

18 December 2021

International Migrants Day

# POLICY BRIEF

## TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: THE COMPLEX NEEDS OF FEMALE MIGRANT VICTIMS

The needs of migrant women victims of trafficking (VoT), which are by nature multilayered and complex, are often made more challenging by an array of factors. These include the women's immigration status, their cultural and linguistic specificities, the limits to their eligibility to state-funded services, a lack of support networks, racism and xenophobia by local officials they come in contact with, and the barriers to accessing integration services, as well as the former's lengthy and demanding procedures.

Assisting such victims in their efforts to integrate in their host countries undoubtedly requires a gender-specific approach and methodology, specialist knowledge about violence against women, as well as intersectional competence.

Health and psychological care, for example, are essential among the many aspects of assistance required to support migrant women VoT. This care can only be effective when it is culturally and linguistically appropriate and carried out in parallel with services focused on securing victims' economic, social and legal rights. It must also take into consideration the needs of victims who are mothers.

## FAILING THE VICTIMS: GAPS IN SERVICES

In 2021, the COALESCE partners conducted a study in six EU Member States: Mind the Gap was carried out in consultation with and from the perspectives of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The research demonstrates that serious gaps persist across three key areas of service provision and rehabilitation of female migrant VoT for sexual exploitation: the economic, the legal and the psycho-social. Among the gaps in these areas, the countries highlight a widespread failure to provide appropriate medical as well as psychological health services to the victims. The six countries that took part in the research also broadly reported that the gaps in services are underscored by a deep-seated reluctance by local authorities to identify victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation – and consequently, to refer them to the required assistance – to recognise victims' health needs as essential, and to allocate adequate funding to support service providers.

## SOLUTIONS THAT RESPOND TO VICTIMS' NEEDS

**ESTABLISH** early, centralised identification and referral mechanisms for migrant women victims of trafficking

**ENSURE** access to information on rights, entitlements, protections, services and opportunities for women victims of trafficking

**ENHANCE** access of female victims to women-specific healthcare (e.i. gynaecologically focused, taking into account Female Genital Mutilation and providing sex education)

**INVOLVE** healthcare workers in the identification process (create safe spaces and equip nurses with the knowledge and skills to identify and refer potential victims of trafficking)

**PROVIDE** access to affordable or subsidised childcare for women victims of trafficking and help facilitate their active participation in the job market and access to other social integration opportunities

**DEVELOP** long-term funding opportunities supporting social and linguistic integration for women victims of trafficking and integrate childcare into this model

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

*Trafficking in women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation is the most widely spread form of exploitation in Europe. (Europol, 2021)*

*Sex trafficking is a highly gendered crime with severe, long-term consequences and harms to the women. (European Commission, 2018)*

*Trafficking in women for sexual exploitation is not a priority in many EU Member States and many female victims remain unidentified. (European Commission, 2018)*

*Recognising the gender-specificity of the forms of trafficking in women and girls and its consequences, including harms suffered, the Committee acknowledges that trafficking and exploitation of prostitution in women and girls is unequivocally a phenomenon rooted in structural sex-based discrimination, constituting gender-based violence and often exacerbated in the contexts of displacement, [and] migration. (CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 38, 2020)*



COALESCE is a transnational project, involving six European countries: Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania. It aims to support the female migrant victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Europe through gender-specific psycho-social, legal and economic support and assistance, and to develop synergies in facilitating needs identification, assistance and support, and improve transnational cooperation among front line professionals.

Taking into consideration all available protection measures in the framework established by the Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU, Coalesce seeks to enhance best knowledge exchange on the integration of trafficked victims, among the partnership which brings together a diverse group of feminist organisations with particular expertise in supporting trafficked migrant women recovering from sexual violence and exploitation.



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# CYPRUS

## The Mind the Gap Report: COALESCE for supporting female third country national victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation

The lack of a solid and ongoing national integration plan in Cyprus has left female third country national (TCN) victims of trafficking in human beings (THB) for sexual exploitation struggling to find gainful employment, while also exposing them to much higher rates of homelessness and potential of exploitation.

The women in Cyprus targeted by COALESCE face multiple forms of discrimination, significantly fewer opportunities to integrate into their host societies, and a higher risk of experiencing violence. The national Mind the Gap report for Cyprus reveals that, in addition to issues stemming from their status as migrants, the women VoT face challenges that are gender-specific. These include: sexual violence, sexism and childcare responsibilities. At the same time, traditional gender roles and institutionalised gender stereotypes pose additional barriers to the integration of women victims of THB in Cyprus.

In examining these challenges, the report reveals that integration policies and measures in Cyprus do not meet the specific needs of female victims of THB for sexual exploitation. This is because most integration policies are gender neutral – failing to take into account the different experiences and needs of women and men – and therefore risk being gender blind. This can be partially attributed to the lack of involvement of migrant and refugee women in the formulation of integration policy which is weak and not effectively enforced.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Mainstreaming of gender equality across integration policies in order to ensure that migrant women and men are benefiting equally and that the protection and integration needs of women migrants are met with statutory funding**
- **Gender-specific support through specialised counselling centres, with sufficient long-term funding (personnel and material costs)**
- **Extension of shelters (including government-run shelter) for VoT with long-term funding for psycho-social, legal and integration support**
- **Extension and funding of nurseries that make childcare affordable**
- **Establishment of gender-specific interpretation and cultural mediation**
- **Funding and implementation of awareness-raising in Cypriot society to combat racism and sexism (through national campaigns and educational programmes)**
- **Funding and support for research looking at gender-segregated data on the integration of VoT, displaced migrants as well as on violence against refugee women**
- **Immediate lifting of the reservation on Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention.**
- **Implementation of recommendations made by the Ombudsman and other entities that monitor and evaluate anti-trafficking policies and efforts.**
- **Organising led by migrant women can contribute to social empowerment and a power shift that would allow women to advocate effectively for their rights.**



### CYPRUS PROJECT PARTNERS

**MEDITERRANEAN  
INSTITUTE OF GENDER  
STUDIES (MIGS)**

<https://medinstgenderstudies.org>

**CYPRUS REFUGEE COUNCIL**

<https://cyrefugeecouncil.org>

**CARITAS CYPRUS**

<https://caritascyprus.org>

### Access The Mind the Gap Cyprus Report and Full List of Recommendations

**ENGLISH:**  
<https://bit.ly/3FEWhQu>

**GREEK:**  
<https://bit.ly/3FEWqDw>



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