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Trafficking in human beings in Slovenia



Material from online learning platform Canvas

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1 Definition of trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings represents a transnational form of organised crime characterised by the exploitation of individuals for economic gain. Offenders typically target persons in situations of heightened vulnerability and employ various coercive strategies, including deception, force, threats, or violence, to compel victims into exploitative practices. These practices encompass sexual exploitation, forced labour, and other forms of exploitation comparable to slavery (Klun and Frangež, 2024; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2022). At the international level, trafficking in human beings is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons for the purpose of exploitation. The commission of the offence involves the use of prohibited means, such as coercion, abduction, fraud, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, as well as the provision or acceptance of payments or benefits to obtain control over another person. Any consent given by the victim is invalid where it has been obtained through such impermissible means (Zakon o ratifikaciji Protokola za preprečevanje, zatiranje in kaznovanje trgovine z ljudmi, zlasti ženskami in otroki, ki dopolnjuje Konvencijo Združenih narodov proti mednarodnemu organiziranemu kriminalu, 2004).

Within the Slovenian legal framework, trafficking in human beings is criminalised under Article 113 of the Criminal Code (Kazenski zakonik (KZ-1), 2012). Paragraph 1 of this provision defines the basic form of the offence and criminalises acts such as the purchase, acquisition, accommodation, transportation, sale, transfer, or other forms of dealing in persons, as well as the recruitment, exchange, or transfer of control over an individual, or to act as an intermediary in such actions. Paragraphs 2 and 5 regulate qualified forms of the offence, which apply in circumstances where the perpetrator employs force, threats, abduction, deception, or abuse of authority or position; acts as a member of a criminal organisation engaged in trafficking activities; derives substantial financial benefit from the offence; or commits the offence against a minor (KZ-1, 2012; Klun and Frangež, 2024).

2 Trafficking in human beings in Slovenia

Slovenia is a transit and destination country (Policija, 2021), as well as a country of origin for trafficking in human beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi, n.d.a). From 2010 to 2024, the police dealt a total of 409 cases of trafficking in human beings. The highest number of such cases was in 2018 (71), while the lowest number was recorded in 2010 and 2014, with three cases each year (Policija, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2023a, 2025) (graph 1).



Graph 1: Number of crimes of trafficking in human beings in Slovenia in the period 2010–2024 (Policija, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2023a, 2025)

Between 2010 and 2023, a total of 455 victims of trafficking in human beings were officially identified in Slovenia. Of these victims, approximately 90% were women, 9% were men, and 1% were children. The majority originated from Ukraine, Serbia, Romania, the Dominican Republic, China, and Hungary, while individuals of Slovenian origin represented 6% of the identified victims.

During the same period (2010–2023), 246 individuals were recorded as suspects in trafficking in human beings cases. Of these, 45% were formally indicted; however, only 26% ultimately resulted in convictions. With regard to the forms of exploitation, sexual exploitation predominated, accounting for approximately 90% of detected trafficking cases between 2010 and 2022. Forced involvement in criminal activities constituted 7% of cases, while the remaining 3% involved other forms of exploitation, including forced labour, servitude, begging, and forced marriages (Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, n.d.b; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, n.d.c).

2.1 Forms of trafficking in human beings in Slovenia

In Slovenia, the most frequently detected forms of trafficking in human beings involve sexual exploitation and prostitution, followed by forced labour, servitude, forced criminality, forced begging, and forced child marriages. Evidence from the past five years indicates that approximately 10% of professionals working in relevant fields have expressed concerns that children may also be at risk of sexual exploitation (Kovač and Kos, 2023). In contrast,



trafficking for the purpose of organ, tissue, or blood removal has not been identified by the Slovenian police to date (Franež and Bučar Ručman, 2017; Kovač and Kos, 2023).

Victims of sexual exploitation and prostitution often do not seek assistance, primarily due to limited perceived benefits of reporting, the non-taxed nature of sex work, and a prevailing lack of trust in law enforcement authorities (Frelih, 2017b; Markelj et al., 2022). Individuals acting as pimps are predominantly Slovenian nationals who engage in prostitution-related activities alongside other illegal economic enterprises, such as the operation of nightclubs. Recruitment of victims frequently occurs under false pretences, with perpetrators posing as potential clients, medical professionals, or police officers (Frelih, 2017a). In the detection of abuse within prostitution, the police primarily rely on proactive investigative approaches rather than victim-initiated reporting (Frelih, 2017b). With regard to regulatory and theoretical approaches to sex work, Kogovšek Šalamon et al. (2023) observe that Slovenia predominantly follows a restrictive model. Under this framework, the sale of sexual services is formally permitted, while certain elements of both the repressive model—such as public discourse condemning sex work—and the integrative model—such as the recognition of sex workers' personal, labour, social, and health rights—are simultaneously present.

Victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of forced labour and labour exploitation in Slovenia are predominantly migrant workers. Their vulnerability stems from disadvantaged social and economic positions, limited access to information, and insufficient knowledge of labour and migration law. Employers exploit these vulnerabilities by recruiting workers in sectors such as construction, catering, transport, and forestry through deceptive practices, including the provision of false or misleading information regarding working conditions, remuneration, and accommodation. In most identified cases, perpetrators do not employ direct physical violence; rather, coercion is exercised through systematic violations of labour and social rights. These violations include the partial or complete non-payment of wages, holiday pay, and sick leave entitlements; unjustified wage reductions; excessive working hours beyond statutory limits; non-payment of mandatory health and pension contributions; unlawful deregistration from compulsory insurance schemes; unilateral alterations of employment contracts without the workers' knowledge; transfers to bankrupt subsidiary companies; and threats of dismissal. In certain cases, migrant workers, particularly in the transport sector (e.g., truck drivers), have been compelled to violate traffic regulations, such as exceeding legally prescribed driving time limits, thereby being forced into criminal activities. Victims often endure exploitation due to existential dependence on employment, which contributes to internalisation of responsibility for their victimisation. As a result, some victims do not recognise their experiences as exploitative or criminal in nature (Bučar Ručman in Franež, 2014). In addition to labour exploitation, domestic servitude has also been identified as a form of trafficking in human beings present in Slovenia (Bučar Ručman in Franež, 2014).



Victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of forced begging predominantly originate from foreign countries characterised by adverse social and economic conditions, including Romania, Slovakia, and states of the former Yugoslavia (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014; Puppis in Sluga, 2016). Persons with disabilities are most frequently identified as victims, although elderly individuals and children may also be subjected to this form of exploitation. Perpetrators exploit victims' structural vulnerabilities and exert control through manipulation, intimidation, and physical coercion, often presenting themselves as economically successful in order to reinforce dependence and compliance. Victims are typically deprived of control over the proceeds of begging, as the majority of collected funds are appropriated by the perpetrators (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014). Begging is commonly organised in a structured and controlled manner, whereby perpetrators transport victims to designated locations and retrieve them at the conclusion of the day's activities, thereby maintaining continuous supervision and control over their movements (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014; Puppis in Sluga, 2016).

Cases of trafficking in children are relatively infrequent in the practice of the Slovenian police, primarily because most children in Slovenia live with legal guardians and are not exposed to homelessness. Nevertheless, children may still become victims of trafficking in human beings in several forms, including sexual exploitation, economic exploitation, forced marriages, trafficking for the purpose of organ, tissue, and blood removal, and illegal adoptions (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014). Empirical findings indicate that, within the past five years, approximately 10% of professionals working in relevant fields have expressed concerns regarding the potential risk of sexual exploitation of children (Kovač in Kos, 2023). Recruitment in cases of child sexual exploitation frequently involves so-called "loverboys," who establish intimate or emotionally manipulative relationships with victims as a means of control.

With regard to economic exploitation, instances of forced begging involving children have been detected on several occasions. These cases were typically terminated promptly due to strong societal reactions and the rapid intervention of law enforcement authorities and social services. Isolated cases of child labour exploitation have also been identified, particularly in activities related to waste separation and forestry work. Furthermore, several cases of forced criminality involving children have been detected in Slovenia (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014).

Forced marriages involving children occur predominantly within Roma communities, although such practices have also been identified in other communities, such as Albanian communities (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014). According to certain traditional norms within Roma communities, girls may be considered eligible for marriage at the onset of menstruation, typically around the age of 15 (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014; Narat et al., 2014). Fathers often play a decisive role in arranging marriages, with debts owed to another



family or prospective spouse constituting a common motivating factor (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014; Narat et al., 2014). These practices are closely linked to patriarchal social structures and are motivated by efforts to preserve cultural traditions, restrict children's autonomy in decision-making, and alleviate family poverty. Within this context, marriage ceremonies hold significant social importance and often involve substantial financial costs. The payment of a dowry or bride price by the "groom's" family functions as a mechanism of control that inhibits victims from expressing dissent. Breach of the marriage agreement is perceived as a source of severe familial shame and entails the obligation to repay the bride price in double the amount, thereby rendering such breaches rare. Following the marriage, victims may be exposed to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Early pregnancies are common, and girls frequently discontinue formal education, rarely entering the labour market later in life. Instead, they typically assume caregiving roles and experience long-term social exclusion (Narat et al., 2014).

In relation to illegal adoptions, suspicions arise in cases involving international adoptions from countries characterised by adverse social conditions; instances where parents return to Slovenia with a child born abroad after prolonged residence outside the country; adoptions originating from states that are not parties to the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption; and cases associated with surrogacy arrangements.

Although the Slovenian police have not identified any confirmed cases of trafficking in human organs, tissues, or blood, the absence of detected cases should not be interpreted as evidence of the absence of such practices (Bučar Ručman in Frangež, 2014; Frangež in Bučar Ručman, 2017).

3 Detection and criminal investigation of trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings is most frequently detected through proactive police activities, as victims rarely report the offence on their own initiative (Policija, 2023a). Underreporting is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including fear of perpetrators, feelings of shame, trauma-related consequences, distrust in state institutions, and, in some cases, victims' lack of awareness that they are being victimised (Farrell et al., 2019). The increasing use of modern technology further complicates detection efforts, as it enables traffickers to operate with greater anonymity, utilise encrypted communication channels, expand their operational reach, and exert remote control over victims. Digital technologies are employed throughout various stages of trafficking operations, including recruitment, advertising, extortion, surveillance, and financial management. In response to these challenges, the police actively cooperate with private-sector actors and online platforms to identify



trafficking-related activities, raise public awareness, and promote reporting mechanisms (Policija, 2025).

Nongovernmental organisations, social services, and other relevant stakeholders play a critical role in investigations, as they are often able to provide essential information and facilitate contact with victims who might otherwise remain inaccessible to law enforcement authorities (Farrell et al., 2019). Nevertheless, a persistent obstacle to effective prosecution is the lack of sufficient evidence. Although victim testimony is central to criminal proceedings, victims frequently refuse to cooperate, while witnesses are scarce or may have a vested interest in concealing the exploitation (Pajón and Walsh, 2018). When reports are submitted, they are most commonly initiated by neighbours or relatives, rather than by victims themselves, who often seek anonymity due to fear of retaliation (Frelih, 2017b). Additional barriers to seeking assistance include threats by perpetrators, fear of deportation, and low levels of trust in public institutions (Markelj et al., 2022; Šalamon, 2006).

The identification of victims of trafficking in human beings remains particularly challenging due to the concealed nature of the crime and victims' limited knowledge of their rights, unfamiliarity with foreign legal systems, and insufficient proficiency in local languages (Clawson et al., 2009). To support identification efforts, the Slovenian Ministry of the Interior has developed a set of indicators encompassing four main categories: general indicators (e.g., lack of knowledge regarding travel arrangements or possession of forged documents); behavioural indicators (e.g., avoidance of eye contact, visible injuries, rehearsed responses); indicators specific to particular forms of trafficking (e.g., forced prostitution, labour exploitation, forced begging); and indicators specific to children (e.g., behaviour inappropriate for age, lack of schooling, absence of contact with parents or guardians) (Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, 2016). However, identification and protection efforts are further impeded by the fact that victims often do not perceive themselves as victims of trafficking (Bučar Ručman and Frangež, 2014).

Investigations into trafficking in human beings rely on a combination of conventional and covert investigative techniques, including surveillance, tracking, wiretapping, house searches, and undercover operations (Frelih, 2017; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2025). Investigators may assume the role of clients and visit locations suspected of exploitation. In certain cases, female investigators undertake undercover roles as sex workers, hostesses, or massage therapists to obtain evidence in environments associated with sexual exploitation (Pajnik and Kavčič, 2007).

Victim and witness testimonies remain crucial for successful prosecution but are generally limited in availability. In some cases, witnesses may actively seek to defend the accused during questioning, potentially due to intimidation or fear of repercussions. Defendants frequently deny the commission of offences, attribute responsibility to the victims, or claim to be victims of personal vendettas or police misconduct. Co-defendants similarly tend to



deny involvement, and in certain cases, female co-defendants may present themselves as voluntary sex workers in an attempt to avoid criminal liability (Pajnik and Kavčič, 2007).

4 Programs of treatments of victims of trafficking in human beings (from National Report for WP2 – Slovenia (Franež et al., 2024))

In Slovenia, there are several programs of treatments of victims of trafficking in human beings¹:

1. The Celostna oskrba žrtev trgovine z ljudmi-krizna namestitev (Comprehensive care for victims of trafficking in human beings–crisis accommodation) program consists of care lasting to 30 days for identified victims who need immediate withdrawal to the sheltered environment. Caritas Slovenia (Slovenska karitas), which implements the program, offers accommodation, material help, assistance in providing primary health care, psychosocial help, counselling regarding victims' rights in a language they understand, translation and interpretation, and assistance returning to their country of origin (Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, n.d.a). The program was established in 2006 and is funded by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Slovenia. Since 2016, 63 victims of trafficking in human beings were included in the program (Tiegl, 2024).
2. The Celostna oskrba žrtev trgovine z ljudmi-varna namestitev (Comprehensive care for victims of trafficking in human beings–safe accommodation) program is implemented by Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi). The program aims to provide victims with safe accommodation and involves victim's cooperation with the police. Victims who participate in the program receive counselling and crucial assistance, including support for attending court hearings or medical examinations. In addition to practical help, they also benefit from essential financial aid provided on a weekly basis. The program also includes thorough training for professionals responsible for providing care. To offer even more flexibility, victims have the option to return to their countries of origin within the program's framework. The program was established in 2001 and is funded by the Ministry of the Interior of Republic of Slovenia. Since 2016, 20 victims of trafficking in human beings were included in the program (Tiegl, 2024).
3. In 2016, Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi, n.d.b) started with the project (Re)integracija žrtev trgovine z ljudmi ((Re)integration of victims of trafficking in human beings)

¹Programs are thoroughly explained in Ana Tiegl's diploma thesis (Tiegl, 2024). She conducted interviews with Slovenian NGOs that provide assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings.



intending to provide system solution for victims in the process of (re)integration. The program involves learning Slovenian, enrolling in educational systems, finding employment, and organizing free time through voluntary work and other activities, such as sports (Kovač, 2019). The individuals received psychosocial support, assistance in document organization, learning, job search, escorting to institutions, and inclusion in counselling activities (Kovač, 2019; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, n.d.a). The program is funded by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia (the Police) (Ministry of the Interior, n.d.). Since 2019, 30 victims of trafficking in human beings were included in the program (Tiegl, 2024).

4. The PATS project is dedicated to identifying, assisting, and protecting victims of trafficking in human beings and sexual violence within the asylum system. Implemented by the Ključ Society - Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi), the project involves providing asylum seekers with crucial information on trafficking in human beings, sexual violence, and gender-based violence, as well as supporting. As part of this initiative, staff members from the Ključ Society - Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi) visit asylum centres to educate individuals on recognizing and reporting trafficking in human beings, and where to seek help. Additionally, they ensure that asylum seekers have access to a range of support programs. Since 2016, 1,704 asylum seekers were offered help in the PATS program (Tiegl, 2024).
5. The project Podpora osebam v prostituciji (Support for people in prostitution) is implemented by Ključ Society - Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi). The support program is designed for individuals involved in prostitution, recognizing that they may also be victims of trafficking in human beings. The program aims to provide various forms of help and support, either in person (through meetings with professionals) or anonymously (via telephone, email, or social networks). Professionals in the project provide personalized care and guidance to individuals involved in prostitution. They work to raise awareness about improving overall health, including mental health, and empower individuals to take control of their lives. The program aims to enhance psychological well-being, build confidence, expand options, and offer support for a safe exit from prostitution, if the individual chooses to do so. The project is co-funded by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia (Tiegl, 2024).
6. The program Celostna oskrba MOL (Comprehensive care MOL) is funded by Municipality of Ljubljana (MOL). The program is similar to the program Celostna oskrba žrtev trgovine z ljudmi-varna namestitev (Comprehensive care for victims of trafficking in human beings-safe accommodation). Within MOL program, the Ključ Society - Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju



z ljudmi) offers five-day crisis accommodation to individuals who have not yet been identified by the police as victims of trafficking in human beings but who need a rescue from their current situation (Tiegl, 2024).

7. In the program Prava zveza (Right relationship) the Ključ Society - Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ - center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi) collaborates with several other organizations, including the Legebitra Association (Društvo Legebitra), the Young Dragons Public Institute (Javni zavod Mladi zmaji), the SOS Telephone Association for Women and Children - Victims of Violence (Društvo SOS telefon za ženske in otroke - žrtve nasilja), the Reclaim the Power Association (Združenje za moč), Association for nonviolent communication (Društvo za nenasilno komunikacijo, Social marketing Out of principle (Socialni marketing Iz principa), and Association DrogArt (Združenje DrogArt). The project's main goal is to provide mutual education, share relevant information, and offer support and help in challenging cases. It aims to empower young people to recognize different forms of violence, identify their own violent behaviour, and take appropriate action in cases of violence. The project has been established in 2015 (Tiegl, 2024).



5 Case studies

5.1 Case study 1: Police operation in a case of trafficking in human beings in Slovenia (from National Report for WP2 – Slovenia (Franež et al., 2024))

In a recent operation, the Ljubljana Police uncovered an extensive criminal organization involved in trafficking in human beings, exploitation through prostitution, illicit drug trafficking, and illegal border crossings. According to Stojan Belšak from the Criminal Police Department, the investigation began near the end of 2021 after reports from two trafficking victims and was coordinated by the Specialized State Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Slovenia. The organization, led by a 65-year-old man from Ljubljana, coerced victims into prostitution across various locations and collected a portion of their earnings. A Slovenian woman, one of his key aides, continued aiding the network even while serving a prison sentence. The operation revealed that nine suspects trafficked 43 victims from countries like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dominican Republic, and Slovenia. At the end of the investigation 6 individuals in Ljubljana were identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. The Police filed 17 charges for trafficking in human beings and 26 for exploitation-related offenses. Additionally, a suspect from Montenegro facilitated illegal crossings for 378 migrants en route to Western Europe with the help of taxi drivers and their associates, while Slovenian suspects managed logistics and payment channels, including Western Union and Revolut. The investigation also exposed connections to illicit drug trafficking using concealed surveillance measures. Two suspects, in collaboration with a 47-year-old from Ljubljana, engaged in illicit drug distribution, resulting in the seizure of cocaine (200 grams) and cannabis (2 kilograms). Police carried out 22 house searches among multiple locations in Ljubljana and Kranj, seizing illicit drugs, firearms, including a Scorpion automatic pistol, revolvers, and semi-automatic pistols, and approximately €30,000. To date, 27 individuals face 113 charges for 113 organized crime-related offenses, including trafficking in human beings, prostitution, smuggling of foreign nationals across borders, and illicit drug trafficking, with 12 suspects detained (eleven remained in custody and one under house arrest). The estimated illicit gains from these criminal activities amount to approximately €200,000 and financial investigations are still ongoing to track further illegal profits. The extensive investigation, concluding on the 5th of December 2023, was conducted in collaboration with other police directorates and the General Police Directorate of Slovenia with the aim to curb trafficking in human beings, illegal migration, and illicit drug trade, which have continued to affect Slovenia and its role in European transit networks (Delo, 2023; Policija, 2023b; RTV Slovenija, 2023).

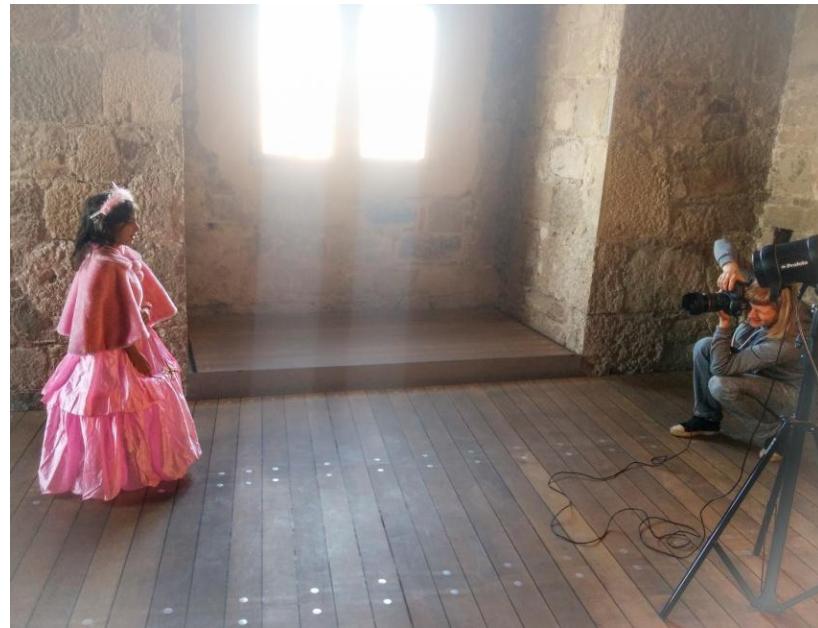


5.2 Case study 2: Forced marriages of children as a form of trafficking in human beings (from National Report for WP2 – Slovenia (Franež et al., 2024))

Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi) has drawn attention to the forced marriages of Roma children and young people with the traveling exhibition titled “My Dreams” which started in 2015.

The exhibition comprises seven portraits of children and youth, who are depicted in professions they dreamed of (e.g., a dancer, singer, basketball player, football player) but did not achieve because they could not choose their own future. Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi) wanted to raise awareness about the fact that Roma children are often discriminated against and have their rights violated. Forced marriages, sexual abuse, labour exploitation, slavery, forced begging, and the commitment of criminal acts are a fact in some of the Roma communities. While Roma boys are mostly exploited for labour, Roma girls are exploited for forced marriages. The offences are rarely prosecuted, and the perpetrators are convicted on even rarer occasions. The portraits were exhibited in multiple locations, such as Ljubljana, Maribor, Kranj, Kočevje, Novo mesto, Gotenica and Koper. In 2016, the exhibition was also displayed at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, in Ljubljana.

During the exhibition in Novo mesto there was a short conference, where Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi) presented findings of a study about forced Roma marriages in Slovenia. In these cases, a child is not officially married to an adult; however, they begin living together after the first sexual intercourse, which is considered sexual abuse in the majority of cases. The study reveals that in the context of forced marriages, Roma girls from Slovenia are sold abroad to countries such as Italy and Germany for prices ranging from €15,000 to €30,000. Additionally, Roma girls sold to Slovenia often come from Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, with a price ranging around €5,000. The findings reveal the humiliating position of girls in their so-called “husbands” homes, where they essentially become house servants to the entire family. They are punished for every mistake they make and are often unable to attend school. Many give birth very young, even as early as 11 years old, though most typically become mothers by the age of 15 (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b; M., Ž., in L., M., 2015; Pokrajinska in študijska knjižnica Murska Sobota, 2016; Stanovnik, 2015). Preventive campaigns, such as exhibition “My Dreams”, are crucial for raising public awareness that all children, including Roma children, have the same rights. Forced marriages of children are a crime, a form of trafficking in human beings and a serious violation of human rights, and not a part of Roma tradition and culture.



Photograph 1. A Roma girl is posing in front of the camera for the exhibition "My Dreams"
(photo: Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi)

5.3 Case study 3: Prostitution

5.3.1 Methods

The case analysis is based on a semi-structured interview conducted within the framework of the international Erasmus+ project Joint eStories: Journeys from Fear to Fair (JeS), implemented at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor. The interview with Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi) was conducted on 6th September 2025 via online platform Teams. The interview was audio-recorded and had a duration of one hour and ten minutes.

5.3.2 Golden questions of criminal investigation

1) WHAT happened?

A young Slovenian citizen was subjected to sexual exploitation over a period of several years. The victim initially entered prostitution voluntarily due to financial hardship; however, the perpetrator exploited her vulnerability and gradually forced her to a state of complete subordination. The victim was coerced into daily prostitution and subjected to violence, threats, and humiliation. She was kept under the perpetrator's constant surveillance, forced to use cocaine, socially isolated, and economically exploited. She



was required to hand over €400 per day to the perpetrator, who acted as her pimp, while charging clients between €30 and €100 per service.

The perpetrator and the victim repeatedly rented apartments in which the victim resided, while the perpetrator exercised daily control over her. When neighbours began to complain to landlords, they would vacate the apartment and relocate to a new one.

On one occasion, while the victim was with a client, two individuals acting on the perpetrator's instructions committed a robbery and stole from the client. The client reported the robbery to the police, who also made contact with the victim. Initially, the victim was too fearful to disclose the abuse; however, she soon realized that this represented her best opportunity to escape the situation. After the police informed her that both perpetrators of the robbery had been apprehended, she went to the police station, provided a full account of her experiences to a criminal investigator, and formally reported the abuse.

Subsequent investigations revealed that the perpetrator had used the victim's labour to repay his personal debts and had repeatedly forged her signature for various purposes. He signed documents in her name at a kindergarten, resulting in the victim paying monthly childcare fees for his children. Additionally, he purchased and sold mobile phones and vehicles in her name. Due to a large number of vehicles registered under her identity and the traffic offenses committed by their users, numerous fines were issued in her name, ultimately requiring the victim to seek legal assistance.

2) WHEN it happened?

The initial contacts between the victim and the perpetrator occurred around 2015, at a time when the victim was still in a relationship with the perpetrator's brother. Shortly after the victim ended this relationship and entered prostitution, she was assaulted by an unknown individual during a service at the hotel where she was working. When she subsequently encountered the perpetrator, he recognized her as his brother's former partner and offered her "protection" in the context of her work.

The exploitation then continued for approximately three years, until 2019. In that year, the criminal offense was formally reported to the authorities. Assistance to the victim and the course of the case extended over several years and included judicial proceedings. Separate legal proceedings are still ongoing in relation to the forgery of signatures and the debts accumulated by the perpetrator in the victim's name.

3) WHERE it happened?

In Ljubljana and its wider metropolitan area, the activities took place in multiple rented apartments, which the victim changed frequently. Sexual services were also occasionally provided in hotels. In the rented apartments, the perpetrator was continuously present, collected the money, and exercised control over the victim's activities.



4) HOW it happened?

The perpetrator identified and exploited the victim's vulnerability. He recognized that the victim was young, socially isolated, financially burdened, emotionally vulnerable, and lacking social support, and that she had experienced significant personal trauma (an abortion and the dissolution of a relationship). He appeared at a critical moment, following an episode of violence she experienced in the course of her work, and presented himself as a "protector." He portrayed himself as someone who cared for her and was concerned about her well-being, offering "assistance" with her work and finances. Initially, the victim intended to compensate him fairly for his help; over time, however, she began to believe that she was dependent on him and that he was supporting her.

The perpetrator systematically assumed control over all aspects of her work:

1. he took over her advertisements on online platforms;
2. he determined prices, working hours, and photographs, and prohibited her from increasing service fees;
3. he monitored client feedback and reprimanded her if any complaints were made;
4. he dictated her physical appearance (hairstyle, nails, clothing);
5. he imposed a system of daily financial quotas (€400 per day);
6. he monitored her work via an online "traffic light" activity indicator on the platform (red when she was with a client and unavailable, green when available); and
7. he frequently appeared at the locations where she worked, collected the money, issued threats, and administered punishments. During periods when the perpetrator was in pretrial detention, control over the victim was assumed by his father and friends.

The perpetrator also gradually induced cocaine addiction in the victim, initially promising that illicit drug use would facilitate her work and increase her energy. Over time, the victim used cocaine in order to work longer hours and to be physically capable of meeting the imposed daily financial quota. The perpetrator created both physical and psychological dependence, resulting in the victim becoming incapable of autonomous decision-making, severely exhausted, malnourished, and suffering damage to the nasal cartilage. The perpetrator threatened to disclose the victim's involvement in prostitution to her parents. He threatened her with physical violence and with attacks against her loved ones, including threats of acid assaults (the victim was aware that he had previously carried out such an attack). He convinced her that he had connections within the police, the courts, and the prosecution service, thereby instilling paranoia and fear of institutions and preventing her from seeking help from law enforcement. Her fear and distrust of the system were further reinforced by the fact that uniformed police officers frequently appeared as clients.

In addition to coercive prostitution, the perpetrator used the victim's identity for a range of criminal activities, including the purchase and resale of vehicles, forgery of signatures, resale of mobile phones, entering into contracts in her name, redirecting traffic violation



fines to her, and accumulating bills, debts, and other financial liabilities. These actions resulted in additional criminal proceedings and proceedings related to personal bankruptcy.

5) With WHAT it happened?

The acts were carried out through the use of violence, threats, and intimidation; through manipulation and abuse of trust; through the creation and exploitation of illicit drug dependence; through economic coercion; through the establishment of complete control over the victim; and through deception, isolation, document forgery, and the involvement of accomplices.

6) WHO was the perpetrator?

The perpetrator was the brother of the victim's former partner, an experienced manipulator and violent offender who was involved in other criminal activities and burdened by substantial debts. He frequently brought individuals to whom he owed money to the victim and compelled her to "work" with them until his debts were repaid. The perpetrator had a wife and children, who were unaware of the victim and of the nature of his activities. During the period of the victim's exploitation, the perpetrator was repeatedly detained in connection with other criminal offenses.

7) WHY it happened?

The primary motive of the perpetrator was financial gain, as the victim constituted a significant source of income and was used to repay his debts. He exploited her vulnerability and exercised complete control and power over her. The exploitation also served the financial interests of the perpetrator's family (in particular his father) and his associates.

8) With WHOM it happened?

The criminal offense was committed in co-perpetration, as the perpetrator's father and his friends were also involved. Indirect participation was further attributable to the victim's clients, purchasers of vehicles, users of mobile phones, and other individuals who were aware of the exploitation.

9) AGAINST WHOM it happened?

The offenses were committed against a young Slovenian citizen who was a minor at the time she initially entered prostitution and approximately 20 years old when she was admitted to a protection program. The victim was socially, economically, and emotionally vulnerable and had a history of traumatic experiences.



5.3.3 Process of accommodation and assistance to the victim

1) Initial contact with the police

The police encountered the victim in connection with a robbery reported by one of her clients. Initially, the victim did not dare to disclose any information and subsequently provided false statements out of fear. She was afraid of being judged or sanctioned for prostitution and illicit drug use, and, due to previous encounters with police officers as clients as well as the perpetrator's threats, she did not trust the police. The criminal investigator assigned to the case observed that the victim appeared extremely frightened and distrustful but chose not to pressure her into giving a statement.

2) Second visit to the police

After the victim learned that the perpetrators of the robbery had been identified and apprehended, she felt reassured and voluntarily returned to the police station. There, she met with a female criminal investigator who established a relationship of trust with her. The victim then disclosed her full account, accepted assistance and protection, and the police immediately contacted the NGO Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi).

3) Crisis accommodation – Karitas Slovenia

The victim was initially placed for a period of 30 days in a crisis accommodation facility operated by *Karitas Slovenia*. There, her physical stabilization and safety were ensured, and she was provided with food, shelter, and medical care. Detoxification and withdrawal from illicit drugs were arranged, and she received psychological support. Upon admission, the victim was severely malnourished (approximately 48 kg), had damage to the nasal cartilage as a result of illicit drug use, and exhibited severe psychological consequences of prolonged exploitation. She continued to express distrust toward institutions and experienced intense fear of retaliation by the perpetrator.

4) Safe accommodation and reintegration

The victim was subsequently admitted to a safe housing program run by Ključ Society – Centre for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (Društvo Ključ – center za boj proti trgovanju z ljudmi), where she remained for one year. The program provided a secure and confidential location, long-term psychosocial support, medical care, psychotherapy, and legal assistance—particularly in relation to offenses, debts, and forged signatures—as well as support for social reintegration. It also included structured preparation for testimony (including simulations, documentation of her life history, and psychological stabilization). During this period, the victim made significant progress: physically (gaining more than 20 kg), psychologically (establishing a sense of safety), socially (disclosing and explaining the events to her parents), and academically (enrolling in an educational program). At present, she is living a stable life, has a family, and is employed.



A documentary film addressing the case was produced in the Slovenian language:
<https://365.rtvslo.si/arhiv/dokumentarci-kulturno-umetniski/174868228>

5.3.4 Discussion with students

1. How was the criminal offense detected and identified?
2. Where information and evidence could have been gathered?
3. Which stereotypes are or could be associated with the analysed case?
4. Which organizations were involved in providing assistance to the victim, and what forms of support did these organizations offer?
5. Consider why the simulation of court proceedings prior to testimony is important for the victim. What impact does such preparation have on the victim and on her subsequent testimony?

5.3.5 Additional ideas for interactive student activities

1. Role-play exercises (pair work)

Students work in pairs and assume the following roles:

- a criminal investigator receiving a report, and the victim;
- a criminal investigator conducting an interview with the victim, and the victim;
- a criminal investigator interviewing the suspect, and the suspect;
- a criminal investigator interviewing the suspect's father, and the father;
- a criminal investigator interviewing the suspect's friend (who was an accomplice), and the friend (who was an accomplice).

2. Risk factor analysis

Students analyse and identify risk factors in the young woman's life that increased her vulnerability to becoming a victim of trafficking in human beings. They also reflect on additional risk factors and identify groups or individuals who are generally more vulnerable to trafficking.

3. Identification of indicators of trafficking in human beings

Students identify and discuss signs of exploitation. For each form of trafficking in human beings, they develop potential indicators that may assist in recognizing trafficking situations.

4. Investigation and evidence-gathering in trafficking in human beings cases

Students examine how investigations and evidence collection in trafficking in human beings cases are conducted, and which investigative measures are most commonly used (traditional investigative methods versus covert investigative measures).

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