



**THE PROFILS OF UNACCOMPANIED  
MINORS AND THE RECEPTION SYSTEMS IN  
ITALY, GREECE, SPAIN, POLAND AND  
ESTONIA**

**TRAFFICKING AND TRAFFICKING  
INDICATORS IN THE EU**

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

The Kleos Project, an initiative co-funded by the European Union under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), emerges as a pivotal response to the increasingly complex and multifaceted challenge of human trafficking within Europe. As a continuation and evolution of the Andreia project (2020), Kleos seeks to forge a bridge between established methodologies and innovative strategies aimed at improving the identification, support, and integration of trafficking victims. Human trafficking is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue, with its roots often intertwined with various forms of discrimination and socio-economic vulnerabilities. The Kleos Project recognizes that trafficking is not a monolithic phenomenon; it is a dynamic and evolving challenge that requires constant adaptation and innovation in response to new trends and emerging threats. The recent global crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, have exacerbated the conditions that lead to trafficking, further complicating the efforts of organizations and governments to address this issue effectively. These crises have also accelerated the shift toward online trafficking, presenting new challenges that require fresh approaches and enhanced indicators to identify and combat trafficking in its various forms.

The project brings together seven partners from five EU member states—Italy, Spain, Estonia, Greece, and Poland—each contributing their unique expertise and perspectives to a comprehensive, collaborative effort. These partners, which include both public institutions and private organizations, represent a diverse spectrum of experiences and approaches to combatting trafficking, thereby enhancing the project's potential for generating meaningful, replicable solutions applicable across different European contexts. The partner organizations are: Centro Studi Medi, an Italian independent research center on migration; Agorà, an Italian social cooperative; Epeksa, a Greek independent research and social intervention center; Red Incola, a Spanish NGO, Rise Up Community, an Italian communication agency; Eluliin, an Estonian NGO; and UMWS, the Office of the Marshal of the Polish Świętokrzyskie region.

At its core, the Kleos Project aims to conduct a thorough analysis of trafficking across the five partner countries and to enhance the effectiveness of Europe's anti-trafficking framework. These countries are strategically significant as they represent major entry points for foreign nationals into the European Union, making them critical nodes in the broader European trafficking landscape.

This Report – divided in two parts - rooted in the Kleos Project, aim to analyze the situation of unaccompanied minors and the situation of trafficking indicators in the five partner countries. The first part has the objective of analyzing the profiles of unaccompanied minors in Italy, Greece, Spain, Poland and Estonia, by analyzing the main sociodemographic characteristics of the minors and then the countries' reception systems.

The second part seeks to evaluate the efficacy of current trafficking indicators in light of recent developments and to assess the need for new indicators that better reflect the complexities of modern trafficking. Through a combination of statistical data, practitioner interviews and analysis of secondary sources, the paper aims to contribute not only to the partner countries' anti-trafficking efforts but also to the broader European and global initiatives against trafficking. The paper will indeed conclude with an analysis of the overall trafficking situation and trafficking indicators in Europe, followed by recommendations for improvement, both at the European level and within the five countries studied.

This report was developed as part of the implementation of the Kleos project - Strengthening Skills and Networks in the Face of the New THB Scenario - and was co-funded by the European Commission. Both reports reflect only the views of the Kleos project partnership and are not representative of the European Commission's perspective.

The first part of the report focuses on “Profiles of unaccompanied minors and reception systems in Italy, Greece, Spain, Poland and Estonia” while the second part of the report focuses on “Trafficking and trafficking indicators in the EU.” The report is produced by Epeksa and Centro Studi Medi.

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# THE PROFILS OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND THE RECEPTION SYSTEMS IN ITALY, GREECE, SPAIN, POLAND AND ESTONIA

## INTRODUCTION

The movement of populations in foreign countries is an intertemporal phenomenon. Migrants and refugees are crossing international borders on daily basis. Unaccompanied minors are the ones in the most vulnerable position and this is the reason they are the object of this research. Their vulnerability has as a result to be an easy target for the traffickers. Minors end up as victims of human trafficking that are not frequently detected. Nowadays, the phenomenon of missing minors is quite concerning. To begin with the meaning of the unaccompanied minors, as an unaccompanied minor is defined the individual under the age of 18 years old, who enters a foreign country without the escort of the adult that is legally responsible for his diligence. Human trafficking is defined by the Protocol for the Prevention, Repression and Punishment of the Forbidden Trafficking of Humans aiming to sexual and financial exploitation, especially of women and children, as the recruitment, transportation, trading, settlement or reception of people via violence, threats, deception, kidnapping, coercion or financial offer. The trafficking of people, including children, is appearing with many kinds of exploitation with most common the sexual exploitation in the form of forced prostitution and forced marriage. The second most common kind of trafficking is forced labour. Other faces of exploitation are mendicancy as well as drug trafficking. The trafficking aiming to the illegal adoption is also worth mentioned. Lastly, there is the trafficking of human organs.

The study is centralised on the five European countries, Italy, Greece, Spain, Poland and Estonia. Each one constitutes a separate chapter on the research. The three Mediterranean countries were chosen, since they receive the higher number of migrants and Poland and Estonia, due to the huge flows of Ukrainian refugees. The report includes a data analysis of the main sociodemographic characteristics of the minors, the gender, age, country of origin and other important factors. The profiles of the minors reaching these five countries and their alterations through the years are crucial for the analysis. Additionally, the main focus is on the countries' reception systems. The processes for the residence permit and the international protection status, the reception structures, the legal representatives and the foster families are analysed. The attempts for integration are pointed out, as well as the changes in the laws and the reception conditions. The Covid-19 affected dramatically the services provided to minors and the statistics were very different during the pandemic. Therefore, the study contains information until the last 8 years, so that the framework of the pre-Covid period is specified. The methodology followed on the study is a desk review and a data analysis.

## Italy

The last years the number of unaccompanied minors reaching the Italian borders gradually increases. In May 2023, 20.510 minors were located in the country, when in the same period the previous year, there were 14.558, 7.159 in 2021 and 5.156 in 2020<sup>1</sup>. It should be mentioned that the dramatical decrease is related to the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, in May 2017 there was a total of 16.348 unaccompanied minors<sup>2</sup>. Most of them are males between 16 and 17 years old. A phenomenon that is slightly decreased the last two years. Until 2021, approximately 95% were males, when in 2022, 80% and in 2023, 86% and correspondingly until over 60% were in the age of 17 years old, when in 2022, only 46% and in 2023, 44%<sup>3</sup>. The main countries of origin were Egypt 25% and Ukraine 23% until May of 2023, Ukraine 35% and Egypt 15% until 2022, Bangladesh 24% and Tunisia 14% until 2021 and Albania 28% and Bangladesh 12% until 2020<sup>4</sup>. Sicily was the region that received the higher number of minors, on average, 28% of the total, with the only exception the year of 2022 that Lombardy was in the first spot receiving 20% of the arrivals<sup>5</sup>. In general, most of the minors was reaching the borders by the sea, while 2022 was reasonably the exception, since most of them were found by the Italian authorities. As for the reception system, over all the years, the second level reception facilities hosted most of the minors, over 2/3. The year of 2023, however, is observed a decrease and the second level facilities accommodated only the 1/2 of the minors<sup>6</sup>. Another noteworthy fact is that from 2022 there is an increase in the private sector reception facilities, reaching 23% of the total<sup>7</sup>, while until the end of 2021 they represented only 4%<sup>8</sup>.

January 2019 to June 2019 was the period with the least minors that arrived alone in Italian land, since there were only 486. In 2020 things changed and that was because in the first six months of the year were reported 1.289 minors from whom 84% were unaccompanied, according to the Ministry of Interior. The majority of them were coming from countries of Africa, such as Guinea (7%), Eritrea (2%), Somalia (10%), Cote d' Ivoire (7%), Tunisia (6%) as well as from Asian countries, such as Bangladesh

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, «Statistical report on the presence of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy», 31/05/2023

<sup>2</sup> Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, «Report mensile Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati in Italia», 31/05/2017

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, «Statistical report on the presence of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy», 31/05/2021

<sup>4</sup> Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, «Report mensile Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati in Italia», 31/05/2020

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, «Statistical report on the presence of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy», 31/05/2022

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, «Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy: Semi- annual report», 31/12/2023

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, «Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy: Semi- annual report», 31/12/2022

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, «Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy: Semi- annual report», 31/12/2021

(19%). Regarding the ages of the unaccompanied children that arrived in Italy on the first half of 2020, 5% of them were between 0 and 3 years old, whereas 95% were between 4 and 17 years old. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, 95% of the unaccompanied children that arrived in 2020 were boys and 5% were girls<sup>9</sup>. In 2021 Italy welcomed 16.575 unaccompanied minors and 3.373 of them applied for international protection. In 2022 the number of the unaccompanied children in Italy increased, since they reached 28.237 and almost half of them (45%) travelled by sea to end up in the Italian land. It is impressive and disheartening that from this big number of unaccompanied minors only 1.671 of them were asylum seekers, coming mostly from third world countries. More analytically, based on Ministry of Labor, 244 unaccompanied minors who requested for international protection were coming from Bangladesh, 236 from Pakistan, 179 from Egypt, 155 from Somalia, 135 from Gambia, 99 from Afghanistan, 87 from Tunisia, 71 from Ivory Coast, 65 from Mali and 56 from Guinea, whereas for the rest 344 there was not identification of their origin.

Among these statistics, they should be added the 7.034 minors that left Ukraine due to the ongoing war<sup>10</sup>. The boys (80.1%) represented the biggest part of the minor population and 44.8% of them were 17 years old and 5.932 were coming from Ukraine, 2.497 from Egypt, 1.302 from Albanian, 1.239 from Bangladesh and 1.145 from Tunisia. However, the advent of Ukrainian minors changed the statistics, since the age bar was dropped to 15 years old and were reported more girls on a percentage of 19.9%. Only 3 Italian cities accepted and housed the unprotected minors, and these were Lombardy, which welcomed 18.3% of the minor population, Sicily accepted 17.6% of them, whereas Emilia-Romagna received 10.5% of the unaccompanied children<sup>11</sup>. In the first six months of 2023, arrived in Italy 11,386 unaccompanied minors. Once again most of them were males (96%) and the females were a minority (4%). They were coming mainly from Egypt (25%), Guinea (11.8%), Tunisia (11%), Ivory Coast (8%) and Gambia (6.1%). There were children of all ages and particularly 0,4% were under 6 years old, 9,3% were between 7 and 14 years old, 17,5% were 15 years old, 31,9% 16 years old and 41% 17 years old. As of June 30, 2023, were reported 20,926 unaccompanied minors in Italy with 86.6% being boys and 13.4 being girls from Egypt (25.5%), Ukraine (21.6%), Tunisia (8.5%), Guinea (5.6%) and Albania (5.4%). Their ages varied between 1 and 6 years old (2.2%), between 7 and 14 years old (16.4%), 15 years old (12.1%), 16 years old (24,7%) and 17 years old (44.7%). At the same period most of them found shelter in Sicily (22.1%), in Lombardy (13.2%), in Emilia- Romagna (8.3%), in Calabria (8%) as well as in Campania (6.7%). They were hosted

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<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, «Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated», Unicef.org

<sup>10</sup> ASGI, «Identification Italy», aida, ecre, 31/05/23

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, «Italy: Report on unaccompanied minors», European Website on Integration, 30/08/22



in reception structures (80%), in second reception structures (59%), in first reception structures (21%) and in private facilities (20%)<sup>12</sup>.

The information by Telefono Azzurro for International Missing Children's Day is jaw dropping, since only in 2022 disappeared 17.130 minors in Italy, with the majority of them (14.410) being teenagers between 15 and 17 years old. Compared to 2021, the percentage of the minors of foreign nationalities that disappeared in Italy was increased almost by half (47.9%) in 2022, whereas the disappeared Italian minors represented a smaller percentage of 24.2%. Regarding the ethnicities of the missing children, 43.6% of them were north Africans from Egypt or Tunisia and mainly boys (91.3%). Ukrainian minors represented a very small sample (0.54%)<sup>13</sup>. It is a fact that the missing of children is closely related to trafficking. In 2021, minors between 12 and 13 years old were into forced labor mostly in rural areas. The same timeline there were 757 trafficked victims and 35% of them were minors with the majority of them being girls<sup>14</sup>. In 2022 most of the exploited victims in Italy were coming from Nigeria, Bulgaria, China, Cote d' Ivorie, Gambia, India, Pakistan and Romania and some of them were ethnic Roma. Especially Nigerian girls are used for sex trafficking because of debts and voodoo ceremonies. It was also reported that many Italians participated casually in the promotion of child sex tourism in other countries. In the same year there were four types of child trafficking in Italy, including sexual exploitation, forced criminal actions, mendicancy and forced labor in agriculture, bars, bakeries, restaurants as well as in different kinds of shops. It is important to mention that ethnic Roma minors are also in danger of being exploited mostly for mendicancy and sex trafficking<sup>15</sup>.

As for the reception system in Italy, there are three types of facilities. To begin with, there is the first reception system, for the immediate needs of the minors, aiming at the identification, the age recognition, as well as to provide them with basic information about their rights. The recognition of the unaccompanied minors provides a condition of permanency, a legal status and social rights. According to the Italian law of 2017 the recognition of the minors should be completed within 10 days. A procedure for the age identification is taking place and an interview, with the assistance of an intercultural mediator. Lastly, a file for the minor is created. In general, the hosting of the minors in emergency structures is considered to be insufficient. Nevertheless, the new law could be evaluated positively, due to the facilitation of the procedures. Then /there is the second reception system, with centers hosting the minors after applying for international protection, until they reach adulthood. In case there is no space available in this type of facilities, the Community, where the minor lives, has to provide structures

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<sup>12</sup> Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, «Unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy, Direzione Generale dell'immigrazione e de politiche di integrazione- divisione II», 30/06/23 <sup>13</sup> Redazione ANSA, «17.130 children reported missing in Italy in 2022», ANSA English, 25/05/23

<sup>14</sup> Save The Children, «Italy: Many children of migrant farm workers live hidden from sight and isolated from schools», 26/07/23

<sup>15</sup> U.S Department of State, «2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Italy»

and host him/her<sup>16</sup>. The priority of the reception system is the placement of the minor in a foster family rather than in a reception facility.

The law 47/2017 introduces the concept of volunteer guardian<sup>17</sup>. He/she is a citizen, who is the central figure for the reception and integration of the minors. The number of the volunteer guardians in the year 2022 was 3.783. Although there has been a raise since 2017, still there are way fewer than the minors. The guardians are following a training of phenomenological, legal and psycho-pedagogical courses of 26 hours. Then there are the training events from the communities. The aim of such events is the creation of networks and the exchange of opinions through them, so that especially the new ones to be provided with assistance. There are also funds and programs to help the guardians. Additionally, social services tend to keep contact with them. Lastly, the community offers cultural mediation workshops if needed, for a more effective management between the different cultural backgrounds. At this point it should be mentioned that not all the applications for guardianship are being accepted and one guardian could be responsible for more than one child. Regarding to the age of the minors, there are courts, which decide that the younger minors are the in higher need, while others support that the ones closer to adulthood are more vulnerable. In general, the first case is more common. A problem that often occurs is that the appointments after the certification could take either weeks or months, based on the region and the availability. As for the exact role of the guardian, the law is not very specific, thus it is in the will of the guardian the support that would be provided to the minor<sup>18</sup>. The key is in the relation that is built between the two. In the past, there was the institutional guardian. The goal is the volunteer guardian to be able to act more freely.

The integration of the minors is influenced by numerous factors. The specific area where the child lives plays a major role, since there are different opportunities in each region. The social circle, the people interacting with the minors also affect their inclusion. Furthermore, the educators have a very important part, especially for the females<sup>19</sup>. Another aspect is that in the small reception centers is more likely to be created the feeling of a family, while in the bigger ones, there are created more often conditions of opposition between the different ethnic groups<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, small centers lack in equipment and are less resilient in socks. As for the mixed structures, they are thought to not respond satisfactory in the specific needs of the minor, while on

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<sup>16</sup> Fontazione Iniziative e Studi Sulla Multietnicità, «A un bivio: La transizione all'età adulta dei minori separati e non accompagnati in Italia», Rapporto, Novembre 2019, Unicef, UNHCR, OIM, p. 22-23

<sup>17</sup> Osservatorio Nazionale sui Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati in Italia, Quatro Rapporto, 2023, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, p. 35-41

<sup>18</sup> Fontazione Iniziative e Studi Sulla Multietnicità, *ibid*, p. 40

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33-36

<sup>20</sup> Osservatorio Nazionale sui Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati in Italia, *ibid*, p. 27-28

the contrary they are considered to be helpful for the integration, because minor get to live and interact with Italian children.

The inclusion of the minors in the education system could be crucial for their integration. The majority follows an Italian course within the host organization, then some within CPIA and few within third sector organizations. In a sample of 130 organizations, 80% of them had partnerships with centers for adult education, VET centers and public organizations<sup>21</sup>. Approximately 65% works with upper secondary schools and 55% with lower secondary schools. According to the sample of the survey, 49% of the minors were full-time students, 34% was not studying due to work or other reasons and 14% was studying with a part-time job. The primary school was attending the 48%, the secondary school the 29%, while 18% did not follow any education level. Many Albanians had reached the secondary school in their country, in contrast to Bangladeshi, that in a high number they had not received any form of schooling. As for the foreign languages, 40% spoke 2 languages and 12%, 3 languages. Therefore, it is obvious that the sample is heterogenous and differentiated. Although the number of arrivals changes during the years, the education system is not reorganized, to adapt to the new conditions. Moreover, there is a high drop out rate, because either the minors have to be relocated in other areas or facilities, or they have a transitory status. Problems also occur due to the complicated bureaucracy and the fact that in regions with a lot of minors, the availability of programs is more restricted<sup>22</sup>. Likewise, the rural areas face more difficulties. The factors that affect negatively the integration of the minors in the education system are plenty. Out of the most important, is the lack of connection between schools and other local services and the weak networks among schools and the reception facilities. Additional problems are the shortage of spaces in schools, the lack of cultural mediators as well as of linguistic or other skills among teachers and the challenge of welcoming the minors in the middle of the school year<sup>23</sup>.

Another very crucial issue that appears, due to the fact that the majority of the minors reaches Italy in the age of 16 and 17 years old, is that it becomes impossible for them to follow a career path, because they have to use the remaining time to get a junior high school diploma<sup>24</sup>. In some cases, minors want to be immediately independent, without the assistance of the reception system, but of the networks from their country of origin. A different problem is the procedures for the age identification<sup>25</sup>. Usually, they take a lot of time preventing the minors from entering the reception structures and as a result they suspend the integration. In case there are doubts about the age declared by the minor, additional procedures take place, that should be fulfilled within 7 days after they have started. If the minor is related to a criminal act, they should be expedited and completed within 2 days. As for the challenging transition to adulthood, the minors

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<sup>21</sup> Foundation ISMU, «Explorative Study on Unaccompanied Minors in Italy and Access to Education and Training», Report, September 2021, p. 10-24

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 52-61

<sup>23</sup> Osservatorio Nazionale sui Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati in Italia, ibid, p. 44

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 50-52, 42

<sup>25</sup> Fontazione Iniziative e Studi Sulla Multietnicità, ibid, p. 41-54, 59-60

that have the international protection status, they are not highly affected. However, in general, minors have to leave from the reception centres and manage the accommodation on their own. Vital is considered to be the possession of permit for work or studies or residence permit. In the harder position are the ones that have reached 18 and they still wait for the asylum application to be authorised. Minors have to deal with the demanding bureaucratic procedures, numerous documents to be submitted and dedicate a lot of time in order to get the residence permit. These procedures are easier if they apply for international protection, nevertheless difficulties will occur supposing the request is rejected. There are also social services of the communities that do not ask for a continuation of the administrative procedures, due to lack of funds or political attempts of elimination. Services on their behalf claim that they do not have enough staff members, which is thought to be the main cause for the delays. The slow bureaucratic processes lead the minors in missing working opportunities. As a result, there are cases of minors working without contract, so that the employers will not pay for the insurance. Other minors end up without getting paid all the wages, or some work for criminal networks. In addition, there are occasions with the residence permits to have been expired and minors were offered shelters unofficially in private religious communities. Such incidents have been observed in Rome and Sicily.

In case of trafficking victims there are specific programs provided, ensuring psycho-social, health and legal assistance. In the reception centers, the rules are stricter and the minors undergo further examination for their safety. On the other hand, it is difficult for the children to comprehend the reasons they are treated otherwise. The gender-based violence has been indicated from the female minors that has started either from their families or their husbands. In most cases, there has been sexual abuse within the trafficking networks or rapes by smugglers. It is pointed out that in the central mediterranean route minors are more likely to be abused. Minors may also face dangers while they try to reach fast the central and north Italy or other European countries, ending up in an irregular journey<sup>26</sup>. As for the unaccompanied minors missing, the accurate data is very limited, because either is not collected or exists only for specific years<sup>27</sup>.

A final aspect that should be analysed is the new law of 133/2023<sup>28</sup>. According to the law, in case of a huge number of arrivals that the municipality cannot host, then temporary structures should be provided by the prefecture. However, the period of staying in such structures is unspecified. The capacity of those centres is to host a maximum of 50 minors and in case of an emergency up to 75 children. If these structures have not been established, minors over 16 years old could stay in reception centers for adults, for a maximum of 5 months. As for the age identification process, in urgent situations the authority that carries fingerprints and photographic surveys will

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<sup>26</sup> Fontazione Iniziative e Studi Sulla Multietnicità, *ibid*, p. 24, 37, 56-57, 60-61

<sup>27</sup> Francesca Morgano, «Unaccompanied Minors (UAMS) in the European Union», National Observatory on Unaccompanied Foreign Minors, CeSPI, n.4, July 2020, p. 12-13

<sup>28</sup> Osservatorio Nazionale sui Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati in Italia, *ibid*, p. 123-127

have the ability to conduct anthropometric surveys and health checks, such as radiographic ones in order to confirm the age of the minors. In extreme emergencies, the authorization could be given orally and then verified by the juvenile court. Lastly, the work permit acquisition becomes more complex, since the opinion of the general director for immigration of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies is necessary. This regulation was not valid for years and now is again into force. On top of this, in the requirements for the work permit is the evaluation of the minor after he/she reaches adulthood, by an employer for a job conducted in the past. Therefore, the new law could be considered ineffective and harmful for the minors' rights, in the aspects of reception, age identification procedures and the residence permit.

## Greece

There has been a reduction in the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in the country the past years. According to information processing from the database of the General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection, 6.350 minors were tracked in 2022, 5.043 in 2023 and more than 2000 in 2024<sup>29</sup>. A slight decrease is also apparent in the availability of placement in the reception centers. In 2022 the reception system could host up to 2.511 minors and in 2023 a maximum of 2.203 children. In 2024 there are 2.060 places available in the centers and the semi-independent living facilities and additional 200 places in emergency facilities. However, not all the available places were utilised. Out of the 2.203 existing places in the end of 2023, 1.462 from the 1.808 places in shelters were occupied, 174 out of the 240 places in semi-independent living apartments and 128 out of the 155 in emergency accommodation facilities. For the year of 2023 over 90% of the centers were long-term accommodation. The males were at least 7 times more than the girls, while the majority of both males and females was over 15 years old. The main countries of origin were Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria and Egypt. The time needed for the placement of the minor to a reception center has been increased from 1 week in 2021, to 2 weeks in 2022 and reduced in 2023 in less than a week. Perhaps the delays were related to the increase of the arrivals.

In January 2023, arrived approximately 2.624 unaccompanied minors. At this point, it should be mentioned that the databases about unaccompanied minors in Greece are not connected and it does not exist one that unifies the evidence and the profiles of the minors<sup>30</sup>. Thus, discrepancies in data result from the different institutions. Analysing the statistics of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, 85% were boys and only 15% were girls. Also, 7% of them were under the age of 14 years old. The hospitality structures hosted 1.736 unaccompanied children, 241 remained in assisted living apartments, 214 stayed in emergency accommodation structures, 389 in reception and identification centers and 44 in open hospitality centers<sup>31</sup>. Almost after a year, there is a decreased number of unaccompanied minors in Greece comparing to 2023, since in March 2024 were recorded 2.123 children that arrived alone. The majority of them were once again boys, 86%, and only 14% were girls. Only 7% was under the age of 14 and the hospitality centers absorbed 1.575 unaccompanied children. The semi-independent living apartments housed 197 minors, 149 stayed in emergency

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<sup>29</sup> Greek Council for Refugees, «Country Report: Special reception needs of vulnerable groups», Asylum Information Database, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, last updated on 10/07/2024

<sup>30</sup> Ειδική Γραμματεία Προστασίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων, «Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Προστασία των Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων», Υπουργείο Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου, 2022, σελ. 101-102

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, «Unaccompanied Minors-January's Data 2023», 03/01/23

accommodation structures and 202 in reception and identification centers<sup>32</sup>. The latest report for the unaccompanied minors in Greece is from June 2024 and it shows that only 2.022 arrived, most of whom were boys, 89%, and 11% were girls. It is shown that 12% were under the age of 15 years old and most of them, 1.417 unaccompanied minors, stayed in hospitality centers. The rest of them stayed in different structures and specifically, 165 stayed in semi-independent living apartments, 136 remained in emergency accommodation structures, 291 in reception and identification centers as well as in closed controlled structures and 13 in accommodation structures for asylum seekers<sup>33</sup>.

In the first six months of 2019 Greece welcomed 5.905 children with 994 of them being unaccompanied or separated from their family. However, from January 2020 till June 2020, due to the pandemic of Covid, there was a decline in the total number of children that found shelter in Greece, since there were only 3,340 minors, according to the Hellenic Police and only 391 of them were unaccompanied. The majority of them were coming from countries of Asia and Africa, such as Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Palestine, Iraq as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Regarding the age of the unaccompanied minors that settled in Greece in the half first of 2020, 29% of them were between 1 and 14 years old and 70% of them were between 15 and 17 years old. Relatively now to the gender of these children, 81% of them were boys and 19% were girls<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless, in September of 2020, were recorded 4.000 unaccompanied refugee and migrant minors with 92,8% of them being boys between 15 and 17 years old with origins from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria and 7,2% of them being girls<sup>35</sup>. According to UNHCR and the National Centre of Social Solidarity, Greece hosted 28.000 minor refugees in 2021 and 2.225 of them were unaccompanied. It is also important to mention that 90% of them were over 14 years old. There were open hospitality structures that hosted 23% of them, meanwhile 20% were staying in ESTIA and 4% were remaining in reception and identification centers<sup>36</sup>.

It should be referred that not all the unaccompanied minors that arrive in Greece stay permanently. The Greek land, because of the strategic geographic location, is only a stop along their long destination. More particularly, between 2020 and 2023, 1.368 unaccompanied children left Greece to immigrate in other European countries. On April 2020, 69 minors in total flew to Europe, 12 of them were intended for Luxemburg and

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<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, «Unaccompanied Minors-March's Data 2024», 01/03/24

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, «Unaccompanied Minors-June's Data 2024», 03/06/24

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, ibid

<sup>35</sup> Unicef, «A situation analysis of children and youth», Greece, 2020

<sup>36</sup> Social Policy, «The situation of unaccompanied minor refugees in Greece-Statistics and challenges», 18/01/22

47 for German. The number of the last unaccompanied that left Greece was coming up to 15 children with their destination being Portugal<sup>37</sup>.

Due to the big number of minors that arrive unaccompanied in Greece, it is difficult to keep track of all of them and as a result many stay unsupervised and exposed to different kinds of exploitation. Most of the times the exploitation begins from their own home country, since they are forced to pay in advance a huge amount of money in order to cross the borders and arrive to their final destination and they are even fooled by their supposed helpers to pay more money to arrive to central and north Europe, but they end up in Greece. The Greek economy is in very low levels and it is impossible for the unaccompanied minors to survive alone and hence, in their attempt to afford their basic needs, they turn into victims without realizing it. There are three kinds of exploitation that have been observed in Greece, forced labour, sexual exploitation and drug abuse. The forced labour takes place in both islands and mainland. Most of the minor victims come from Pakistan and Bangladesh, since they are unaware of the fact that they are protected by the European Union without working. The most common jobs to which they are attending illegally are rural, in gas stations, in laundry facilities as well as in factories. Now, regarding to sexual exploitation, the most sexual victims have been seen in the center of Athens and they are sexual harassed by both Greek and compatriot adults and even by other minors in hospitality structures. In many cases they use drugs and work as drug dealers<sup>38</sup>. According to the chairman of «The Smile of the Child», mister Giannopoulos Kostas, girls between the age of 15 and 18 years old change their appearance, in order to look older and sexualize themselves to attract possible customers. However, children of all ages are sexually exploited, even infants. Most girls are coming from Balkans and many teenagers that had been missing in Greece, had been found in Albania and Italy continuing the same tragic life there<sup>39</sup>. Regarding temporary housing, there are two types, the Safe Zones at open hospitality structures and hotels, while as for the permanent housing, there are only hospitality structures for minors. There are efforts being made to exist hospitality structures in suburban areas as well, because in that way, the minors will not be exposed to the dangerous stimuluses that exist in big cities and thus they will have a better growth<sup>40</sup>.

Unaccompanied minors are hosted in accommodation centers or by foster families<sup>41</sup>. The centers have a capacity of hosting 15 to 40 minors each and there are separated structures for males and females. In case the minors are under 12 years old,

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<sup>37</sup> Voultepsi Sofia, «The last 15 unaccompanied minors departed from Greece», Proto Thema, 28/03/23

<sup>38</sup> Elina Sarantou, Aggeliki Theodoropoulou, «Adrift Children- Exclusion and Exploitation of the unaccompanied minors in Greece», Institution Rosa Luxemburg, November 2019, p. 116- 119

<sup>39</sup> Chrysanthi Archontidou, «Trafficking: The life of children that are victims of sexual exploitation», parallaxi, 21/02/24

<sup>40</sup> Elina Sarantou, Aggeliki Theodoropoulou, *ibid*, p. 65-77

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Migration and Asylum, «Applying for Asylum: Unaccompanied minors»



there is no gender separation in the structures. The ones over 16 could live in supervised apartments, up to 4 minors per apartment. The objective for the siblings is not to be separated. In order for the minors to apply for international protection, they are provided with a legal person to assist them with the procedures. The guardian is decided by a public prosecutor to be the representative of the minor and has full responsibility of the child<sup>42</sup>. If the minor is already settled in a center, someone from the structure could be the representative. Whether the minor has reached 15 years of age, he/she has the possibility to submit the application for international protection on his/her own, otherwise it is obligatory that a representative submits it. In case there is an urgent need for the minor to be represented in the court and still there is no guardian defined, the prosecutor has his/her liability<sup>43</sup>. In practice it is very difficult for someone to be a guardian, due to the fact that the child changes accommodation, from the borders to the mainland. There are also many requirements in order a person to take responsibility<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the prosecutor ends up often to be the legal representator. Although there are attempts the alterations in the place of residence of the minor to be reduced, they still occur regularly.

For the procedures of international protection to be fulfilled, an interview should take place, with the presence of the guardian or the representative and a medical examination, so that the age is specified, while both the minor and the guardian should give their consent<sup>45</sup>. If after the medical tests, it is still uncertain whether he/she is a minor or an adult, he/she is considered as a minor. Since the application is submitted, the minor has full access to health care and education system, as well as to the labour market. Full access to the national health care system for free is actually provided both to the minors with temporary and permanent residence permit, to the ones waiting for their status to be specified and the ones with international protection status. However, the minors staying in Greece irregularly could receive only emergency health care. After all, if a family member of the child lives legally in another European country, the minor could be transferred to this country and the application will be examined there. In fact, for the majority of the minors Greece is a transit country, since they want to reach the ones in north and central Europe. Unaccompanied minors could apply either

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<sup>42</sup> Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας, «Εθνικό Σύστημα Επιτροπείας και Πλαίσιο Φιλοξενίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις αρμοδιότητας του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου», Νόμος 4960/22, άρθρο 17, σε ισχύ από 22/07/2022

<sup>43</sup> Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας, «Ασφαλιστικές και συνταξιοδοτικές ρυθμίσεις - Αντιμετώπιση της αδήλωτης εργασίας - Ενίσχυση της προστασίας των εργαζομένων - Επιτροπεία ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων και άλλες διατάξεις», Νόμος 4554/18, άρθρο 16, σε ισχύ από 18/07/2018

<sup>44</sup> Ειδική Γραμματεία Προστασίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων, ό.π., σελ. 13-15

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Migration and Asylum, *ibid*

for international protection<sup>46</sup> or for humanitarian protection<sup>47</sup>. The minor that has applied for the first one, receives a temporary residence permit with a duration of 1 year, that can be renewed if there is no final decision. If the answer is positive and the minor is considered a refugee, he/she is provided with a residence permit of 3 years, which could be renewed for other 3 years. In case of an affirmative response with a subsidiary protection, the minor receives a residence permit with a duration of 1 year that could be renewed for 2 years. Whether the application is rejected, then the child could apply for a 2 year residence permit for humanitarian reasons, in case he/she is hosted in a state's structure or a center by an NGO. There is no data available about the number of the minors, who have received humanitarian protection, but is thought to be low.

Besides the centers for the minors that have applied for international protection, there are also the initial reception facilities and the progressively transit centers<sup>48</sup>. In general, a major problem is the long waiting lists. Minors have to spend a lot of time in camps and structures, before they are placed in permanent ones, which makes harder their participation to school, other activities and the health care provided is more restricted<sup>49</sup>. There were exceptional cases that asylum examination took 3 or 4 years. Minors may have to wait for two years until they are interviewed for asylum. However, on average they are spending 2 months in the first reception centers. The complexity of the legal system, the fact that alterations in the laws occur regularly and the slow bureaucratic procedures are the main obstacles that minors have to deal with in order to get a legal status. The difficulties minors were facing with the social services became even worse during the pandemic period. The living conditions were deteriorated with the spreading of Covid-19<sup>50</sup>. Due to quarantine creative, recreational and sport activities were stopped. The access to education became more challenging and there was a reduction in the staff members. Nevertheless, the situation before 2015 was even worse, when minors were not hosted in separated centers from adults. Until 2020, if a minor was tracked and there were no available places in the centers, in case he/she was under 15 years old, he/she was hosted in public hospitals and the ones over 15, were kept in the police departments, till there was a place found. The poor conditions in the first reception centers in the islands along with the negative impacts

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<sup>46</sup> Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας, «Κύρωση Κώδικα Νομοθεσίας για την υποδοχή, τη διεθνή προστασία πολιτών τρίτων χωρών και ανιθαγενών και την προσωρινή προστασία σε περίπτωση μαζικής εισροής εκτοπισθέντων αλλοδαπών», Νόμος 4939/22, άρθρο 69, σε ισχύ από 10/06/2022

<sup>47</sup> Ειδική Γραμματεία Προστασίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων, ό.π., σελ. 56-59

<sup>48</sup> Εφημερίδα της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας, «Ίδρυση Υπηρεσίας Ασύλου και Υπηρεσίας Πρώτης Υποδοχής, προσαρμογή της ελληνικής νομοθεσίας προς τις διατάξεις της Οδηγίας 2008/115/ΕΚ και λοιπές διατάξεις», Νόμος 3907/11, άρθρο 10, σε ισχύ από 26/01/2011

<sup>49</sup> Anita Calchi Novati, «The reception system of unaccompanied minors in Greece», A Path for Europe, uploaded on 14/02/2022

<sup>50</sup> METAdrasi, «Integration of Unaccompanied Children in Greece: Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations», 2022, p. 22-24

of the Covid-19 lead the European Union to decide in 2020 the relocation of unaccompanied minors in other member states. From the spring of 2020 to the spring of 2023, in total 1.368 minors were relocated<sup>51</sup>. The states that received the higher number of these minors were France, Portugal, Germany and Finland. The standards for the operation of the reception centers are not yet specified<sup>52</sup>. However, NGO's should cooperate with the ministry and all the minors hosted ought to be registered. The minors should not stay in the first reception and identification centers more than 25 days, nevertheless they do not have the right to leave, until the process is fulfilled.

Unaccompanied minors in Greece have the obligation to attend primary and junior high school, based on their age, as well as native children. This type of education is provided for free. To facilitate the access to public education, since 2016 they operate reception structures for the education of migrants in hot spots<sup>53</sup>. The curriculum in these structures is part of the courses that are being taught in the mandatory schools. Due to the fact that minors may have to wait for a long time in the temporary reception centers, it is considered positive that such lessons take place, in order for the children to adapt easier in the schools later on. However, access to schools is not always an easy procedure, especially for the minors that are not hosted in a reception center. For the ones staying in centers, serious delays occur in areas with high number of arrivals<sup>54</sup>. There are native populations opposing and the availability of places in the schools is insufficient. Even more concerning is the fact that although the majority of the minors manages to be registered in the public schools, the minority actually attends the classes. One of the basic problems are considered to be the logistics, since their transportation is usually not covered throughout the whole school year. Apart from these structures, they also operate reception classes in schools that are located in educational priority areas, since 2010. The classes function separated hours than the ones of the basic school curriculum, in order to help the minors reach the required knowledge level in Greek language or other lessons, based on their age. They are divided in 2 courses, the first has a duration of 1 year and the second of 3 years<sup>55</sup>. The main problem observed in the reception classes is that the teaching staff is newly introduced to the profession and is changing very regularly<sup>56</sup>. Thus, the fact that every year they have to change school

<sup>51</sup> Greek Council for Refugees, *ibid*

<sup>52</sup> Ειδική Γραμματεία Προστασίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων, *ό.π.*, σελ. 16-20

<sup>53</sup> Δημήτριος Γουδήρας, Ευθύμιος Βαλκάνος, Γιώργος Μάρδας και Δημήτριος Ε. Μάρδας, *Σύγχρονα Θέματα Κοινωνικής Πολιτικής: Μετανάστευση, ανάπτυξη-κρίση, εκπαίδευση, θεσμικό πλαίσιο*, Ζυγός, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2018, σελ. 377-432

<sup>54</sup> Συνήγορος του Πολίτη, «Εκπαιδευτική ένταξη παιδιών που διαβιούν σε Δομές και ΚΥΤ του Υπουργείου Μετανάστευσης & Ασύλου Πόρισμα Συνηγόρου», Αθήνα, 13/03/2021, σελ. 8-20

<sup>55</sup> Ναυσικά Γαλανάκη, *Παιδιά Πρόσφυγες και Μετανάστες: Προκλήσεις και προοπτικές διαχείρισης*, επιμ. Εύχαρις Μάσχα και Κατερίνα Παπαδοπούλου, «Παιδιά Πρόσφυγες και Μετανάστες: Η αναγκαιότητα μιας πολύγλωσσης και πολυπολιτισμικής εκπαίδευσης», Νομική Βιβλιοθήκη, Αθήνα, 2021, σελ.126

<sup>56</sup> Ελένη Ζάχου, *Παιδιά Πρόσφυγες και Μετανάστες: Προκλήσεις και προοπτικές διαχείρισης*, επιμ. Εύχαρις Μάσχα και Κατερίνα Παπαδοπούλου, «Τάξεις υποδοχής: Η υλοποίηση του προγράμματος και οι σχολικές κοουλτούρες», Νομική Βιβλιοθήκη, Αθήνα, 2021, σελ. 142

makes it difficult to create relations with the minors. Nevertheless, it is helpful for the minors' integration to attend in a school among with the native children.

The age of the minor is thought to be crucial for his/her integration. It was supported by the employees in alternative care centers, that it is unhelpful that the minors are close to 17 years old. The lack of time and the enormous pressure in both the workers and the minors make the process even more difficult. Foster parents also mentioned that the inclusion of younger minors was easier in comparison to the older ones. In addition, foster families indicated that the complexity of bureaucratic and administrative procedures prevents the minors from registering and attending school. Another ascertainment is that minors, who have been living in Greece for a long time were more willing to cooperate in care programs than the ones living for a short period of time. It could also be speculated that the nationality of the minors affects their integration process<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, it was claimed by the people working at the structures that the bonds of the children with their families back in their countries of origin, usually have a negative impact on them, because their priority is to send money back to their families and they end up neglecting other important aspects. Thus, it is vital that the minors live together, not with adults, in order to create friends and new social bonds. In conclusion, it is obvious that the integration process is influenced by numerous factors.

Minors victims of human trafficking, usually have been victimised before reaching Greece, during their journey. It is not kept separated data about the unaccompanied minors. More common is the labour exploitation of the children for both males and females<sup>58</sup>. Traffickers force them to beggary and then they are the ones taking advantage of the money. On the contrary, sexual exploitation is more often in adults and females are the majority of the victims. As for the children, other years are recorded more incidents in males, while other in females. In most cases traffickers are presented as the parents or relatives of the minors. The main country of origin is Bulgaria. The victims should be recognised by the prosecutor. In case of rape or other kind of violence they have also to undergo medical examination. They cannot be deported and they have the right to apply for residence permit for humanitarian reasons. Victims of human trafficking are informed about their rights, receive medical, health and psychological care, education, protection and accommodation. They could also ask for a refund from the perpetrator or the state<sup>59</sup>. Since 2021, operates the National Emergency Response Mechanism, which goal is to identify unaccompanied minors living in the mainland and provide them with the proper care. The years of 2022 and 2023, 3.173 minors were tracked under dangerous living conditions<sup>60</sup>. Although such

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<sup>57</sup> METAdrasi, *ibid*, p. 19-22, 24-25

<sup>58</sup> EMA, «Ετήσια Έκθεση Εθνικού Μηχανισμού Αναφοράς για την Προστασία των Θυμάτων Εμπορίας Ανθρώπων», 2021, σελ.9-36

<sup>59</sup> Ειδική Γραμματεία Προστασίας Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων, ό.π., σελ. 83-85

<sup>60</sup> Greek Council for Refugees, *ibid*

mechanism is useful for the prevention of victimising, the minors that are already victims of human trafficking are very difficult to be tracked.

## Spain

In 2020, according to Memoria del Gobierno, there was a big flow of unaccompanied children that arrived in Spain, 3.307 in total. The majority of the minor population were boys (97.61%), whereas the girls represented a quite less percentage (2.38%). Regarding the minors' ethnicities, Memoria del Gobierno reported 42.12% from Morocco, while the rest were from Algeria, Senegal, Mali, Gambia and the Republic of Guinea<sup>61</sup>. There were 19 areas in total to host the unaccompanied minors and particularly, the government had built reception facilities in 17 independent communes, meanwhile in Ceuta as well as in Melilla there were 2 independent towns ready to house the unprotected minors<sup>62</sup>. In 2022 there was a quite noticeable increase of these children, since were reported 11.417 of them. The majority were between 15 and 17 years old constituting the last choice for a foster family and thus 3% of them were part of one. The most common route they followed to reach Spain were through the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Ceuta and Melilla<sup>63</sup>.

In 2023 minor girls represented 4% of the total percentage of sex trafficking victims<sup>64</sup>. Most of the sex traffickers were finding their victims via social media and dark web. Some of the exploited minors were coming from Ukraine as refugees due to the invasion that took place by Russia the same year. The data from 2022 showed that the foreign unaccompanied minors were used for sex trafficking as well as for mendicancy. On the other side, Roma female minors were used for forced labor. Spain had done some efforts to meet the needs of the unaccompanied minors that arrived by thousand in its land and protect them by potential dangers. More analytically, more laws were made for both sex and labour trafficking that predicted serious punishments for the traffickers. Moreover, the Spanish government made sure that both law professionals and those who work in child protection facilities were well equipped with knowledge and practical methods to apply the instructions they were given in order to respond to the needs of Ukrainian minors. Last but not least, many non-governmental organizations demanded from Spain to proceed to more frequent identifications about

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<sup>61</sup> Marina Perez Ortega, «The social integration of unaccompanied minors in Spain- main challenges and solutions», Humanium, 29/11/22

<sup>62</sup> Unicef, «Latest Statistics and graphics on refugee and migrant children- Latest information on children arriving in Europe»

<sup>63</sup> Statista Research Department, «Unaccompanied foreign minors in Spain- Statistics and Facts», 14/03/24

<sup>64</sup> Statista Research Department, «Number of victims of sex trafficking in Spain in 2023, by gender and age group», May 2024

the exploited minors<sup>65</sup>. However, one year later, in 2023, things were pretty much the same regarding the situation of trafficking in Spain. Since the war in Ukraine had not ended, Ukrainian minors were still arriving by thousands. An easy and common target were also Nigerian female minors because of the voodoo curse that kept them trapped in commercial sex. In 2023 there were more victim identifications, but the providing help was almost minimum<sup>66</sup>. One of the major problems that these children deal with are racism and exclusion because of their foreign nationality and vulnerability, according to STATISTA. It is also important for them to be identified in order to receive the fundamental rights of health and education. If they are educated, then it will be easier for them to find a job once they are adults and as a consequence, they will have financial independence<sup>67</sup>.

There are numerous and various reasons that unaccompanied minors leave their country of origin and migrate to Spain. According to interviews provided from SJM, the main cause is the violence existing in their states. From other stories of the minors is demonstrated that they have suffered persecution, due to their sexual preferences, their gender as females or the political contribution of their families and relatives in certain events. There are also minors claiming that they have started the journey in order to provide financial support in their families or pursue for themselves a better future in the aspects of education and economy<sup>68</sup>. In general, minors have undergone very challenging situations in their countries of origin, such as conflicts, domestic violence, forced marriage, exclusion discrimination or lack of access in basic services. In many cases, during their mobility, they faced abuse or violence.

The data provided for the unaccompanied minors cannot be completely accurate. The minors, who reach Spain through sea, are counted before their age is formally specified. Therefore, many mistakes may occur and minors remain unregistered in the official data. As for the ones that cross irregularly the borders through land, there is no formal data, because they often cannot be tracked<sup>69</sup>. The increase in the arrivals has started in 2017, reaching its pick the next year. The majority of the minors in 2018 was in the region of Andalucia, while in 2019 in Canarian islands and in 2021 in Ceuta. There was a slight decrease in 2020, due to the pandemic crisis, that reduced mobility. The main countries of origin in 2021, were Algeria, Guinea, Mali, Marocco and Senegal. In total, Marocco is the main country of origin of the minors, 71% of them. The profile of the children is mainly males, between 16 and 17 years old. The following years until the end of 2023, the number of arrivals of the minors was raised, however no significant alteration in the aspect of gender and nationality of origin

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<sup>65</sup> U.S Department of State, «2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Spain»

<sup>66</sup> U.S Department of State, «2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Spain»

<sup>67</sup> Marina Perez Ortega, *ibid*

<sup>68</sup> Entreculturas, Alboan, SJM - España, SJM – México, Redodem, «La desprotección de la infancia no acompañada en frontera: España y México, una misma realidad», Informe, Diciembre 2021, p. 17

<sup>69</sup> Unicef, «Niños migrantes no acompañados: Más de la mitad de las personas refugiadas en el mundo tiene menos de 18 años», Informe

occurred. 2/3 of the minors were from Marocco and then Gambia and Algeria for the males and Colombia and Brazil for the females. Most of them did not speak Spanish.

There is no specific information about the conditions of unaccompanied minors living in Spain, because there is limited coordination between the different administrations. The criteria are set by the communities, since they are responsible for the minors. Each one sets its own, due to the fact that the available resources differ. The majority of the minors is hosted in reception centres, while fewer live with foster families. For instance, in 2020, in Andalucia, 1.376 were in the centres, while only 41 in families. While generally in Spain, the same year there 11.380 minors were hosted in the centres and 110 in families. Thus, the overriding majority of 99% of the children lives in the reception centres, whereas 94% of them are males. The main problem for this situation is not considered to be the laws, but the way public administrations operate. The foster care by families is not promoted that much. Another problem is claimed to be the fact that minors are usually in an older age, coming from a different cultural background and in addition to the complex bureaucratic procedures, families are discouraged<sup>70</sup>. According to the legal framework in Spain, priority is given to the foster families and institutions should also promote the integration through foster families in their territory. However, the number of minors hosted by families remains the same through years, while the number for the reception centres dramatically increases and it was almost doubled within 5 years. The requirements for the foster families are numerous and the evaluation differs between the communities. Nevertheless, most of the applications are being rejected. Eventually, the minors are held in the police departments, until the identification and registration procedures are fulfilled.

The centres the unaccompanied minors are hosted are divided in four categories. There are the first reception centres, where the minors could stay maximum for 45 days, then there are centres for the ones under 16 years old and centres for the ones between 16 and 17 years old or between 18 and 23. Lastly, there are institutional centres, where educators run them and some of them live permanently in them. Foster families are also categorised. There are the external families, where the minor has no relation with the other members and the extended ones, where a connection is created. The families are furthermore divided according to the duration of staying. There are the emergency families for minors under 6 years old, where the minors could stay for a maximum of 6 months. The temporary hosted families, with a maximum of staying of 2 years. Finally, there are the permanent ones, where the minors could stay forever<sup>71</sup>.

The young migrants in the age of 16 and 17 used to lose their legal status after reaching adulthood, because they were facing many difficulties in finding an occupation. A reform for the rights and freedoms of migrants in Spain took place in

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<sup>70</sup> FAB, por Causa, «La acogida de menores migrantes en España: Marco normativo, sistema administrativo, y formatos de acogida», Informe, 2021, p. 1-15

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, p. 17

October 2021, reducing the time given for the legal documentation procedures<sup>72</sup>. As a result, there was a decrease in the number of unaccompanied minors reaching 18 without having the necessary papers yet. It should be mentioned however, that in the next two years the number of minors in the age of 16 and 17 was reduced from 35% to 14%, while on the contrary the number of the minors between 18 and 23 years old was doubled, from 6.568 to 13.340. The main problem that minors have to deal with remains and is to find a job and not become irregular after reaching adulthood. Theoretically, they could receive a residence permit if they have been offered a job and have the support from the professional sector. Practically, it is more complicated for the minors to receive the residence permit and many employers are sceptical due to their complex legal status. With the new reform there was a probably successful attempt for the simplification of the procedures, so that the minors are able to find a job easier. In addition, in few cases the minor status could apply for a few months after the adulthood, in order to be easier for them to settle. This is possible because the residence permit for the minors has a duration of 2 years, while in the past the permits were issued in the reception centres and they automatically ended after the minor turned 18. Therefore, now someone could be 19 with the permit being still valid. Another challenge in finding a job is the lack of working experience and relevant qualification. On top of this young adults have to find accommodation, which without a job and the financial difficulties could be quite hard. The demands are stricter than the ones for the natives, something that the new law tried to change as well. As for the unaccompanied minors reaching adulthood without a residence permit, considered irregular, they could receive one after a demanding bureaucratic procedure. The reform eliminated the demands and as a result from 434 people receiving the permit under these circumstances, the number multiplied to 3.627. The number of minors having a work experience of at least one day, also raised dramatically from 2021 to 2023, an increase of 150%. The main working fields were hospitality, administrative and support services and agriculture and livestock farming.

Unaccompanied minors, while reaching Spain have to deal with many problems, such as the reception and housing conditions, the age identification process, the residence and work permit, the access in the education system, with the fear of being socially discriminated. Specifically, according to Save the Children report, minors do not always undergo an interview, which is considered to be necessary after their arrival<sup>73</sup>. Moreover, even if minors have crossed the borders irregularly, their detention is prohibited. However, this principle is violated. As for the process of the age identification, is considered to be the main problem of the legal procedures. It is related to medical examinations, that many times are thought to be harmful for the health of the minors. The duration of the process may take years with the children ending up reaching adulthood and then they are recognised as irregular migrants, facing the

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<sup>72</sup> Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración, «Menores no acompañados y jóvenes extutelados con autorización de residencia: Stock mensual desde el 30 de junio de 2021 al 31 de diciembre de 2023 (personas de 16 a 23 años)», Nacional Informe, 2023, Ministerio de inclusion, seguridad social y migraciones, p. 1-12

<sup>73</sup> FAB, por Causa, ibidem, p. 17-23



possibility of deportation. Challenging is also the acquisition of Spanish citizenship, especially for the minors over 16 years old, who are the majority. Another problem is that their will is not taken into account in the decision-making process. As a result, minors between the age 13 and 17 are escaping the protection system and the reception centres have to deal with a large number of disappearances. Therefore, the existing programmes that help the minors remain in the reception system are not enough, while the system in general is struggling to handle effectively the vulnerability of the minors.

A great issue was created in 2018 with the enrichment of the fence of 2005 that seals the borders with Morocco. The following years, Covid-19 also had a negative impact in the unaccompanied minors. There was a significant decrease in the number of minors that NGO's were taking care in this area. SJM mentions a reduction of 80% for the year 2020. As for the reception centres, Fuerte Purisima is the one that hosts the higher number of unaccompanied minors, 900 in 2020. According to the minors, the centre is overcrowded, unsanitary, while people working are in sufficient specialised. The number of staff members is restricted to provide adequate services, whereas minors may even have to share on mattress in the centre. Out of the two independent Spanish cities in the African continent, Melilla is the smallest and the one receiving the majority of the irregular migrants in these years. Based on a research by PRODEIN, administrations in Melilla argued the minors are not living in the city, but in the Moroccan providence of Nador and they are entering and leaving the borders daily<sup>74</sup>. Some of the minors however speak Spanish fluently and live in Melilla for years. In fact, the minors crossing the borders on daily basis is the minority. A positive paradoxical change came with the Covid-19 pandemic and the sealing of the borders with Morocco. The previous condition altered and the minors started to become officially registered, to have access to education and the health care system.

Nevertheless, the problems remain. The autonomous city of Melilla does not comply with its legal obligation to process and provide residence permits to the minors. In other cases, despite the fact that the minors are provided with the permit, the same is not happening with Identity Card for Foreigners, which proves the administrative status. As a result, in some of the minors the residence permit expires before they get to have the card. Thus, without this document they cannot travel from Melilla to another city, by the terms of Schengen. According to Spanish law, unaccompanied minors should be provided with the Identity Card for Foreigners. Without it they are considered to be irregular and therefore they could be sent back to their country of origin. Thus, not only they cannot continue their migration path, but they are also condemned to live under the fear of deportation. In case the irregular migrant is considered to be underaged, the city of Melilla is obligated to host him/her. If on the other hand is over 18 years old, he/she is deported or returned to the country of origin.

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<sup>74</sup> Entreculturas, Alboan, SJM - España, SJM – México, Redodem, ibidem, p. 27-28

Overall, minors prefer to live on the streets rather than integrate into the reception system, due to its bad conditions. Usually, they try to get in the ships unofficially, in order to reach the mainland, putting their lives at risk.

## Poland

Poland is probably the country hosting, temporarily or permanently, the majority of the Ukrainian unaccompanied minors, especially from 2022 till nowadays, because of the Russian invasion and the fact that Poland is bordering with Ukraine. Starting from 2020, there were plenty childcare structures destined for both foreign and Polish minors. On 30 June 2020, only one minor arrived in Poland as asylum seeker<sup>75</sup>. The pandemic of Covid-19 hindered the efforts of providing help to the minors staying in childcare facilities, since due to the quarantine the reunification with their families was almost impossible. The majority of the children in these structures were unaccompanied and were requesting international protection. Only a minority of them were adopted by families and it was allowed for the rest to be under the supervision and care of the relative with whom they came with in Poland<sup>76</sup>. The statistics from UNHCR on May 2022 showed that from 24 February till 2 May 2022 the percentage of the Ukrainian minors crossing the Polish borders between 0 and 4 years old was 6.7%, 3.4% were boys and 3.3% were girls, 20% of them were between 5 and 12 years old, 10.1% were boys and 9.9% were girls and the children between 12 and 17 years old represented 16.6% of the minor population with 8.1% of them being boys and 8.5% being girls. Even though most of them were integrated in the Polish educational system, 7.673 of them dropped school from 16 May 2022 till 6 June 2022<sup>77</sup>.

In 2023, based on the Office for foreigners, 2.375 minors arrived in Poland and only 292 of them were unaccompanied, representing 3% of the child population<sup>78</sup>. Due to the high number of refugees and unaccompanied children that arrive in Poland, many of them became victims of trafficking. The children are mostly involved in sex trafficking both in Poland and abroad, especially in France and Germany. The minor victims are coming from South America and eastern European countries, such as Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine. It is also noticeable that the Roma Romanian minors are the most common vulnerable victims for forced mendicancy. The attempts of the Polish government to eliminate human trafficking and assist the victims were more efficient in 2023. That year two non-governmental organizations were supported financially by the government, in order to help more effectively and persistently the trafficking victims. In these efforts it should be added the emergency lines and the existence of SOPs in order to be used for the minors who left Ukraine while unaccompanied<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, *ibid*

<sup>76</sup> Eurochild, «Poland- Country Profile on the European Semester and Covid-19 crisis from a children's rights perspective»

<sup>77</sup> Anna Krawczak, «Situation of Ukrainian children in Poland», Children Count 2022. Report on risks to children's safety and development in Poland, Empowering Children Foundation, p. 354-375

<sup>78</sup> Aida, ecre, «Statistics Poland», 13/06/24

<sup>79</sup> U.S Department of State, «2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland»

As the unaccompanied minors reach the Polish borders the Border Guard authority sends them to a foster family, operating as emergency family or a care and educational centre of intervention type. The authority creates the profiles of the minors by identifying, fingerprinting, photographing them, collecting data about their country of origin and their migration path. Additionally, it checks whether the minors are irregular or have the necessary papers and informs them about their rights, directs them also to relevant organizations. In case of doubts about the minor's age, the child should undergo medical tests, including X-ray examination. If the minor refuses, he/she is considered as an adult.

The minors have the possibility to apply for refugee status. In this case, the Border Guard sends the application to the Head of the Office of Foreigners and then the Refugee Council could help in the approval of the application, as a second instant authority. The Border Guard has to ask for a guardian that will represent the minor during the refugee status process, as well as for a residential-care institution to host the minor. In order the status to be achieved, guardians are usually law students. The type of institution is decided by the court. In general, most of the minors are placed in the Orphanage No.9, in Warsaw. Medical and psychological help is provided to the minors while waiting for a response on their applications<sup>80</sup>. They are also given a temporary ID document. For the procedures to be fulfilled, an interview is taking place under the cooperation of a psychologist, educationist etc. These procedures should be completed within 6 months. However, most of them are not carried through for various reasons.

Minors could also apply for international protection. An official guardian or a representative guardian of an NGO or an International Organisation should submit the application. In the courtship the minor has to be represented by a guardian and if there is not one already, the court in a maximum of 3 days, defines someone, so that the process is completed. Then the guardianship court decides within 10 days about the placement of the child in foster care and whether the application for international protection is approved or declined<sup>81</sup>. The court is informed about the situation of the minor from the Border Guard. The facilities hosting the minors provide medical and psychological assistance until the final decision of the court.

In case the refugee status or the status for international protection is rejected, the Head of the Office of Foreigners or the Refugee Council could provide the minor with a subsidiary protection or a permit for tolerated stay, so that the minors keep on living in Poland legally. These two types of papers are provided in the occasion that the minor's life would be at risk if he/she was repatriated. For the permit of permanent stay in the country are required 5 years of staying in Poland, from the time the minor is

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<sup>80</sup> Polish National Contact Point to the European Migration Network, «Policies on reception, return and integration arrangements for, and numbers of, unaccompanied minors», National Report, May 2009, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, uploaded on 26/01/21, p. 13- 19

<sup>81</sup> Office for Foreigners, «Unaccompanied minors», Ministry of the Interior and Administration, uploaded on 02/06/21

provided with the refugee status or 10 years, from the time he/she is given the permit for tolerated stay. There are also other residence permits.

The Polish reception system provides the minors with food, medicines, accommodation, education and pocket money. The ones with refugee status, international protection and victims of trafficking have free access to medical services, but they do not have health insurance. As for the irregular minors, they have access to emergency treatment, however the following needed therapies are not all covered by the state. In this occasion Poland has bilateral agreements with border countries<sup>82</sup>. In general, the irregular minors are hosted in intervention centres. All unaccompanied minors are offered free education. For the secondary schools, there should be a refugee status, a status of international protection, a permit for tolerated stay, or a subsidiary protection status. It is demonstrated that there are high drop-out rates and limited attendance to schools<sup>83</sup>. Lack of interest is indicated by the teachers working with the minors. These problems are related to lack of knowledge of Polish language or the fact that children were not attending school due to war in their country of origin and therefore they are having serious gaps. Another problem, that mainly appears in small towns is that teachers are not trained adequately to work with foreigner minors. In order to deal with the first issue, there are free Polish language courses in the communities of the minors. Nevertheless, there is still low participation. As for the last one, NGOs and local authorities are trying to cover the knowledge gaps.

After the transition to adulthood nothing alters for the minors that have applied for asylum or international protection, apart from the fact that they do not have any more a guardian to legal represent them. The rest have to legalize their staying under the same conditions as adults, while trafficking victims could obtain their permanent residence permit. In order the transition to be less challenging for the minors, they have assistance for finding a residence and an occupation. The requirement for this assistance is to follow an individual independence programme, minimum 1 month before reaching 18<sup>84</sup>. They have also legal support so that their legal status is regulated before adulthood. However, if the legal status is not specified there is no longer access to free education. The assistance for gaining independence and finding accommodation could be provided until 26 years of age.

There is no reliable data about the unaccompanied minor victims of trafficking and the legal status of these minors is not specified, while the national legislation of Poland has not a particular definition for human trafficking either. The first actions

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<sup>82</sup> Polish National Contact Point to the European Migration Network, «Unaccompanied minors in Poland: Policy, practice and data», National Report, 2015, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, uploaded on 03/02/21, p. 34-44

<sup>83</sup> Polish National Contact Point to the European Migration Network, «Policies on reception, return and integration arrangements for, and numbers of, unaccompanied minors», *ibid*, p. 22- 25

<sup>84</sup> Polish National Contact Point to the European Migration Network, «Unaccompanied minors in Poland: Policy, practice and data», *ibid*, p. 55-59

related to supporting child trafficking victims took place in 2007-2008 in Poland. It was clear that minor victims should not stay in the same structures with adult victims, but they could not stay at the centres for minors seeking for refugee status, because they did not apply for it. Thus, it was considered better the creation of shelters addressing only to foreign minor victims of trafficking. There were designed separated ones for the minor victims that would return to their country of origin<sup>85</sup>. However, in practice there are no institutional special care centres. The only ones existing are specified shelters for the female teenage victims between 15 and 17 years old. The data about the minors missing from the centres is not specific but is thought to be high<sup>86</sup>. The profile of the children is mainly males over 15 years old. The main reasons are the fact that they want to migrate in other European countries, or they leave in order to reunite with family members or friends, who stay irregularly in the country.

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<sup>85</sup> Polish National Contact Point to the European Migration Network, «Policies on reception, return and integration arrangements for, and numbers of, unaccompanied minors», *ibid*, p. 27- 29

<sup>86</sup> Polish National Contact Point to the European Migration Network, «Unaccompanied minors in Poland: Policy, practice and data», *ibid*, p. 52-53

## Estonia

Estonia is one of the countries with a minimum number of children that arrive unaccompanied seeking asylum and there are not many available statistics. Despite that, there is significant information about the politics of the country towards these minors. Estonia is quite influenced by the war that broke out between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 and thus the majority of unaccompanied minors that arrived in Estonian land are Ukrainians. From the beginning of this war, 27% of the Ukrainians that refueged in Estonia were children and the Police and Border Guard Board reported that over than 100 of them had arrived alone<sup>87</sup>. Based on Estonian Social Insurance Board, the National Child Protection system is responsible for the Ukrainian minors to preserve their rights as children in the new country and a minority of them were housed in an SOS Children's Village facility. The purpose for these children is to keep honouring their roots and their ethnicity, even though being away, and for that reason the professionals assisting them were coming from Ukraine as well<sup>88</sup>.

It is understood that children coming alone from Ukraine as war refugees are very vulnerable and scared, emotions that make them an easy target for traffickers. However, not all minor victims of trafficking are from Ukraine, since some of them that were reported in 2023 were originated from Africa, Asia, East Europe and both north and south America as well. In most cases, minors are involved in sex exploitation. Their ages were around 9 years old and the most common means of approach and deception used by the traffickers through the social networks were money offers as well as video games. In 2023 the Estonian government made enough attempts to prevent trafficking and protect potential and actual victims. More specifically, the legal age for sex changed from 14 to 16 years old, in order any kind of sexual abuse towards minors to be eliminated. Furthermore, according to section 175, referring to children's exploitation as part of human trafficking, the Estonian government defined as crimes any kind of involvement of a minor in violations, mendicancy, prostitution and participation in pornographic footage. Moreover, the penalties for human traffickers got stricter through the enrichment of the law system. It is needed to mention that there was an emergency line for trafficking victims, making easier their detection and salvation. Lastly, the government tried to decrease the resonance of commercial sex, in which may have participated trafficking victims, through a co-funded expedition for sexual abuse<sup>89</sup>.

Responsible for the unaccompanied minors in Estonia is the local government, the municipality in other words, in which the minor lives or is registered. The Police, Border Guard or the Estonian Internal Security Service are obligated to find a family member, a guardian or a reception centre for the child. If there are doubts about the age

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<sup>87</sup> Aili Vahtla, «SKA: Estonia has received more than 50,000 refugees from Ukraine», ERR News, 11/08/22

<sup>88</sup> European Guardianship Network, «Spotlight on practices regarding guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children arriving in the EU from Ukraine», 21/07/22

<sup>89</sup> U.S Department of State, «2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Estonia»

of the minor and it cannot be verified, then medical examinations could be carried out for the age identification<sup>90</sup>. In case he/she refuses to undergo the examination, he/she would be considered as an adult. Only the unaccompanied minors that is clear that are underaged, are excluded from the medical examinations, even though their age may not be verified.

The main goal of the reception system is the minors to have a legal guardian, who will help them with the administrative procedures and other needs. An application form for guardianship is sent to the court, which decides if it will be approved or rejected. In most cases the duration of the process is 5 days after the appointment<sup>91</sup>. The guardian is authorised to represent and make choices for the minor and he/she is also responsible for the minor's upbringing. He/she has the possibility to apply for relevant allowances. In case there is no guardian to represent the minor, a social worker is temporary selected for the crucial situations, who is not however a legal representative of the minor like a guardian. In general, unaccompanied minors are represented so that they are provided with assistance and to be more likely to receive international protection<sup>92</sup>.

Unaccompanied minors are hosted in the initial reception centre, after reaching the country, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Afterwards, it is more common that minors will be settled in child welfare institutions or foster families. The first reception centre provides language lessons and all minors should be sent to the compulsory school, which is offered for free. As long as the minor applies for asylum, he/she is staying at the reception centre or a social welfare institution and a guardian, the director of the centre or the institution or someone who is authorised has to help the minor with the legal procedures<sup>93</sup>.

Additionally, care services are provided to the minors by the Social Insurance Board<sup>94</sup>. The case plan of alternative care should be checked to a minimum of 1 time per year. If there is already a guardian selected for the minor, he/she prepares the case plan. Alternative care service is a social service, under the local authority, which aims in the protection of child rights and needs, as well as the insurance of a safe environment and family-like living conditions<sup>95</sup>. This type of service could be provided by a foster family or a foster parent. The duration of the alternative care service could be short-

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<sup>90</sup> Government Gazette, «Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act», entry into force 01/04/1999, uploaded on 08/01/24, § 12.8, 12.1.1, 12.1.2

<sup>91</sup> Republic of Estonia Social Insurance Board, «Unaccompanied minor foreigner», last update 20/03/2023

<sup>92</sup> Government Gazette, «Aliens Act», entry into force 01/10/2010, uploaded on 30/04/24, § 227

<sup>93</sup> «Response from the Republic of Estonia regarding the Human Rights Council resolution 12/6», uploaded on 2010, based on the study of May 2009, p.1-2

<sup>94</sup> Government Gazette, «Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act», *ibid*, § 12.9

<sup>95</sup> Government Gazette, «Social Welfare Act», entry into force 01/01/2020, uploaded on 19/01/24, § 10, 45.5.1, 45.5.2, 45.5.3, 126.2



term continuously with a maximum of 90 days or periodically, according to the decision of the guardian of the minor. In the occasion that there is no guardian, then it applies for a long-term on a 24hour base.

Unaccompanied minor victims of sexual violence or abuse are provided with the basic support from the Social Insurance Board. The data of the minor is transferred to the Board and the child is given medical assistance and primary psychological support. Moreover, the Board has to implement the necessary procedures in a friendly environment and provide services for the proper integration of the minor. Firstly, the child is interviewed and then experts support and council him/her<sup>96</sup>. If the age of the victim of trafficking is unknown and is considered to be a minor, he/she is provided with the help given to a minor, until the opposite is proved. Medical tests could take place, involving X-ray examinations, but minor's and guardian's agreement is necessary<sup>97</sup>. According to Victim Support Act, Social Insurance Board shall make a case plan for the unaccompanied minors and provide them with the help needed. Either the Board or the local authorities are obligated to find accommodation to the minor. Furthermore, the Board cooperates with the local municipality, where the minor lives. Afterwards, children are placed in foster homes so that they will not disappear. The victims are given a temporary residence permit, that is renewable<sup>98</sup>. In order an unaccompanied minor victim of trafficking to be return to his/her country of origin, the guardian or the reception centre of the minor should give permission. Local municipalities, Social Insurance Board and law enforcement agencies are the ones responsible for the return.

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<sup>96</sup> Government Gazette, «Child Protection Act», entry into force 01/01/2020, uploaded on 10/04/23, § 29.1.3

<sup>97</sup> Government Gazette, «Victim Support Act», entry into force 01/04/2023, uploaded on 03/04/23, § 18.2, 23.1, 23.2, 23.3, 25

<sup>98</sup> GRETA, «Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Estonia», Second evaluation round, 07/06/2023

## Conclusions

Out of all the European countries that were analysed, Italy and Greece provide the most statistics about the unaccompanied minors that arrived in them in the last five years. The majority of them are boys and their origin is mostly from the third world countries of Africa and Asia. The most common types of trafficking that the minors are involved in is sexual exploitation in case of Italy and forced begging in Greece. Italy, comparing to Greece, has a higher rate of missing children and child trafficking is present with all its kinds, targeting mostly girls, even though they are a minority of the minors that arrived alone in Italian land. In Greece the profile of the victims of human trafficking is not determined by the aspect of gender. Regarding Spain, it is also a host country for unaccompanied minors that are coming mainly from Africa and once again most of them are males. Spain is the mediterranean country with the least statistics about the unaccompanied minors that arrive every year. The insufficient data and identification of these children cause additional problems for them, since they are deprived from their basic rights and excluded from society. The Spanish government along with many organizations have taken significant actions towards child trafficking the last years, in order to protect this vulnerable population from all the kinds of exploitation and set stricter laws, but still there are more things that need to be done towards their integration.

Poland and Estonia provide the least statistics, comparing to the three mediterranean countries, and the main nationality of the children that arrive alone in them is Ukrainian, due to the invasion of Russia in Ukraine in 2022. Both countries have made efforts to integrate these kids and protect them from trafficking, but the lack of identification means that there are more minors than the ones that were reported and thus there are hidden victims of exploitation. The Polish government have made improved steps to integrate the refugees in the society, protect them and assist them from trafficking, but there are more changes that need to be done in order Poland to be considered a country with a strong system to cover the needs of the foreign citizens. Especially, after 2022, Estonia provided a more effective program in order to protect both Ukrainian minor refugees and unaccompanied children of every nationality from the danger of trafficking as well as the circumvention of their rights.

Common in all the five countries was the fact that Covid-19 had a negative impact in the services provided to the minors and a reduction in the number of arrivals. However, since 2022 the flows return to the previous conditions and in most cases tend to be increased. Therefore, it is crucial for the reception systems of the member states the adaptation to the new reality. A basic dysfunction in the systems is considered to be the age identification procedures, that tend to be harmful for the minors' health. Another important problem is the plenty time needed for the approval of the residence permit, due to the complexity of the bureaucratic procedures, which has to be renewed in many cases. In Italy, the new law of 2023 made the situation of the resident permit and the emergency structures even worse. A challenge for the minors is the time they reach adulthood. The main goal is to maintain legal papers and not to become irregular,

something observed in all the countries. The fact that the majority of the minors reaches European borders the age of 16 and 17, puts additional pressure on the reception systems that have they do not have the necessary time to provide the children with a gradual integration. It is proven that most of the procedures are easier for the minors with the status of international protection. One more crucial issue is the high drop out rates from the educational system, which are discouraging for the minors' integration.

The countries have numerous types of reception centers to host the minors. Although, the names and the variety differ in each country, they could be generally divided in the first reception centers that minors stay there temporarily and the second reception centers, that provide permanent accommodation. It is ascertained that the services provided in the second ones are superior in comparison to the first ones. The time needed for the transition of the temporary reception centers to the permanent ones is another major problem in the national reception systems. In case of Greece, it is apparent that long waiting lists had as a result the minors to spend a lot of time in camps and emergency structures, until they are placed to permanent centers. One more important institution, which is present in all the countries is the legal, voluntary guardian. Guardians are the representatives of the minors that assist them with the legal procedures for the status verification and residence permits and also could provide help with the accommodation, access to education or any other need of the minor. Moreover, there are the foster families or parents that minors could live with. Especially, in Spain it was evident that although the legal system prioritizes the foster families in contrast to the centers, in action the foster care is not actually promoted. The three Mediterranean countries are receiving an important number of minors each year and their reception systems have been developed through years. Therefore, there are more data, reports and evidence about the dysfunctions of the systems and through the survey are becoming clear the aspects that need to be improved. As for Poland and Estonia, they have developed their reception systems more recently and although the procedures are specified, they cannot yet be defined their defects in practice. In conclusion, it is a necessity that improvements will take place in the reception systems, so that the best interests of the minors are ensured.

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# Trafficking and Trafficking Indicators in the EU

## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking remains one of the most pervasive and alarming human rights violations in the European Union (EU). Defined by the 2000 Palermo Convention, human trafficking consists in the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, for the purpose of exploitation<sup>1</sup>. Exploitation can manifest in various forms, but the most common are forced labor, sexual exploitation, and child trafficking. Despite the EU's concerted efforts to combat this crime, it persists as an urgent and escalating issue. Estimates suggest that thousands of individuals are trafficked across Europe each year, with many cases going undetected due to the hidden nature of the crime<sup>2</sup>. The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons highlights that the real scale of human trafficking is significantly larger than the official data suggests, with trafficking networks growing increasingly sophisticated, often leveraging digital platforms to exploit victims<sup>3</sup>.

The complexity of modern trafficking networks, along with their transnational scope and the covert nature of victim exploitation, presents a formidable challenge for authorities. This issue is not only a threat to individuals' freedom and dignity but also a severe breach of human rights that undermines the rule of law and the social fabric of EU societies. As such, it is imperative to develop stronger tools and strategies to address this crisis effectively<sup>4</sup>.

Trafficking indicators have emerged as one of the key mechanisms in this fight. They refer to specific signs or characteristics that may point to the presence of trafficking activities

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (2000). *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto*. United Nations. [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2000/11/20001115%2012-34%20AM/Ch\\_XVIII\\_12p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2000/11/20001115%2012-34%20AM/Ch_XVIII_12p.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). *Global report on trafficking in persons 2022*. United Nations. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP\\_2022\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP_2022_web.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission. (2022). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A stronger EU response to tackling human trafficking* (COM/2022/736 final). EUR-Lex. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0736&from=EN>

or the exploitation of individuals<sup>5</sup>. These indicators are crucial for identifying victims, perpetrators, and trafficking operations, and range from physical and behavioral signs in victims to certain patterns of movement or economic conditions linked to exploitation. They can include a wide spectrum of signals, such as signs of physical abuse, restricted freedom of movement, unfamiliarity with local languages, lack of personal documents, or the presence of a controlling figure in an individual's life.

The importance of trafficking indicators lies in their ability to provide early warning signs that can lead to timely intervention<sup>6</sup>. Without these indicators, victims of trafficking may go unnoticed, as traffickers often manipulate and coerce their victims into remaining hidden. Moreover, the effectiveness of law enforcement, border control, social workers, and healthcare professionals in combating trafficking largely depends on their ability to recognize these subtle yet telling signs. Trafficking indicators serve as a critical tool in training professionals across sectors to detect trafficking in its various forms, from labor to sexual exploitation, and to intervene appropriately.

The concept of trafficking indicators emerged in response to the increasing complexity of human trafficking and the difficulty in identifying victims, particularly in situations where exploitation is not immediately visible. Early efforts to develop trafficking indicators were driven by several international organizations, including the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), along with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in anti-trafficking advocacy. A notable project in 2008, conducted jointly by the European Commission and the ILO, produced a set of comprehensive indicators for assessing potential trafficking cases. These indicators were developed through a participatory process involving international experts and used the Delphi methodology to refine and validate the lists<sup>7</sup>. The United Nations also initiated its Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking in

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<sup>5</sup> Commissione Nazionale per il Diritto di Asilo. (2022). *Linee guida per le Commissioni Territoriali: Identificazione delle vittime di tratta tra i richiedenti protezione internazionale e procedure di referral*. Ministero dell'Interno. [https://www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2021/01/Linee-Guida-per-le-Commissioni-Territoriali\\_identificazione-vittime-di-tratta.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2021/01/Linee-Guida-per-le-Commissioni-Territoriali_identificazione-vittime-di-tratta.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Abbatecola, E., & Filippi, D. (2022). *La nuova frontiera dello sfruttamento sessuale: Il sex working indoor e lo sviluppo del sesso online*. Progetto HTH Liguria: Hope This Helps. <https://alisei.anciliguria.it/attach/news/download/1425>

<sup>7</sup> International Labour Organization. (2009). *Operational indicators of trafficking in human beings: Results from a Delphi survey implemented by the ILO and the European Commission* (Revised version). International Labour Office. Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/forcedlabour>

2007, which brought together key stakeholders to establish effective strategies, including the development of trafficking indicators<sup>8</sup>. Both the ILO and the UN aimed to create reliable tools that would help practitioners across sectors identify victims and address the growing complexities of trafficking, particularly as trafficking networks became more organized and sophisticated.

These indicators were initially informed by patterns observed in actual trafficking cases, survivor testimonies, and the experiences of law enforcement and frontline workers. Over time, they have evolved into comprehensive tools used in the development of international and national anti-trafficking strategies. Today, trafficking indicators are continually refined through data analysis and fieldwork to ensure they remain relevant and effective in the face of changing trafficking tactics.

This paper examines the development, application, and challenges of trafficking indicators within the EU context. By analyzing their role in the early detection of trafficking, and by understanding and improving these indicators, the EU can bolster its capacity to protect vulnerable individuals and dismantle trafficking networks.

## **Trafficking in the EU**

### **Statistical data**

Human trafficking remains a significant issue across the European Union (EU), posing complex challenges for policymakers, law enforcement, and civil society. As an evolving transnational crime, human trafficking affects nearly every member state, with the number of victims rising steadily despite intensified efforts to combat the phenomenon<sup>9</sup>. Data collected from various sources—such as the European Commission, Europol, and national governments—provides insight into the scope and nature of trafficking in the region.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). (2009). *Progress report 2009*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. [https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/lsidocs/UNGIFT\\_progress\\_report09.pdf](https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/lsidocs/UNGIFT_progress_report09.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> European Commission. (2021). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU strategy on combatting trafficking in human beings 2021–2025* (COM/2021/171 final). EUR-Lex. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0171>

However, gaps in data collection and reporting still exist, which hampers a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

According to the 2022 Eurostat report, the EU registered 10,093 victims of human trafficking, reflecting a 41% increase compared to 2021<sup>10</sup>. This rise is partly attributed to improved victim detection efforts, especially in light of the heightened risk for individuals fleeing conflict zones, such as those affected by the war in Ukraine. The data collected highlights several important trends. Of the total victims, 6,071 - around 63% - were women and girls, marking a slight decrease from previous years where the figure was closer to 68%. Women still make up the overwhelming majority of identified trafficking victims in general and, specifically, the vast majority of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation. This underscores the persistent vulnerability of women to commercial sexual exploitation, driven by high demand in specific regions, particularly in countries like Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, where prostitution and trafficking are often linked, as traffickers often exploit the demand for prostitution in urban areas<sup>11</sup>. Children continue to represent a significant share of trafficking victims, comprising approximately 15% of all identified victims in 2022, with the majority being female (75%)<sup>12</sup>. Child trafficking, especially for sexual exploitation, remains a serious issue in countries with high tourism rates, where traffickers exploit both local and foreign demand for commercial sex services. Additionally, children are often trafficked for labor in informal sectors, such as domestic work and street begging. Notably, countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary report a high number of trafficked children, many of whom are transported to wealthier EU nations for exploitation<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>11</sup> Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. (2022, March 31). *Belgium joins Germany in creating legal haven for sex trade*. CATW. <https://catwinternational.org/press/belgium-joins-germany-in-creating-legal-haven-for-sex-trade/>

<sup>12</sup> European Commission. (2024, February 28). *Newly released data show an increase of trafficking in human beings*. Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28_en)

<sup>13</sup> ECPAT International. (2020). *Trafficking in persons report 2020*. <https://ecpat.org/trafficking-in-persons-report-2020/>

However, recent data highlights an increase in the number of men trafficked for forced labor, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing<sup>14</sup>. Men now make up a significant portion of forced labor victims, reflecting shifting patterns in trafficking dynamics as demand for cheap labor grows across various industries. In 2022, it was reported that 19% of all trafficking victims in the EU were trafficked for labor exploitation<sup>15</sup>. This figure reflects a notable rise, particularly in sectors like agriculture, construction, and domestic work, as industries that rely heavily on low-wage or informal labor, where workers are often subjected to harsh conditions, long hours, underpayment and, in some cases, threats of violence or deportation. However, reports from the International Labour Organization and the EU suggest that this percentage is likely underreported, as labor trafficking is often more difficult to detect than sexual exploitation. Forced labor is especially prevalent in countries with large informal economies or significant seasonal labor demands. Southern EU countries such as Italy and Spain have been notable hotspots for labor exploitation in agricultural sectors, where seasonal migrants are often coerced or forced to work under exploitative conditions<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation, exacerbated by irregular immigration status and poor legal protections.

Other forms of exploitation, including criminal activities, forced begging, and organ removal, accounted for 18% of all registered victims<sup>17</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated the landscape of human trafficking, with traffickers increasingly using digital platforms for recruitment and exploitation. The surge in online sexual services during lockdowns led to a rise in online sexual exploitation,

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<sup>14</sup> International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons*. International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons>

<sup>15</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>16</sup> Oxfam International. (2024, June 4). *Millions of migrant farm workers exploited in Europe's fields, says Oxfam*. Oxfam. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/millions-migrant-farm-workers-exploited-europes-fields-says-oxfam>

<sup>17</sup> European Commission. (2024, February 28). *Newly released data show an increase of trafficking in human beings*. Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28_en)

particularly targeting vulnerable groups like children and refugees<sup>18</sup>. Victims of trafficking have become more difficult to detect, as many are forced into more isolated environments due to lockdown measures and reduced public oversight. Data from 2020 and 2021 showed an increase in online recruitment tactics used by traffickers, as well as the expansion of trafficking into new forms of exploitation, including forced participation in cybercrime and other illegal activities<sup>19</sup>. The pandemic's economic fallout also increased the vulnerability of already at-risk populations, including migrants and refugees, to trafficking. Countries with higher numbers of asylum seekers, such as Greece and Italy, saw a rise in reported cases of trafficking, especially among women and unaccompanied minors<sup>20</sup>.

The number of suspected traffickers fell by 16% in 2022, totaling 8,064, while convicted traffickers decreased by 17% to 2,097 compared to 2021<sup>21</sup>. In terms of trafficking perpetrators, reports highlight the increasing sophistication and organization of trafficking networks. These groups are often highly adaptable, using technology to recruit, transport, and exploit victims. The majority of perpetrators apprehended in the EU are EU nationals themselves, although many networks have cross-border dimensions that involve both EU and non-EU countries<sup>22</sup>.

The majority of human trafficking victims identified in the EU continue to come from within Europe itself, reflecting the internal nature of trafficking across EU borders<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Europol. (2020). *Exploiting isolation: Offenders and victims of online child sexual abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/exploiting-isolation-offenders-and-victims-of-online-child-sexual-abuse-during-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe. (2022). *Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings>

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF. (2020). *Human trafficking and exploitation: The impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/15311/file>

<sup>21</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>22</sup> Europol. (2024, April 5). *Europol report identifies the most threatening criminal networks in the EU*. Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/europol-report-identifies-most-threatening-criminal-networks-in-eu>

<sup>23</sup> European Commission. (2024, February 28). *Newly released data show an increase of trafficking in human beings*. Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28_en)



Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland are consistently highlighted as the main source countries, with traffickers taking advantage of the Schengen Zone's free movement to transport victims for exploitation across borders. Romania alone accounts for a significant share, with nearly 28-30% of the EU's identified trafficking victims, according to Eurostat's 2022 report<sup>24</sup>. Trafficking networks frequently move victims from Romania to wealthier nations like Germany, France, and Italy for forced labor or sexual exploitation<sup>25</sup>.

However, EU trafficking is not limited to internal trafficking. Non-EU nationals are also heavily affected. Many asylum seekers and irregular migrants are at heightened risk of exploitation due to their precarious legal status, limited access to employment, and lack of social protection. Trafficking networks often prey on these vulnerabilities, making migrants a key target group for traffickers. Data shows a marked correlation between irregular migration flows and increased trafficking cases in border countries, such as Italy, Greece, and Spain<sup>26</sup>. Victims from Africa and Asia are frequently targeted, with Nigeria remaining a significant source country for sexual exploitation, especially in Italy and Spain<sup>27</sup>. This reflects the exploitation of individuals from countries experiencing economic hardship, political instability, or conflict, who are particularly vulnerable due to limited opportunities and increased desperation.

### Trafficking Indicators

Despite efforts by Europol, the European Commission, and national agencies, the data on trafficking indicators is often inconsistent or incomplete across member states. Efforts to standardize trafficking indicators across the EU have been driven by organizations such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the International Organization for

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<sup>24</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>25</sup> Pascoal, R., Schwartz, A. (2024). Romania: Trendsetter in European Human Trafficking?. In: Rodrigues, A.M., Guia, M.J. (eds) *New Forms of Human Trafficking*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39732-5\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39732-5_9)

<sup>26</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. (2021). *Victims of human trafficking*. EUAA. <https://euaa.europa.eu/easo-asylum-report-2021/54-victims-human-trafficking>

<sup>27</sup> Europol. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings*. Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/trafficking-in-human-beings>

Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). These organizations emphasize the importance of harmonized data collection to create a more comprehensive understanding of trafficking patterns. In recent years, there has been a push to develop digital tools and databases that allow for more accurate cross-border tracking of trafficking cases, such as Europol's early warning system for trafficking networks operating across member states. Given the clandestine nature of trafficking, effective identification of victims remains one of the primary challenges. Trafficking indicators are specific characteristics or signs that may suggest an individual is being trafficked, exploited, or at risk of becoming a victim. These indicators have been vital for detecting cases that might otherwise go unnoticed, especially in sectors where victims are hidden in plain sight, such as domestic work or agriculture.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has categorized trafficking indicators into three broad groups: personal, situational, and transactional<sup>28</sup>. Personal indicators include signs such as physical or psychological abuse, trauma, or restricted freedom of movement. Situational indicators refer to the victim's living and working conditions, such as being housed in overcrowded, unsafe environments or working excessive hours without pay. Transactional indicators relate to the legal and economic control traffickers exert over their victims, such as withholding identification documents, controlling bank accounts, or enforcing debts.

While trafficking indicators are widely used across the EU, there is still room for improvement. Many member states have inconsistent approaches to collecting and reporting data on trafficking indicators. For instance, while Northern European countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands have established sophisticated frameworks for identifying trafficking victims, Southern and Eastern European countries often struggle with resource limitations and inconsistent data collection, which can hinder victim identification<sup>29</sup>. This inconsistency in data collection undermines the EU's ability to effectively address trafficking at a regional level, as it creates gaps in knowledge about emerging trafficking trends and the effectiveness of interventions. Accurate, comprehensive data is essential for developing

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<sup>28</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (n.d.). *Thematic focus: Trafficking*. FRA. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/content/thematic-focus-trafficking>

<sup>29</sup> Skilbrei, ML. (2024). Human Trafficking Policies in Scandinavia: What Happens When International Obligations Meet National Problem Definitions?. In: Rodrigues, A.M., Guia, M.J. (eds) *New Forms of Human Trafficking*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39732-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39732-5_5)

evidence-based policies, and trafficking indicators play a crucial role in enhancing the EU's capacity to detect, prevent, and respond to trafficking in all its forms. While the European Commission has made efforts to harmonize the use of trafficking indicators through directives and reports, studies continue to highlight gaps in the practical implementation of these indicators at the national and local levels<sup>30</sup>. The main challenge is to standardize anti-trafficking policies across the EU's 27 member states. These challenges stem from differences in legal frameworks, resources, and the understanding of trafficking dynamics in various national contexts<sup>31</sup>.

Nevertheless, available data has shown that the presence of multiple trafficking indicators in combination often correlates strongly with actual trafficking cases. For example, Europol reports indicate that individuals who display both personal and situational indicators—such as physical signs of abuse coupled with a lack of control over personal documents—are at high risk of being confirmed as trafficking victims<sup>32</sup>. In addition, cross-referencing trafficking indicators with migration and employment data has helped authorities in some EU countries identify previously undetected cases of trafficking, particularly in labor-intensive sectors. Indeed, in Europe, the development of trafficking indicators has been closely tied to the region's migration policies and labor markets, where irregular migration and informal labor have presented significant challenges for authorities in detecting exploitation.

A growing body of literature also suggests that trafficking indicators should be used in conjunction with vulnerability assessments, which examine the socio-economic factors that make individuals more susceptible to trafficking<sup>33</sup>. This approach highlights the importance of viewing trafficking indicators not just as static markers of exploitation but as part of a dynamic process where vulnerabilities—such as poverty, lack of education, or precarious

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<sup>30</sup> Stobb, M., McDonald, C. The conditioning effect of EU membership status: understanding compliance with legislative initiatives to protect trafficking victims. *Comp Eur Polit* **17**, 813–831 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-018-0127-0>

<sup>31</sup> Todres, Jonathan. (2020). Preventing human trafficking. *Georgia State University Law Review*, 36(4), <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/gslr36&i=1064>

<sup>32</sup> Europol. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings*. Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/trafficking-in-human-beings>

<sup>33</sup> Baldwin, S. & Fehrenbacher, A. & Eisenman, D. (2014). Psychological Coercion in Human Trafficking: An Application of Bideman's Framework. *Qualitative health research*. 25. 10.1177/1049732314557087

migration status—can evolve into situations of trafficking if left unchecked. Indeed, recent studies have begun to explore the intersectionality of trafficking indicators, particularly concerning gender, race, and migration status. Trafficking indicators need to be disaggregated by these factors to better understand how different groups experience trafficking<sup>34</sup>.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new complexities in identifying trafficking victims, with studies highlighting the rise in online trafficking and the need for updated digital indicators to track the increasing use of the internet and social media by traffickers. Many studies emphasize the need for more empirical research into the effectiveness of trafficking indicators in practice. While theoretical frameworks and models for trafficking indicators are well developed, there is a lack of large-scale studies that assess how well these indicators work in real-world settings<sup>35</sup>.

Additionally, there is a limited body of research on how trafficking indicators intersect with other forms of exploitation, such as forced begging or organ trafficking. These forms of trafficking often receive less attention in the literature, which tends to focus on sexual and labor exploitation. Future research should expand the scope of trafficking indicators to ensure that they are inclusive of all forms of exploitation recognized by international law<sup>36</sup>

### **Table of trafficking indicators**

The following is a table of red flags to keep in mind when identifying a potential victim of human trafficking. This list is intended to encompass transnational and domestic trafficking, as well as both sex and labor trafficking<sup>37</sup>. Some indicators may be more strongly associated with one type of trafficking.

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<sup>34</sup> Konrad, R. & Trapp, A. & Palmbach, T. & Blom, J. (2016). Overcoming Human Trafficking via Operations Research and Analytics: Opportunities for Methods, Models, and Applications. *European Journal of Operational Research*. 259. 10.1016/j.ejor.2016.10.049

<sup>35</sup> Brunovskis, A. & Surtees, R. (2012). A fuller picture. Addressing trafficking-related assistance needs and socio-economic vulnerabilities, Brunovskis & Surtees 2012

<sup>36</sup> Gallagher, A. T. (2017). What's Wrong with the Global Slavery Index? *Anti-Trafficking Review*, (8). <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121786>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.centerffs.org/serv/human-trafficking-facts>

Common Work & Living Conditions	<p>The individual...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is under 18 years of age and is providing commercial sex acts</li> <li>• Is not free to leave or come and go as they wish</li> <li>• Is in the commercial sex industry and has a pimp/manager</li> <li>• Is unpaid, paid very little, or paid only through tips</li> <li>• Works excessively long and/or unusual hours</li> <li>• Is not allowed breaks or suffers under unusual restrictions as work</li> <li>• Owes a large and/or increasing debt and is unable to pay it off</li> <li>• Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of their work</li> <li>• Is living or working in a location with high security measures</li> </ul>
Poor Mental Health or Abnormal Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibits unusually fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous behavior</li> <li>• Reacts with unusually fearful or anxious behavior at any reference to "law enforcement"</li> <li>• Avoids eye contact</li> <li>• Exhibits a flat affect</li> </ul>
Poor Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibits unexplained injuries or signs of prolonged/untreated illness or disease</li> <li>• Appears malnourished</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture</li> </ul>
Lack of control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has few or no personal possessions</li> <li>Is not in control of their own money, and/or has no financial records or bank account</li> <li>Is not in control of their own identification documents (e.g., ID, passport, or visa)</li> <li>Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves (e.g., a third party may insist on being present and/or interpreting)</li> <li>Has an attorney that they don't seem to know or to have agreed to receive representation services from</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has been branded by a trafficker</li> <li>Exhibits a lack of knowledge of whereabouts and/or does not know what city they are in</li> <li>Exhibits a loss of a sense of time</li> <li>Has numerous inconsistencies in their story</li> <li>Claims to be "just visiting" and is unable to clarify where they are staying or provide an address</li> </ul>

## Italy

### Statistical data

Italy has been identified as one of the key destinations and transit countries for human trafficking in Europe, owing to its geographical proximity to North Africa and its role as a

major entry point for migrants. This unique position, coupled with ongoing migration flows, has significantly influenced the trafficking dynamics in the country. Italy is a central route for migrants crossing the Mediterranean, many of whom fall victim to trafficking during their journey or upon arrival. The International Organization for Migration has identified that around 80% of Nigerian women arriving in Italy by boat are potential victims of trafficking, predominantly for sexual exploitation<sup>38</sup>.

In October 2022, Italy adopted a National Action Plan 2022-2025 against trafficking and the severe exploitation of human beings which defines long-term strategies and actions for raising awareness, better prevention and social integration of victims of trafficking<sup>39</sup>

As of 2023, Italy identified 2,146 victims of human trafficking, highlighting the persistent nature of the issue in the country, which has among the highest numbers of trafficked persons in the EU<sup>40</sup>. Data also highlights the gendered dimension of trafficking in Italy, with approximately 79% of identified victims being women, the majority of whom are trafficked for sexual exploitation. This trend continues to be one of the most significant forms of trafficking in the country. Many victims arrive through the Central Mediterranean route, where they are subjected to coercion, debt bondage, and forced prostitution.

Trafficking for forced labor is also prevalent, particularly in the agriculture sector, where migrant workers from Eastern Europe, Africa, and South Asia are especially vulnerable. These workers often face exploitation in informal sectors, especially in the agricultural regions of Southern Italy, such as Apulia and Sicily, experiencing conditions that include long working hours, little to no pay, unsafe working environments, and threats of violence or deportation<sup>41</sup>. The informal economy makes it difficult for authorities to detect and address trafficking. indicators for labor exploitation need enhancement. Labor trafficking

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<sup>38</sup> International Organization for Migration. (2017, July 21). *UN Migration Agency issues report on arrivals of sexually exploited migrants, chiefly from Nigeria*. IOM. <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-issues-report-arrivals-sexually-exploited-migrants-chiefly-nigeria>

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of the Interior. (2022, October 19). *Piano nazionale d'azione contro la tratta e il grave sfruttamento 2022-2025* [National action plan against trafficking and severe exploitation 2022-2025]. Ministero dell'Interno. <https://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/AnteprimaPDF.aspx?id=3613>

<sup>40</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>41</sup> Council of Europe. (2024). *GRETA third evaluation report on Italy: Focused evaluation round* (GRETA(2024)03). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-2024-03-fgr-ita-en-2750-4314-7273-1/1680ae9f81>

in rural areas remains underreported due to the isolation of victims and the informal nature of agricultural labor.

Migrants and asylum seekers, particularly those arriving from conflict zones, are at high risk of being trafficked for both labor and sexual exploitation<sup>42</sup>. The complex situation is further exacerbated by Italy's role as a key point of entry for migrants seeking refuge from conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. These migrants often arrive in precarious circumstances and are exploited by traffickers who take advantage of their vulnerability.

Victims of trafficking in Italy primarily come from Nigeria, Eastern Europe (especially Romania and Albania), and other African countries like Eritrea and Sudan<sup>43</sup>.

### **Trafficking Indicators in Italy**

Trafficking indicators are crucial in identifying and assisting trafficking victims, particularly in a context as complex as Italy's. The Italian government, NGOs, and international organizations have developed and refined trafficking indicators to aid law enforcement, healthcare professionals, and social workers in recognizing the signs of trafficking.

In the case of sexual exploitation, Italy has faced a specific challenge with the trafficking of Nigerian women. According to the literature, indicators used to identify these victims are, for example: physical signs of abuse, control over the victim's movements by a third party, and restricted access to identification documents<sup>44</sup>. In the case of Nigerian victims, traffickers often use "juju" rituals (voodoo-like practices) to instill psychological control over their victims. Victims, often recruited under false pretenses with promises of employment, are frequently coerced into sex work to repay large debts, sometimes exceeding 40,000 euros,

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<sup>42</sup> Amnesty International. (2024, May). *Italy 2023: Asylum and human rights issues* (EUR 30/8244/2024). <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2112042/EUR3082442024ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of State. (2024, June 24). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Italy*. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111691.html>

<sup>44</sup> Global Citizen. (2020, June 4). *Nigerian women trafficked into sex work are being abandoned in Italy as lockdown halts economy*. Global Citizen. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/nigerian-sex-trafficking-abandoned-italy-lockdown>



to their traffickers<sup>45</sup>. Many of the traffickers use psychological manipulation, instilling fear and psychological dependency.

Another key trafficking indicator related to sexual exploitation in Italy involves the victims' lack of autonomy. Trafficked women are often controlled by “madams” or other intermediaries who collect their earnings, restrict their movements, and provide them with false or confiscated identity documents<sup>46</sup>. Law enforcement agencies and NGOs are trained to look for signs of psychological dependency, where victims express fear of leaving their traffickers due to threats against their families. Moreover, recent reports highlight the growing use of online platforms for recruitment, suggesting that Italy needs to develop digital trafficking indicators to address this emerging threat<sup>47</sup>.

Italy also faces significant challenges in addressing trafficking for labor exploitation. In Southern Italy, migrant workers from countries like Romania, Albania, and sub-Saharan Africa are frequently exploited in agriculture. Indicators of labor trafficking in these regions often include evidence of exploitative working conditions, such as wage withholding, excessive working hours, and substandard living conditions<sup>48</sup>. Victims are often housed in overcrowded accommodations, lack legal employment contracts, and are subjected to physical abuse or threats from employers.

The “caporalato” system—a form of illegal labor brokerage in Italy’s agricultural sector—plays a significant role in facilitating labor trafficking<sup>49</sup>. Migrant workers are often recruited by “caporali” (illegal labor intermediaries) who place them in exploitative conditions for low wages. Trafficking indicators in this context include a lack of proper work

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<sup>45</sup> Degani, P., & De Stefani, P. (2020). Addressing migrant women’s intersecting vulnerabilities. Refugee protection, anti-trafficking and anti-violence referral patterns in Italy. *Peace Human Rights Governance*, 4(1), 113-152. <https://doi.org/10.14658/pupj-phrg-2020-0005>

<sup>46</sup> Mancarella, F. (2021). *Human rights-based approach to sex-trafficking of women and girls: The analysis of prostitution policies in Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands*. University of Padua.

<sup>47</sup> Europol. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings*. Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/trafficking-in-human-beings>

<sup>48</sup> Scaturro, R. (2021). Modern slavery made in Italy—Causes and consequences of labour exploitation in the Italian agricultural sector. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 3(2), 181-189. <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.83>

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Department of State. (2024, June 24). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Italy*. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111691.html>

documentation, confiscation of identity papers by intermediaries, and threats of deportation or physical harm if workers attempt to leave their positions<sup>50</sup>.

In addition to physical and situational indicators, psychological trauma is also a key sign of labor trafficking in Italy. Many victims exhibit signs of extreme exhaustion, malnutrition, and fear of interacting with authorities due to their undocumented status or the coercion they face from traffickers<sup>51</sup>.

The academic literature on trafficking indicators in Italy emphasizes both the complexity of trafficking and the need for refined, context-specific indicators. One of the earliest indicators identified in victims was the presence of large, unexplained debts combined with an inability to access identification documents or legal work. More recent studies have built on this foundation, emphasizing the importance of recognizing cultural and psychological factors in identifying trafficking victims<sup>52</sup>. Research stresses the need for indicators that go beyond physical abuse, such as fear of spiritual retribution (as seen in the Nigerian context) or control over personal finances and decision-making. Studies advocate for the development of indicators that are specific to the victim's cultural background and trafficking pathway, as generalized indicators may not capture the nuances of trafficking in different contexts.

In the context of labor trafficking, the informal labor market in Italy provides fertile ground for trafficking, particularly in agriculture. The difficulty of applying trafficking indicators in rural, isolated regions where labor exploitation occurs out of sight of the general public and law enforcement.

It is important to discuss how trafficking indicators are applied in mixed migration contexts, where it can be difficult to distinguish between victims of trafficking and irregular migrants. In Italy, where the migration crisis has created significant pressure on asylum and refugee systems, this distinction is crucial. Trafficking indicators should be better integrated into the asylum process, with asylum seekers undergoing screening for signs of trafficking, such as evidence of coercion, manipulation, or exploitation in their journey to Italy.

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<sup>50</sup> Dines, N. (2023). After entry: Humanitarian exploitation and migrant labour in the fields of southern Italy. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 41(1), 74-91.

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International. (2024, May). *Italy 2023: Asylum and human rights issues* (EUR 30/8244/2024). <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2112042/EUR3082442024ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Becucci, S. (2024). Trafficking of Migrants for Sexual and Labour Exploitation. In *Smuggling and Trafficking of Migrants in Southern Europe* (pp. 84-130). Bristol University Press.

Italy remains one of the key battlegrounds in the fight against human trafficking in Europe, grappling with both sexual and labor exploitation of vulnerable migrants and citizens. While progress has been made in identifying trafficking victims through the use of trafficking indicators, challenges remain. To effectively combat trafficking, Italy must continue to refine its trafficking indicators and ensure their consistent application across sectors. Italy's trafficking indicators are effective in certain sectors but require updates, particularly to account for labor exploitation in isolated areas and the increasing role of online trafficking.

### **Interviews**

As part of the Kleos project, facilitated by the Italian partner, a series of interviews were conducted with operators working directly with migrants and trafficked individuals in Italy. These interviews offer crucial insights into the current state of trafficking in the country. They serve as a valuable tool for assessing whether professionals on the ground—who often encounter trafficking victims firsthand—have observed shifts in trends or can offer suggestions for improving anti-trafficking measures. Practitioner interviews can sometimes detect emerging trends faster than academic research, providing a real-time perspective on changes in trafficking patterns.

The interviews conducted with operators in Italy offer several key insights into the realities of human trafficking, focusing on both the vulnerabilities of victims and the challenges of providing adequate support. Practitioners report that many trafficked individuals come from countries with high levels of poverty, and low education. Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, and Cameroon are highlighted as some of the most common source countries.

Victims often face a combination of poor socio-economic conditions, family abandonment, and violence, making them susceptible to exploitation. Traffickers often exploit individuals by luring them with false promises of employment or education. Once in the trafficking network, victims are subjected to various forms of abuse, including forced labor and sexual exploitation. In some cases, individuals are even sold within their own families, reinforcing their vulnerability.

The journey itself is marked by severe exploitation, especially in transit countries like Libya and Tunisia. Victims are often transported under horrific conditions, experiencing forced labor and abuse along the way. Once they reach Italy, they remain vulnerable to further exploitation due to a lack of documentation, language barriers, and the risk of deportation. Identifying trafficking victims remains challenging. Many victims do not openly disclose their situation due to fear or distrust of authorities, as they are often manipulated by traffickers.

The lack of resources, particularly in terms of housing and legal support, makes it difficult for operators to offer comprehensive assistance. Operators note how cultural mediators play a crucial role in bridging the gap between trafficked individuals and operators, especially in overcoming language and cultural barriers. This role is essential for establishing trust and ensuring that victims receive appropriate support. The interviews emphasized the importance of comprehensive support systems that address the complex needs of trafficked individuals in Italy.

## Greece

### Statistical data

Greece, due to its geographical location at the southeastern border of Europe, proximity to the Middle East, and its role in the migration crisis, is primarily a transit country. However, it is also a destination for trafficked individuals, particularly refugees and asylum seekers who are vulnerable to both labor and sexual exploitation. Indeed, it serves as a gateway for migrants and refugees, primarily from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, many of whom are at risk of trafficking<sup>53</sup>. The ongoing migration crisis has further exacerbated the vulnerability of migrants, as they seek refuge from conflict and instability in their home countries. Traffickers exploit these vulnerabilities, often using Greece as a transit point to move victims into other EU countries, or as a destination for sexual and labor exploitation.

As of 2022, Greece identified 358 victims of human trafficking, marking a notable increase from the 157 victims identified in 2021<sup>54</sup>. Among these victims, the majority were women, highlighting the gendered nature of trafficking, which predominantly affects women and children. The victims originate mainly from Albania, Romania, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, reflecting the diversity of trafficking sources in the country<sup>55</sup>. Child trafficking continues to be a significant issue in Greece, where children are exploited for forced begging, labor, and sexual exploitation. Many child victims are from marginalized communities, including migrants and refugees, who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation within Greece<sup>56</sup>.

The complexity of the trafficking situation in Greece is compounded by the country's strained asylum system, which has been overwhelmed by the influx of migrants and refugees. Many of these migrants reside in overcrowded refugee camps, where they are particularly

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<sup>53</sup> European Commission. (n.d.). *Greece: Together against trafficking in human beings*. European Commission. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/greece\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/greece_en)

<sup>54</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>55</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Greece: Second evaluation round*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-greece-2nd-evaluation-round/1680aaa70a>

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Department of State. (2024, June 24). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Greece*. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111675.html>

vulnerable to exploitation<sup>57</sup>. Traffickers often target individuals in these camps, offering false promises of employment or safety in exchange for forced labor or sexual services.

Unaccompanied minors are especially at risk, often disappearing from refugee facilities and falling into trafficking networks. Trafficking for labor exploitation is also a major concern in Greece, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Migrant laborers, especially those without legal status, are frequently subjected to exploitative working conditions<sup>58</sup>. The informal nature of these labor sectors makes it difficult for authorities to detect and address trafficking, particularly in rural areas.

### Trafficking Indicators in Greece

To address the growing challenge of human trafficking, Greece has adopted trafficking indicators to help law enforcement and social service providers identify victims. In the context of sexual exploitation, trafficking indicators in Greece have focused on identifying victims through behavioral and situational cues. Common indicators include restricted freedom of movement, the presence of a controlling figure (often referred to as a "handler"), signs of physical and psychological abuse, and the absence of personal identification documents<sup>59</sup>. Victims of sexual exploitation in Greece are often trafficked in urban centers or tourist-heavy areas, where they are forced to work in the commercial sex industry. Victims frequently exhibit signs of dependency on their traffickers, such as fear of retribution or deportation if they attempt to escape. Greece has also experienced an increase in child trafficking, particularly involving unaccompanied minors who are forced into prostitution or begging. Indicators of child trafficking include evidence of coercion, such as threats of violence against the child or their family, and signs of malnutrition or physical neglect<sup>60</sup>.

Many children are trafficked for forced begging in public areas or exploited in the tourism industry. These children often have no access to education or medical care, which serves as a key indicator for social workers and law enforcement officers. It is important to remember

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<sup>57</sup> Amnesty International. (2024, May). *Greece 2023: Asylum and human rights issues* (EUR 25/8356/2024). <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2113361/eur2583562024english.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Asylum Information Database. (2024, June). *Country report: Greece 2023 update*. AIDA. [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/AIDA-GR\\_2023-Update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/AIDA-GR_2023-Update.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> Papanicolaou, G., Boukli, A. (2020). Human Trafficking in Greece. In: Winterdyk, J., Jones, J. (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8\\_64](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8_64)

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of State. (2024, June 24). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Greece*. <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111675.html>

the relevance of early intervention in refugee camps, where many unaccompanied minors are trafficked soon after arriving in Greece.

Labor exploitation is another significant concern in Greece, particularly in sectors like agriculture, construction, and domestic work, where many migrant laborers are employed informally. Migrant workers, especially those who are undocumented or seeking asylum, are at heightened risk of exploitation. Trafficking indicators in labor sectors often include excessive working hours, withholding of wages, confiscation of identity documents, and unsafe working conditions. Migrants are often housed in overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, which is a common indicator of labor exploitation<sup>61</sup>. Trafficking indicators include a lack of formal employment contracts, isolation from the local community, and restricted access to health and social services. Migrant workers often face threats of deportation if they attempt to challenge their exploitative working conditions, creating a climate of fear that traffickers exploit to maintain control over their victims<sup>62</sup>.

The migration crisis has also had a significant impact on trafficking indicators in Greece. Refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those in overcrowded camps or informal settlements, are at high risk of being trafficked for labor. Indicators specific to this context include the presence of individuals who act as intermediaries, offering work or assistance in exchange for exploitative labor. Victims in these situations often lack the legal documentation necessary to work legally, making them more vulnerable to traffickers who offer to “help” them secure employment under illegal conditions. Trafficking indicators in Greece must account for the precarious status of migrants and refugees and the country’s unique position as both a transit and destination country for trafficking.

The intersection of trafficking and migration in Greece, highlights the challenges faced by authorities in distinguishing between victims of trafficking and irregular migrants. Trafficking indicators should be integrated into the asylum and refugee process, particularly for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable women who are at risk of exploitation. the need for

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<sup>61</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Greece: Second evaluation round*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-greece-2nd-evaluation-round/1680aaa70a>

<sup>62</sup> Cockbain, E., Bowers, K., & Dimitrova, G. (2018). Human trafficking for labour exploitation: the results of a two-phase systematic review mapping the European evidence base and synthesising key scientific research evidence. *Journal of experimental criminology*, 14(3), 319–360. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9321-3>

indicators that address the specific vulnerabilities of refugees, such as the presence of intermediaries who offer “help” in exchange for exploitative labor or sexual services<sup>63</sup>.

The academic literature highlights the need for refined and context-specific trafficking indicators that account for Greece’s unique situation as a migration hub. Trafficking indicators must be adapted to reflect the cultural, economic, and social realities of trafficking in Greece. To effectively combat trafficking, Greece must continue to improve its trafficking indicators and integrate them more fully into the asylum and labor systems to protect vulnerable populations from exploitation.

while Greece has developed useful indicators, these tools often struggle to account for the complex intersection of migration and trafficking. Many refugees and asylum seekers remain hidden in plain sight, making it difficult for authorities to apply trafficking indicators effectively within refugee camps. Screening mechanisms within refugee camps and for asylum seekers should be improved to better detect trafficking risks.

### **Interviews**

The interviews conducted with operators working with migrants and trafficked persons in Greece reveal key insights into the complexity of human trafficking in the region. Most trafficking victims encountered by operators in Greece are men, women, and unaccompanied minors from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. These individuals often come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds and face significant hardships, including lack of education and precarious health conditions due to the difficult journeys they undertake. Criminal organizations often recruit victims through false promises of employment or safety. Victims are lured with promises of better opportunities in Europe but are instead subjected to exploitation, particularly labor exploitation. Many of these individuals face extreme coercion, blackmail, and violence. Women are targeted for sexual exploitation, and in many cases, traffickers use debt and physical violence to control them.

The interviews emphasize the difficulties in identifying trafficking victims, especially as many victims do not disclose their exploitation due to fear, shame, or distrust in authorities. Traffickers often control their victims closely, making it difficult for them to seek help.

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<sup>63</sup> Moskoff, H., & Serafeim, A. (2022). Detecting the valid consent in human trafficking crime. *Urban Crime. An international Journal*, 3(1), 200-225. <https://doi.org/10.26250/heal.panteion.uc.v3i1.2>



Operators experience highlights that signs of psychological trauma, contradictory stories, or submissive behavior are often indicators that someone may be a trafficking victim. Many victims of trafficking have suffered exploitation and abuse during their transit to Greece.

Operators described hearing harrowing stories of physical and sexual abuse, as well as dangerous journeys across the sea from Turkey. These journeys often involve overcrowded boats and severe physical and psychological distress, where individuals lose their belongings or have them taken by traffickers during the journey.

Organized crime plays a significant role in human trafficking in Greece. These networks are highly adaptable and exploit vulnerabilities such as poverty, lack of education, and the desire for a better life. Victims are often manipulated through fear and blackmail, with criminal organizations preying on the desperate circumstances of those seeking to migrate.

While Greece serves as a key transit country for trafficked persons, there are significant gaps in the institutional framework to protect victims. Many victims remain trapped in exploitative situations due to a lack of adequate legal and social support. Some operators pointed out that even after being identified, victims are often re-exploited due to the insufficient support structures in place.

## Spain

### Trafficking Data and Situation in Spain

Spain, due to its geographical location as a gateway between Europe and Africa, and its status as a major destination for tourism and migration, plays a significant role in human trafficking networks.

As of 2023, Spain identified 497 victims of trafficking and exploitation, marking a 24% increase from the previous year<sup>64</sup>. The majority of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are women between the ages of 28 and 32, predominantly from Colombia, Venezuela, and Paraguay. Sexual exploitation remains the most prevalent form of trafficking in Spain, with victims often trafficked into the country through organized criminal networks. These networks frequently exploit vulnerable women from Latin America and West Africa, using deception, coercion, or debt bondage to force them into prostitution. Victims are often exploited in brothels, street prostitution, or through escort services in major cities like Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia, as well as in tourist areas along the Mediterranean coast.

Victims trafficked for labor exploitation, including forced labor, are primarily men from Colombia, Moldova, and Morocco, most commonly employed in agriculture and domestic work<sup>65</sup>. Forced labor victims are often recruited from North Africa and Eastern Europe, where traffickers take advantage of poor economic conditions to lure workers into exploitative arrangements.

Spain continues to serve as both a transit and destination country, especially for individuals trafficked from Africa and Latin America, often through organized criminal networks. The southern regions of Andalusia and Murcia are hotspots for labor trafficking, particularly in the agricultural sector, where large-scale farms rely heavily on migrant labor, much of which is exploited under precarious conditions<sup>66</sup>. Moreover, child trafficking remains a critical concern, especially for forced begging and criminal activities. Unaccompanied

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<sup>64</sup> US Department of State (USDOS), 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Spain, 24 June 2024, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111764.html>

<sup>65</sup> Government of Spain. (2024, May 13). *Spain strengthens protection for trafficking victims*. La Moncloa. <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/news/Paginas/2024/20240513-trafficking-victims.aspx>

<sup>66</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Spain: Third evaluation round* (GRETA(2023)10). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-spain-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-10-ac/1680ab8d0f>

minors from North Africa are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, with many disappearing from protection centers and falling into traffickers' hands.

### **Trafficking Indicators in Spain**

To address the growing issue of human trafficking, Spain has developed and implemented trafficking indicators designed to assist law enforcement, social workers, healthcare professionals, and NGOs in identifying potential victims. These indicators, however, must account for the various forms of trafficking in Spain, as well as the different populations and trafficking routes involved.

In the context of sexual exploitation, trafficking indicators in Spain often focus on identifying signs of coercion, control, and abuse. Common indicators include restricted freedom of movement, the presence of a controlling figure or “handler,” signs of physical and psychological abuse, and lack of access to identification documents. Victims of sexual exploitation in Spain are frequently isolated from their social networks and are often forced to live and work in controlled environments, such as brothels or private residences<sup>67</sup>. Research highlights the importance of recognizing behavioral indicators in victims of sexual exploitation. These include visible signs of fear or anxiety, reluctance to engage with authorities, and a lack of knowledge about the local language or geographical area. In many cases, traffickers use debt bondage as a means of control, coercing victims into prostitution to repay large sums of money for their travel to Spain. The debt is often fabricated or inflated, ensuring that victims remain trapped in exploitative conditions<sup>68</sup>.

Moreover, trafficking indicators must adapt to the increasing use of digital platforms in human trafficking. There are digital indicators, such as the presence of traffickers controlling victims' online communications or the use of multiple locations for exploitation. In Spain, trafficking indicators have adapted to the rise of online sexual exploitation, where traffickers increasingly use digital platforms to recruit, advertise, and exploit victims. Some key indicators include traffickers controlling victims' online profiles, frequent changes in

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<sup>67</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Spain: Third evaluation round* (GRETA(2023)10). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-spain-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-10-ac/1680ab8d0f>

<sup>68</sup> European Commission. (n.d.). *Spain: Together against trafficking in human beings*. European Commission. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/spain\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/spain_en)

victims' locations, and signs of psychological manipulation. Spanish law enforcement has developed specialized digital tools to track and identify traffickers operating online, reflecting the growing need for expertise in detecting trafficking on sexual services websites<sup>69</sup>. These tools include AI-driven systems that monitor online sexual service websites, analyzing patterns of suspicious behavior such as frequent changes in victim locations, controlled online profiles, and indicators like photos showing "branding" or unconventional acts. Additionally, Spanish authorities collaborate with tech companies to develop algorithms capable of detecting coercive language in advertisements, which can help identify potential trafficking cases early<sup>70</sup>. Labor exploitation is another significant concern in Spain, particularly in the agricultural sector, which relies heavily on seasonal migrant labor. Indicators of labor trafficking in Spain include long working hours, withholding of wages, lack of legal employment contracts, and unsafe working conditions. Victims of labor trafficking are often housed in overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, isolated from the local community, and have their identity documents confiscated by traffickers or employers. the role of intermediaries in facilitating labor trafficking in agricultural regions<sup>71</sup>.

The conditions faced by migrant workers in southern Spain, particularly in Andalusia, where agricultural production is concentrated. Trafficking indicators in this context often include the use of illegal labor intermediaries, known as "enganchadores," who recruit workers from vulnerable populations and place them in exploitative conditions<sup>72</sup>. Migrant workers, particularly those from North Africa and Eastern Europe, are often promised decent wages and working conditions but find themselves working under coercive conditions with little to no pay. Trafficking indicators must be tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of

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<sup>69</sup> US Department of State (USDOS), 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Spain, 24 June 2024, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111764.html>

<sup>70</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2023, May 12). *OSCE issues recommendations to better identify and assist victims of human trafficking in conflict situations*. OSCE. <https://www.osce.org/cthb/555525>

<sup>71</sup> Martínez, F. A. (2018). Enforcing jurisdiction against vessels suspected of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. *Revista De Direito Brasileira*, 20(8), 19–42. <https://doi.org/10.26668/IndexLawJournals/2358-1352/2018.v20i8.4657>

<sup>72</sup> Corrado, A., Palumbo, L. (2022). Essential Farmworkers and the Pandemic Crisis: Migrant Labour Conditions, and Legal and Political Responses in Italy and Spain. In: Triandafyllidou, A. (eds) *Migration and Pandemics*. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81210-2\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81210-2_8)

migrant workers, including their lack of legal status and their dependence on illegal labor intermediaries for employment. The evidence calls for greater oversight of labor conditions in agriculture, as well as improved training for labor inspectors on identifying signs of trafficking.

Trafficking indicators in Spain's labor sectors have also expanded to address the exploitation of domestic workers, particularly women from Latin America and Africa. Key indicators in this context include excessive working hours, isolation in the employer's home, lack of access to personal documents, and restricted communication with family or friends<sup>73</sup>. Spain has faced significant challenges enforcing labor protections in this sector, especially since many domestic work arrangements occur in the informal economy, complicating the monitoring of working conditions.

In 2023, Spain enhanced its use of trafficking indicators to address the growing issue of child trafficking, particularly for forced begging and criminal exploitation. These indicators focus on behaviors such as children being coerced into street begging or criminal activities like petty theft, often controlled by traffickers through physical threats or psychological manipulation. Unaccompanied minors from countries like Morocco and Algeria are especially vulnerable, as they frequently disappear from protection centers shortly after arrival in Spain, making them easy targets for traffickers<sup>74</sup>. Indicators of child trafficking include children being forced to beg on the streets, involvement in petty theft or other criminal activities.

Indicators also include signs of physical neglect or malnutrition, which reflect the dire conditions these children face under the control of their traffickers<sup>75</sup>. Traffickers often use physical threats or manipulation to control child victims, making them fearful of authorities and unwilling to seek help. In addition, child trafficking for sexual exploitation remains prevalent. Vulnerable girls, often from Latin America and Eastern Europe, are trafficked for sexual exploitation. Spanish authorities have refined their indicators in these areas, focusing on sudden changes in children's behavior, their accompaniment by adults who are not their

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<sup>73</sup> US Department of State (USDOS), 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Spain, 24 June 2024, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111764.html>

<sup>74</sup> Cortina, J., & Fazel-Zarandi, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Migration and youth: Challenges and opportunities*. UNICEF. <https://jeronimocortina.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Migration-and-Youth-Challenges-and-Opportunities-Full.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). *Global report on trafficking in persons 2022*. United Nations. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP\\_2022\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP_2022_web.pdf)

legal guardians, and their lack of access to education<sup>76</sup>. Spanish authorities have worked to refine these indicators, particularly in areas with high levels of tourism, where child trafficking may go unnoticed. There is a need for early intervention and more robust protection mechanisms for unaccompanied minors, who are at high risk of trafficking in Spain.

Spain's trafficking dynamics are shaped by the influx of migrants from Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, many of whom are exploited for sexual and labor purposes. While Spain has developed trafficking indicators to help detect and address trafficking, the complexity and evolving nature of the crime, particularly in the context of online exploitation, continue to pose challenges for authorities. From sexual exploitation in urban and tourist areas to labor exploitation in the agricultural sector, Spain's trafficking indicators must continue to be adaptable and responsive to the diverse populations and trafficking networks involved.

### **Interviews**

The interviews conducted with operators working with migrants and trafficked persons in Spain highlight several key themes and insights. Firstly, operators report that trafficking victims in Spain are predominantly women, with many coming from Latin American countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Paraguay, and some have university degrees or established careers before their exploitation. A significant portion of these women are exploited for sexual purposes, though labor trafficking is also observed, particularly in the agricultural sector. Some victims come through legal avenues, such as tourist visas, only to find themselves exploited upon arrival.

The operators mention that economic instability and insecurity in their home countries drive many to migrate, only to fall into trafficking networks upon arrival in Spain. Many victims are lured to Spain under false pretenses, typically with promises of legitimate work. Upon arrival, they are either forced into prostitution or exploited for labor. In some cases, the traffickers are people they know, such as friends or even family members. Therefore, identifying victims can be difficult, as they often do not realize they are being exploited. Many have normalized their situations, believing that their exploitation is simply part of

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<sup>76</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Spain: Third evaluation round* (GRETA(2023)10). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-spain-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-10-ac/1680ab8d0f>

repaying debts or fulfilling promises made by traffickers. Operators also note that trust- building is essential for victims to disclose their experiences.

Victims, especially those involved in prostitution, frequently move between different locations to avoid detection. Some live in unstable conditions, such as shared accommodations, and are often controlled by traffickers, who manage their movements and even confiscate their documents. Fear of retaliation and a lack of trust in authorities prevent many victims from seeking help. Some fear being sent back to their home countries with unresolved debts, while others are under the constant control of traffickers, who maintain power over them through manipulation and threats. Operators then also note how migrants, particularly those coming from conflict-ridden or economically unstable regions, are especially vulnerable to trafficking. The operators have underscored the particular importance of trust- building, legal assistance, and comprehensive support for migrants and trafficked individuals.

## **Poland**

### **Statistical data**

Poland is primarily a source, transit, and, to a lesser extent, destination country for human trafficking. Its geographical position in Central Europe and its close proximity to Eastern European and post-Soviet countries make it a key transit route for trafficking networks operating between Eastern and Western Europe. Over the past decade, human trafficking in Poland has primarily affected Polish nationals trafficked for labor exploitation abroad, particularly in Western Europe<sup>77</sup>. However, Poland also faces significant challenges with domestic trafficking, and more recently, it has seen an increase in trafficking of foreign nationals, including Ukrainians, Belarus and other Eastern Europeans, particularly in the context of forced labor. This shift, driven by economic migration and instability in the region, has led to increased vulnerability among migrant workers. Indeed, the influx of refugees and

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<sup>77</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Poland: Third evaluation round* (GRETA(2023)08). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-poland-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-08-a/1680ab7039>

migrants from Ukraine due to ongoing conflict has heightened the vulnerability of Ukrainian nationals to trafficking, particularly for labor exploitation in Poland's construction, agriculture, and domestic work sectors<sup>78</sup>.

Poland has seen significant increase in labor trafficking. 277 victims were identified in 2022, a considerable decrease from 447 in 2021<sup>79</sup>. This figure, while substantial, is likely underrepresenting the full scope of the problem, as trafficking often remains hidden or unreported. The majority of victims are foreign nationals, especially from Ukraine, driven by migration linked to the ongoing conflict. Labor exploitation remains the predominant form of trafficking in Poland, particularly affecting foreign workers from Ukraine, Belarus, and other Eastern European nations.

Recent data indicates that while Poland remains a source country for trafficking, the rising number of migrant workers from Ukraine and other Eastern European countries has shifted Poland's role to that of a destination country as well. Forced labor, particularly in agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, now constitutes the most common form of trafficking in Poland. This is a significant departure from earlier trends that focused more on sexual exploitation, indicating that the trafficking landscape in Poland is evolving.

Poland's role as a transit country also remains significant, with traffickers using Poland as a route to transport victims from Eastern Europe to Western Europe for labor and sexual exploitation. This trend is facilitated by Poland's membership in the Schengen Area, which allows for relatively easy cross-border movement. However, Polish nationals continue to be trafficked abroad, particularly to countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, where they are exploited in sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, and construction. Moreover, the demand for low-cost labor in Poland's own agricultural and construction sectors has created an internal market for labor trafficking, particularly involving migrants from Eastern Europe.

### Trafficking Indicators in Poland

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<sup>78</sup> US Department of State (USDOS). (2024). Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111745.html>

<sup>79</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)



Poland has implemented a range of trafficking indicators to help law enforcement, NGOs, and social services detect and assist trafficking victims. These indicators are used to identify both labor and sexual exploitation and have been developed in line with EU-wide standards. The National Consulting and Intervention Centre for Victims of Trafficking provides key support, including legal and psychological assistance, to identified victims (European Commission, 2023).

Given the prominence of labor trafficking in Poland, indicators for forced labor are critical. Common indicators include lack of employment contracts, wage withholding, long working hours, and poor living conditions. Many victims of labor trafficking in Poland are housed in overcrowded and unsanitary accommodations, often controlled by their traffickers. The confiscation of identification documents and threats of deportation are also common tactics used to control victims. Labor trafficking indicators in Poland often overlap with indicators of severe labor exploitation<sup>80</sup>. For example, victims are frequently isolated from the local community, have no access to legal or medical assistance, and are subjected to physical abuse or threats. These indicators have been particularly useful in detecting cases of trafficking in agriculture and construction, where informal labor practices are prevalent. This underscores the importance of refining indicators to account for the specific vulnerabilities of migrant workers, particularly those from Ukraine, who may lack legal protections or social support. Many labor trafficking victims in Poland are isolated in rural areas, making it difficult for authorities to detect exploitation, further underscoring the importance of monitoring indicators such as restricted freedom of movement and the inability to communicate with the outside world<sup>81</sup>. There is a need for labor trafficking indicators that focus on the role of intermediaries, confiscation of documents, and the provision of substandard living and working conditions. In the context of sexual exploitation, trafficking indicators in Poland include restricted freedom of movement, signs of physical and psychological abuse, and control by a third party (such as a pimp or trafficker). Victims are often forced into prostitution through debt bondage,

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<sup>80</sup> Walby, S. et al. (2016). *Study on Comprehensive Policy Review of Anti-Trafficking Projects Funded by the European Commission*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d2eddf49-9c50-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1>  
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111745.html>

<sup>81</sup> US Department of State (USDOS). (2024). *Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland*

where they are told they must repay significant sums for their transportation or “protection”<sup>82</sup>. Women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation often exhibit signs of fear, anxiety, and a reluctance to engage with authorities. Frontline workers should be trained to recognize subtle signs of coercion, such as fear of speaking with authorities or reluctance to leave traffickers. Indicators focus on restricted movement, signs of coercion or threats, and control over victims’ earnings and personal documents<sup>83</sup>. This is particularly relevant in Poland, where many victims of sexual exploitation are trafficked through complex networks that operate across multiple countries. Women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation are often reluctant to speak to authorities due to threats against their families or fear of deportation.

While Poland has made significant progress in detecting and addressing sexual exploitation, particularly through the use of these indicators, the increasing focus on labor trafficking has shifted some attention away from the issue of sexual exploitation. Nonetheless, organizations such as La Strada Poland continue to play a crucial role in supporting victims and raising awareness about trafficking indicators in this context.

Poland also faces challenges with child trafficking, particularly involving forced begging and criminal exploitation. Children trafficked for forced begging are often controlled by traffickers who subject them to physical abuse and force them to work long hours on the streets. Indicators for child trafficking include signs of malnutrition, lack of access to education, and the presence of adults controlling their movements. While child trafficking remains less prevalent than labor and sexual exploitation, it is a growing concern, particularly in urban areas.

Poland faces a complex and evolving trafficking landscape, with labor exploitation now surpassing sexual exploitation as the most prevalent form of trafficking. The country’s role as both a source and destination for trafficked individuals, combined with its status as a transit country, makes it a key battleground in the fight against human trafficking in Europe.

The literature suggests that while Poland’s trafficking indicators are generally effective, they must be continuously refined to address the changing dynamics of trafficking, particularly in light of new migration patterns and labor market trends. The increasing number of foreign nationals trafficked into Poland, presents new challenges for applying these

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<sup>82</sup> US Department of State (USDOS). (2024). *Trafficking in Persons Report: Poland*  
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2111745.html>

<sup>83</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Poland: Third evaluation round* (GRETA(2023)08). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-poland-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-08-a/1680ab7039>

indicators effectively. By enhancing collaboration between law enforcement, NGOs, and social workers, Poland can improve its capacity to detect and combat human trafficking. The influx of Ukrainian refugees has further complicated the trafficking landscape, with a growing number of potential victims falling outside the scope of traditional trafficking indicators<sup>84</sup>.

Poland, meanwhile, must continue refining its indicators for detecting labor exploitation in rural and informal sectors, where much of the trafficking occurs. With a large influx of migrant workers, Poland needs to strengthen its focus on detecting signs of coercion, fraud, and exploitation in migrant labor recruitment. The country would benefit from increased collaboration at the regional level to share best practices in developing and applying trafficking indicators.

### **Interviews**

As part of the Kleos project, facilitated by its Polish partner, a series of interviews were conducted with operators working directly with migrants and trafficked individuals across various regions of Poland. The interviews highlight several recurring themes and concerns in the Polish region. According to the interviews, almost all trafficked individuals come from Eastern European countries such as Russia, Belarus, and, mostly, Ukraine. They often are women with children facing economic hardships and uncertainty, becoming easy targets for traffickers. However, in some areas of Poland, there is a presence of trafficked individuals from Southern American countries that arrive in Poland thanks to a temporary permit stay of 3 months.

Generally, operators report a feeling of anxiousness, disorientation, and insecurity among individuals, due to the absence of support structures and the lack of knowledge about their new environment. Then, economic vulnerability is a recurring theme, with many victims coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or having lost their means of livelihood due to the war. Many victims also resort to borrowing money or selling their possessions to afford the journey, often putting them in debt, which can be leveraged by traffickers. Moreover, the interviews highlight how many individuals were recruited under false promises of employment through intermediaries or employment agencies. Upon arrival, they find themselves in exploitative situations, often working in poor conditions with minimal pay. This

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<sup>84</sup> Asylum Information Database. (2023). *Statistics on asylum seekers in Poland*. AIDA. <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/poland/statistics/>

trend has been notably observed in migrants from South America and other non-European countries. While the identification of trafficked individuals is a priority, lack of language skills and reluctance to report exploitation further hampers efforts. Operators also noted how organized criminal networks take advantage of refugees, particularly at border points, exploiting the chaos and lack of oversight to traffic individuals. This has been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, where the rapid influx of refugees has created a high-risk environment for trafficking.

## **Estonia**

### **Statistical Data**

Estonia, while relatively small, plays a notable role in the regional trafficking landscape, functioning as a source, transit, and, increasingly, a destination country for human trafficking.

In 2023, Estonia continued to confront both labor and sexual exploitation as key forms of human trafficking. The Council of Europe's GRETA report noted that the majority of trafficking victims in Estonia are exploited for labor purposes, particularly men from Ukraine and Poland, employed in sectors like construction and agriculture<sup>85</sup>. Of the 87 registered victims in Estonia, most were trafficked for labor exploitation, which has seen a rise in prevalence, while sexual exploitation cases remain significant, particularly affecting women<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, in the past few years, Estonia has seen a rising trend in labor trafficking, particularly affecting men from neighboring countries like Ukraine and Poland. From 2018 to 2021, labor exploitation was predominant among the 264 presumed victims of trafficking, while sexual exploitation was more common among formally identified victims<sup>87</sup>. The influx of Ukrainian refugees due to the war has further raised concerns about increased

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<sup>85</sup> Council of Europe. (2023, June 6). *Human trafficking experts urge Estonia to combat labour exploitation, improve identification of victims*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/-/human-trafficking-experts-urge-estonia-to-combat-labour-exploitation-improve-identification-of-victims>

<sup>86</sup> Eurostat. (n.d.). *Trafficking in human beings by form of exploitation and citizenship of victims - number and percentage*. European Commission. [https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM\\_THB\\_SEX](https://doi.org/10.2908/CRIM_THB_SEX)

<sup>87</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Estonia: Third evaluation round (GRETA(2023)07)*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-estonia-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-07-/1680ab81c1>

vulnerabilities, with a focus on labor exploitation within sectors such as construction, agriculture, and cleaning.

### **Trafficking indicators**

Estonia's anti-trafficking response includes a set of trafficking indicators, particularly focused on labor exploitation, as the country has shifted from being predominantly affected by sexual exploitation to experiencing an increase in labor trafficking. GRETA's recent report urged Estonia to strengthen its mechanisms for identifying labor exploitation, emphasizing the need for better-trained labor inspectors who can recognize the signs of trafficking during workplace checks. Common indicators for labor exploitation in Estonia include lack of formal contracts, wage withholding, excessively long working hours, and unsafe or overcrowded living conditions for laborers, particularly those from Ukraine and Poland. Additionally, the confiscation of identity documents and threats of deportation are often used to maintain control over victims, particularly among foreign workers<sup>88</sup>.

For sexual exploitation, Estonia uses behavioral and situational indicators, including restricted freedom of movement, signs of physical abuse, and the presence of a controlling figure (often referred to as a "pimp"). Victims of sexual exploitation, predominantly women, are often manipulated into prostitution through coercion or threats against their families.

Estonia also applies specific trafficking indicators for children, particularly for unaccompanied minors or those who may be involved in forced begging. These indicators include signs of malnutrition, lack of access to education, and evidence that an adult is controlling the child's activities and movements.

Research by the Council of Europe and GRETA suggests that Estonia has made considerable progress in identifying trafficking victims but still faces challenges, particularly in the labor sector. Studies emphasize the need for Estonia to better integrate trafficking indicators into its labor inspection system and expand training programs for frontline workers, including police and social service professionals<sup>89</sup>. Furthermore, the GRETA report highlights the importance of enhancing Estonia's ability to detect trafficking among vulnerable

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<sup>88</sup> US Department of State (15 June 2023). 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Estonia <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2093714.html>

<sup>89</sup> Riigi Teataja. (2020, November 13). *Trafficking in human beings prevention and victim support act*. Riigi Teataja. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/313112020006>

populations, such as asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees, many of whom are at risk of labor exploitation due to their precarious legal and economic status.

In conclusion, Estonia's human trafficking situation is evolving, with labor exploitation becoming a growing concern alongside traditional forms of sexual exploitation. While the country has developed effective trafficking indicators, particularly for sexual exploitation, further refinement is needed to address labor trafficking and ensure that all at-risk populations are adequately protected. Improving training for labor inspectors and other frontline workers will be key to enhancing the country's ability to identify and assist victims.

Estonia has also developed trafficking indicators for vulnerable populations, particularly unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers, who may be targeted for labor or sexual exploitation. While Estonia has made strides in identifying trafficking victims, especially in the context of asylum-seekers, labor inspectors and law enforcement need further training to apply these indicators effectively<sup>90</sup>.

In Estonia, GRETA has highlighted the need for more comprehensive training for labor inspectors and law enforcement officials to ensure that trafficking indicators are used effectively in detecting labor exploitation, especially in the construction and agricultural sectors. The focus should be on enhancing awareness of labor trafficking indicators among frontline workers and improving coordination between various agencies involved in trafficking prevention.

### **Interviews**

The interviews conducted with operators working with migrants and trafficked individuals in Estonia provide a detailed look into the patterns, challenges, and dynamics of human trafficking in the country. Interviews highlighted how many of the trafficked individuals identified are from vulnerable backgrounds, including poor economic conditions, low education levels, or unstable family situations. Domestic victims from Estonia are indicated as mostly prevalent, but there is also considerable presence of international victims (from countries such as Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Spain). Most of the trafficked individuals are women, primarily between the ages of 20 and 40. Moreover, many victims have mental health issues or undiagnosed disabilities, which further exacerbate their vulnerability.

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<sup>90</sup> Council of Europe. (2023). *GRETA evaluation report on Estonia: Third evaluation round* (GRETA(2023)07). Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-estonia-3rd-evaluation-round-greta-2023-07-/1680ab81c1>

Victims are trafficked for various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, prostitution, and sham marriages. Operators identified that traffickers commonly use social media platforms like Telegram and TikTok to recruit victims, often targeting vulnerable individuals with promises of better opportunities or jobs, only to exploit them once they arrive in Estonia. Victims are often transported across borders through informal channels, and their documents are frequently confiscated to control them. Many victims struggle to seek help due to fear, shame, or distrust in the authorities. Victims often rely on trusted social workers or advisors who help build trust over time. However, the re-victimization of individuals is a significant concern, particularly for those who do not receive timely support. Rehabilitation efforts are often hindered by the lack of resources and opportunities available to victims. The operators emphasize that trust-building and early intervention are crucial for successful recovery, but resource limitations and the re-victimization of individuals present ongoing challenges in the fight against human trafficking.

### **Suggestions for Improvements**

As outlined throughout the report, human trafficking remains a persistent issue across the European Union, with notable differences in its dynamics across Spain, Italy, Greece, Poland, and Estonia. While each country faces unique challenges—ranging from labor exploitation to online sexual trafficking—the assessment of trafficking indicators shows that many of the tools used to identify and assist victims are similar and effective but may require adjustments to reflect the evolving trafficking profiles. Below are specific recommendations for improving trafficking indicators in the five countries, along with proposals for new indicators where necessary, followed by concluding thoughts on the broader European context.

#### **Improved Training and Awareness for Frontline Workers**

Across all five countries, there is a pressing need to enhance training for labor inspectors, law enforcement officers, social workers, and healthcare professionals. The effectiveness of trafficking indicators depends on the ability of these frontline workers to recognize the subtle signs of trafficking, particularly in less obvious forms such as labor exploitation. For example:

- In Poland and Estonia, where labor trafficking has grown, it is crucial to train labor inspectors to spot indicators in informal labor markets, such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work.
- In Italy and Spain, the focus should be on recognizing both labor and sexual exploitation, especially in industries such as tourism, agriculture, and domestic work where migrant workers are particularly vulnerable.
- In Greece, training should prioritize the identification of trafficking victims among asylum seekers and refugees, with a focus on understanding the risks of trafficking within refugee camps and among unaccompanied minors.

### **Strengthening Labor Trafficking Indicators**

Labor trafficking is a growing concern, especially in Poland, Estonia, Italy, and Spain, where migrant workers are frequently exploited. Current trafficking indicators should be expanded to better capture the nuances of labor trafficking, particularly in informal economies. New indicators should focus on:

- Recruitment practices: Monitoring the role of intermediaries and recruiters who may exploit workers through deceptive or fraudulent employment offers.
- Living conditions: Identifying situations where workers are housed in overcrowded, unsafe, or unsanitary conditions, often under the control of traffickers or employers.
- Workplace conditions: Expanding the range of indicators related to wage withholding, excessive working hours, and restrictions on workers' freedom of movement or access to their identification documents.

### **Enhanced Digital Monitoring**

In all five countries, traffickers are increasingly using online platforms to recruit, exploit, and control victims. Therefore, digital trafficking indicators are essential for identifying victims and their exploiters. Spain has already made progress in this area, particularly with its emphasis on digital platforms used for sexual exploitation, but more work is needed across all countries:

- Develop digital indicators to detect online recruitment tactics, particularly for sexual exploitation and forced labor.
- Train law enforcement agencies to monitor and analyze online activities that may signal trafficking, such as suspicious job offers or coercive messages.



- Implement collaborative efforts between governments, tech companies, and NGOs to track trafficking activities online, sharing data and trends across borders.

### **Adapting Indicators for Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

In Greece and Italy, refugee flows have created heightened risks for trafficking. Indicators specific to the vulnerabilities of refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors and women, should be integrated into the screening processes at refugee camps, immigration detention centers, and asylum processing facilities. These indicators should focus on:

- Signs of psychological or physical coercion.
- Irregular work arrangements offered to refugees who may lack legal documentation.
- The presence of intermediaries or traffickers who may be posing as employers, recruiters, or even other refugees offering help.

### **New Indicators**

#### **Digital Indicators for Online Exploitation**

Given the increasing use of technology in trafficking operations, new digital indicators should be developed for identifying potential victims of trafficking who are being recruited or exploited online. These indicators could include:

- Monitoring social media for patterns of coercion, manipulation, or recruitment for forced labor or prostitution.
- Analyzing messaging patterns or advertisements that offer too-good-to-be-true job opportunities, especially those targeting vulnerable populations such as refugees or migrants.
- Collaboration between tech companies and governments to detect traffickers using encrypted communication platforms or the dark web to avoid detection.

#### **Sector-Specific Labor Indicators**

In sectors where labor trafficking is common, such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work, new indicators should be developed to reflect the specific vulnerabilities of workers in these fields. These could include:

- Lack of formal contracts, use of cash payments, or illegal deductions from wages.

- Frequent turnover of workers, particularly migrant laborers, which could signal high levels of exploitation.
- Restrictions on workers' ability to leave their place of employment or report abuses, with a focus on migrant workers who may be afraid to report exploitation due to their immigration status.

### **Child-Specific Trafficking Indicators**

Child trafficking, particularly for forced begging or criminal activities, is a growing concern in Greece, Estonia, and Poland. New child-specific indicators should be developed to reflect the unique ways in which children are trafficked, such as:

- Evidence of control by adults who are not the legal guardians of the child, particularly in cases of forced begging.
- Signs of physical neglect or malnutrition in children, which could indicate exploitation.
- Lack of access to education or health services, particularly for children in marginalized communities in urban areas or refugee camps.

### **Conclusion**

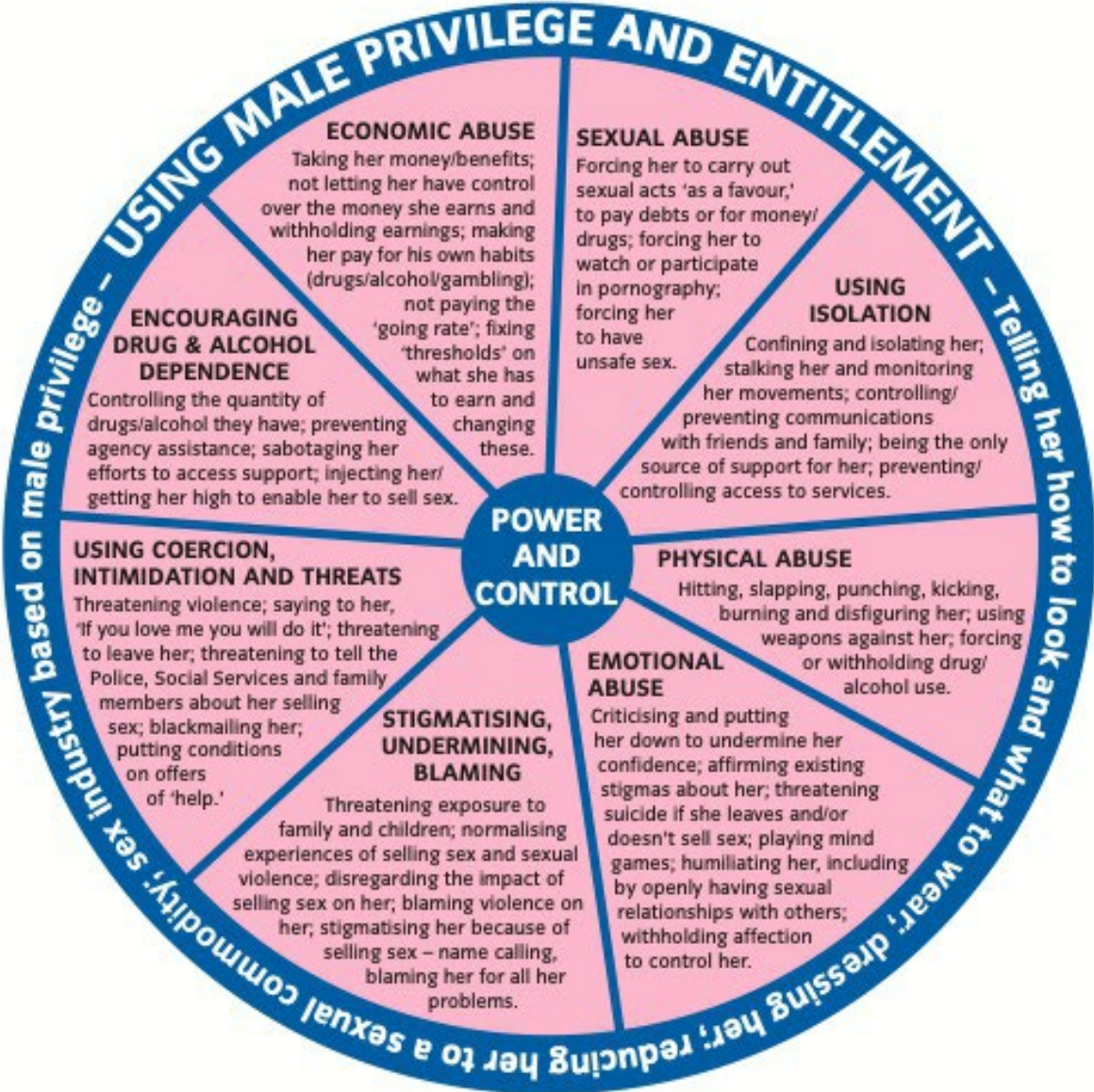
Human trafficking in Europe continues to be a significant challenge, with each country facing unique trafficking dynamics shaped by its geographical location, economic conditions, and migration patterns. As demonstrated in the cases of Spain, Italy, Greece, Poland, and Estonia, labor trafficking has become more prevalent, particularly among migrant and refugee populations. Sexual exploitation, while still a serious issue, is increasingly intertwined with digital platforms and online recruitment efforts, necessitating new approaches to monitoring and detection.

The review of trafficking indicators across these countries suggests that while the current tools are effective in many respects, there is a pressing need to refine and expand them to address the evolving trafficking landscape. Digital indicators, sector-specific labor indicators, and child-specific indicators are all necessary adaptations to ensure that trafficking victims are identified and assisted as early as possible.

In conclusion, Europe's response to human trafficking must continue to evolve through enhanced training for frontline workers, improved coordination between law

enforcement agencies, and the development of new trafficking indicators that can detect exploitation in both physical and digital environments. By staying ahead of trafficking trends and adapting tools and strategies accordingly, European countries can improve their capacity to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and bring traffickers to justice.

## POWER & CONTROL WHEEL FOR WOMEN INVOLVED IN STREET PROSTITUTION



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