwide.

Globally, countries are detecting and reporting more victims and are convicting more traffickers. This may not necessarily represent an increase of trafficking, but also an improved response of the law enforcement capacity to trafficking and an enhanced national capacity to detect, record and report data on trafficking victims.

Despite the permanent efforts of the law enforcement authorities, having in mind the large incomes obtained with a rather minimum investment from the criminal networks involved, the extent of human trafficking continues to represent a serious matter most countries are facing either internally or at international level.

At regional level, the number of identified victims of human trafficking has been following a downward trend starting with 2013, when over 2,000 were identified. From 2016 and up to 2018 the total reported figures did not exceed 2,000 and, excepting 2017 when an 11% increase was observed, the number of identified victims has continued to decrease to a total of 1,671 human trafficking victims reported for 2018.

The main types of exploitation are different from one country to another, from the internal to the external dimension of the human trafficking process, and are generally age and gender based. Nevertheless, as in the previous years, the general available data at regional level is placing sexual exploitation and exploitation for forced labor on top of the purposes identified in 2018 as well.

Total identified victims of human trafficking at regional level, by year (2014-2018)

- 2014: 2,089
- 2015: 2,001
- 2016: 1,692
- 2017: 1,886
- 2018: 1,671

Reporting MSs: 12, 12, 12, 11, 11
Regarding age, almost all countries reported higher figures for adult victims than for minors. Thus, the victims of trafficking identified were generally adults (66%, 1,100 victims), while the minors accounted for 26% (437 identifications). In 2017, adults accounted for 49%, minors for 24%, while for 27% of the number of victims data was not available.

Given the place of exploitation and origin of the victims identified in 2018, 36% (608 identifications) were nationals exploited in other countries, 30% (503 identifications) national victims of internal trafficking, while 11% (174 identifications) are foreign victims exploited in the reporting Member State.

The regional situation regarding the share of identified victims by origin and place of exploitation did has only slightly changed compared with the previous year: nationals of SELEC Member States exploited in other countries (27% in the previous year; 36% in 2018), national victims of internal trafficking (27% in the previous year; 30% in 2018) and foreign victims exploited in SELEC Member States (16% in the previous year, 11% in 2018).
In terms of numbers, the statistics over the past five years are highlighting a downward trend regarding internal trafficking. The number of national victims exploited in other countries has also been following a downward trend up to 2018, when a 14% increase was reported at regional level. The number of foreign victims exploited in the reporting Member States is rather small compared with the other categories, a peak of 325 identified victims was reported in 2017.

The countries of exploitation for national victims of trans-border trafficking are generally in Western Europe. The available data is placing UK, Germany and Italy on top of the countries of exploitation for the victims of human trafficking from Southeast European countries, particularly adults. Nevertheless, other countries such as Spain, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, France and Belgium were also reported as countries of exploitation. While, exploitation for most victims took place only in one country, there was a significant number of victims for which the exploitation was organized in more than one country.

At regional level the total number of identified foreign victims exploited in SELEC Member States was rather small compared with other categories and the available data suggests that an important number of victims identified were citizens of other SELEC Member States.

The available data at regional level is confirming the already established pattern related to the age of the identified victims for the above analyzed categories. Most victims of internal trafficking continue to be minors (65%), while for the other two categories, national victims exploited in other countries and foreign victims exploited in the reporting Member States, the victims are generally adults (93% and 77%, accordingly). Given the trans-border element, international transportation/travel required for the last two categories, the exploitation of minor victims in other countries would require a more elaborate preparation and modus operandi, thus making the internal exploitation of minor victims more appealing for the traffickers.
**Features of human trafficking and modus operandi**

**Recruitment**

The criminal networks engaged in human trafficking are taking advantage of the social and economic vulnerability of the victims and are generally using deceit, false promises of employment opportunities or promises of shared financial gain and the *lover boy* method as recruitment methods.

The abuse of position was also reported as a method for recruitment of minor victims.

The traffickers and the victims are sharing the same citizenship, victims being usually recruited by individuals belonging to the same social environment, or even the same family.

In order to create a trust and dependence based relationship with the victims, physical abuse was rarely reported as used by the traffickers in the recruitment process.

The Internet and the social media facilitating advertising of false employment opportunities are enhancing the recruitment and enlarging the number of potential victims both for sexual exploitation, as well as for labor exploitation.

**Transportation**

Transportation of the victims is generally facilitated by the same person who recruited the victim or, in some cases, by another trusted person or even by the victims alone.

The costs are covered by the traffickers and may be used as debt bondage in order to force the victims to engage into exploitation.

Usually, transportation is made by vehicles belonging to the traffickers, sometimes by train or airplane.

Since the victims are usually cooperative the traffickers are not concerned of police controls on the roads, thus they use the fastest routes towards destination countries.

In almost all cases legal documents are used for transportation and border crossing. Fraudulent documents are generally used in trafficking of minor victims (ID documents or documents proving consent to accompany.

**Exploitation**

The exploitation is usually coordinated by other members of the criminal networks and, in international exploitation cases, is supported by citizens of the country of destination.

For sexual exploitation, the traffickers are using dedicated websites in order to advertise the sexual services of the victims.

Although rarely, the use of violence is used during this stage of trafficking in order to control the victims.

Other methods used by the traffickers in order to control the victims are the use threat of violence against family members, emotional dependence, debt bondage and even the use of drugs (reported in one case).

**Proceeds of crime**

The proceeds of crime are either invested in the countries of exploitation or sent back to the countries of origin of the traffickers and victims.

For money transfer, the criminal networks are using services such as Western Union or Money Gram. However, it is still very common to transfer money through one of the member of the criminal networks, the victims themselves, curriers or bus drivers.

The proceeds of crime are also used to buy real estate or luxury cars and jewelry which can be more easily transported across the borders and used as well in order to attract new potential victims.
Exploitation

At regional level, the most common type of exploitation of victims of trafficking was sexual exploitation (853 victims) followed by the exploitation for the purpose of forced labor (496 victims).

Moreover, a total of 37 victims were exploited for forced begging and other 27 were identified as victims of forced street crime.

Other types of exploitation including tissue and organs harvesting, forced marriage or child pornography accounted for a small number of cases and are detailed below.

In addition, one victim with more than one type of exploitation was reported and another one with exploitation for illegal surrogacy.

In 50% (545 identified victims) of the cases for which detailed data was provided, adult victims were exploited for sexual purposes, while the victims exploited through forced labor accounted for 40%. Exploitation for forced begging accounted for 3% (29 victims), street crime for 1% (13 victims), while 3 victims were exploited for tissue and organs harvesting purposes.

The exploitation of minor victims of human trafficking identified was for sexual purpose in 70% of the cases (307 victims). Labor exploitation was reported in 14% of the cases (59 victims), street crime in 3% of the cases (14 victims) and begging in 2% of the cases (8 victims). Additionally, one victim was exploited for forced marriage, one victim for child pornography and another minor victim was identified in connection with multiple forms of exploitation.
Sexual exploitation

The figures for all types of exploitation are particularly underlining that most of adult victims identified were exploited in other countries and to a lesser extent in the countries of origin, while a rather insignificant number of victims were foreigners identified in the reporting SELEC Member States. The minor victims, however, were exploited for almost all purposes in the country of origin, the only exception is begging, which generally took place in other countries than the country of origin.

The most common type of exploitation identified by the Member States is the sexual exploitation in terms of adults, as well as minor victims exploited both internally and at international level, mainly in Western European countries. The sexual exploitation is generally gender based, most victims of this type of trafficking being women.

As a general rule, the traffickers are taking advantage of the social and economic vulnerability of the victims, using soft methods of recruitment rather than physical violence, currently very rarely used. However, physical violence was reported to be used in some cases as a method of control over the victim during the exploitation phase together with other methods such as threats against members of their families, restrictions on their freedom and communications (victims are not allowed to use mobile phones, social media etc.), debt bondage, etc.

The traffickers are using deceit regarding false job opportunities of employment or the share of financial gains in the recruitment process. The victims are misled regarding the purpose of their travel and the country of destination or are not familiar with the working conditions and the degree of dependence imposed.

Nevertheless, the lover boy method remains the most common recruitment method in human trafficking for sexual exploitation, the victims becoming emotionally and financially attached to the trafficker. The traffickers are proposing to travel abroad or even to get married. In many cases the victims are aware of the activities they will be involved in and voluntarily engage in the trafficking process.

The exploitation of the victims takes place in different types of environment such as clubs, brothels, hotels, private apartments, beauty or massage salons, which actually operate as illicit brothels, or on the street. In terms of countries of exploitation, the traffickers tend to orient towards countries where prostitution is legal and where they are actually acquiring the necessary documents and even fulfill the related tax obligations.

The Internet and the social media are used in order to advertise the sexual services of the victims, but also in recruitment, to contact possible victims and clients of services, as well as a communication method in order to avoid wiretapping.

Labor exploitation

Labor exploitation is the second most common type of exploitation identified by the Member States, victims of trafficking are mainly male adults. The targeted victims for the traffickers are also belonging to social and economic vulnerable communities lured by promises of motivating income and employment opportunities, mostly in the
agriculture area. The criminal networks are displaying a law level of organization, but are supported by individuals with connections within the labor market in the countries of destination or by specialized recruitment companies.

The victims are voluntarily engaging in the trafficking process and leave the countries of origin legally using their personal identity documents. After being transported to the countries of exploitation, in some cases, the victims are deprived of their documents and forced to work in exchange of small amounts of money which mainly cover only their primary needs.

The main part of the earned money is held by the traffickers, promising the victims that their money is only being collected and will be paid back upon returning to the country of origin. In order to control the victims, the traffickers are using debt bondage, threats or deprivation of the means of communication after being transported to remote agricultural areas.

Other

Other types of exploitation were also identified by the Member States, the victims being also forced into begging or into committing crimes, in some cases multiple form of exploitation were organized by the traffickers.

In terms of exploitation through begging, both male and women were recruited, adults as well as minors were identified as victims. Individual with physical or mental disabilities are more likely to become victims of trafficking for this purpose.

The exploitation typically takes in large urban areas, metro stations and popular touristic regions.

Exploitation through forced crime, usually street crime was additionally reported.

Trafficking for the purpose of tissue or organs harvesting has been rarely reported in Southeastern Europe, only one such case was investigated in the region. Additionally, one case regarding a female victim recruited for the purpose of surrogacy was reported, as well as cases of pregnant women trafficked for the purpose of selling their newborns.

SELEC MS reported a total of 595 perpetrators charged/prosecuted and 170 convicted for trafficking in human beings related offences for 2018. In line with the decrease of the number of identified victims, the number of perpetrators charged/prosecuted, as well as the number of convictions for trafficking in human beings offences has dropped.

Traffickers and criminal networks

Traffickers charged/prosecuted and convicted (2015—2018)

![Graph showing the number of traffickers charged/prosecuted and convicted from 2015 to 2018.](image)
Criminal Networks

The member of the criminal networks engaged in human trafficking are generally linked on grounds of ethnicity, family ties, regional basis or financial interests.

At regional level, there is no single organizational structure for the investigated criminal networks engaged in trafficking in human beings related crimes.

The Member States have identified criminal networks with a defined hierarchical structure, usually coordinated by on leader and members specialized for each step of the trafficking (recruitment, transportation, harboring, surveillance, exploitation or document forgery if necessary).

Generally, the member which is responsible of recruitment is also facilitating the transportation to the country of destination where other members are responsible of the exploitation phase.

On the other hand, there were identified criminal networks without a defined hierarchical structure which are operating through a broad scheme of persons who assist the members both in the countries of origin and the countries of destination (accommodation and surveillance of the victims).

Regarding the number of members, it was underlined that the current tendency is towards smaller groups brought together by the same interests, while the profits remain within a small group of persons.

However, the members of the criminal networks are relying on the support of other individuals from the countries of destination, which are mainly engaged in the exploitation phase providing support in terms of accommodation and surveillance of the victims.

In terms of nationality, the members of the criminal networks generally share the same nationality with the victims.

Nevertheless, in the exploitation phase of the human trafficking process, it was observed the contribution of individuals with the citizenship of the country of exploitation.

The criminal networks are characterized by flexibility and mobility, acting simultaneous in various areas of one country or at international level, moving from one country of destination to another in order to avoid being detected by the authorities.

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Number of national/international investigations and identified victims (2015-2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>National Investigations</th>
<th>International Investigations</th>
<th>Victims of Human Trafficking Identified</th>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>2,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>1,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>1,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1,067</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>1,671</td>
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Several facilitating factors are contributing to the trafficking of minor victims such as the specific vulnerability of minors, the increased demand in the destination/exploitation countries, as well as the Internet and social media which have had the unintended consequence to enable the exposure of minor victims to sexual exploitation. The vulnerability of the minor victims is also gender sensitive, the significant share being female exploited sexually for prostitution.

A concerning number of minor victims, as the most vulnerable category of human trafficking victims, continued to be identified in Southeastern Europe, in the trans-border, but mostly in the internal dimension of exploitation.

At regional level, a total of 437 identifications of minor victims were reported, accounting for 26% from the total numbers.

Taking advantage of the specific vulnerability of minor victims, the traffickers are recruiting victims from social and economic vulnerable families, using deception and promises of better life conditions, the lover boy method in order to obtain their voluntarily consent or in some cases the consent of the family, which may be financially interested or directly involved in the trafficking process.

Minor victims are also recruited from youth centers or from other education centers, usually with the support of the decision makers in the respective institution, taking advantage of the authority they have over the victims and using promises of high incomes. The main types of exploitation were for sexual purposes and forced labor.

In international trafficking cases, transportation to countries of exploitation is facilitated by false ID documents or false legal authorizations for the minor to leave the country.

However, in many cases, the parents or legal guardians are directly involved or deceived to sign the legal documents and the transportation is made using legal documents.

Regarding the place of exploitation, most of the minor are identified as victims of internal trafficking.

The minor victims of internal trafficking accounted for a 65% share, while 23% of the victims exploited in other countries and 7% of the victims from other countries exploited in the Member States were minors.

The reported countries of exploitation were predominantly in Western and Northern Europe, including UK, Sweden, Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Austria, Poland, Belgium or Denmark.
Conclusions and future scenarios

At regional level, considering that the number of victims of human trafficking has been following a downward trend over the past years, the extent of human trafficking appears to have decreased.

However, as the number of national investigations has been following an upward trend, this may be the result of an improved response of the law enforcement capacity against human trafficking.

The Member States continue to represent the origin of victims of human trafficking exploited in Western European countries and to a much lesser extent countries of destination, while, at the same time, facing internal trafficking in a serious extent.

The orientation of perpetrators towards procurement rather than trafficking and the use of soft methods of recruitment leading to voluntarily engagement of the victims in the trafficking process for sexual exploitation as well as for labor may have contributed to smaller number of unidentified victims leading to the constant drop of the number of victims identified.

Additionally, given the tendency towards criminal networks with a low degree of organization and small number of members, the number of victims exploited by one criminal network may be smaller than it was in the past.

While human trafficking may be disguised into other criminal activities such as prostitution, property crime, labor related crime or even money laundering, a significant number of victims originating from countries in the region or internally exploited may still remained unidentified.

Facilitated by several factors including the social and economic vulnerability of the victims such as the lack of education or employment opportunities and optimized by the orientation of criminal networks towards the use of the Internet and social media facilitating both the recruitment and the exploitation opportunities, human trafficking will remain a serious threat most countries are facing, either internally or at international level.

At regional level, the type of exploitation is different from one country to another, from the internal to the external dimension of trafficking, placing on top the sexual exploitation, followed by labor exploitation and other forms of such as begging and forced crime for trans-border trafficking, whilst internally trafficking for sexual exploitation remains the main form of exploitation.

The most common type of exploitation further expected within the following period of time, having in mind the large incomes obtained with rather minimum investment from the organized crime groups involved, remains the sexual exploitation.