



Human Trafficking for The Purpose of Labour Exploitation

Guide for “first line” responders



Enhancing pRevention AnD multi-agenCy cooperAtion against labour TraffICKING



**Funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

Project number: 101101925

The images included are licensed from Shutterstock.com.

SUMMARY

This pocket-sized guide serves as a comprehensive overview for “first line” responders on addressing human trafficking for labour exploitation. It outlines the multifaceted nature of Trafficking in Human Beings (THB), emphasizing its violation of human dignity and fundamental rights such as equality, freedom, and the right to a safe working environment. The document defines THB (Section 1), its impact on fundamental rights, indicators for identifying both traffickers and victims (Section 2), and provides structured “key questions” to aid in the intervention process (Section 3). Special attention is given to the people fleeing from the war in Ukraine and their vulnerability to THB (Section 4).

THB is defined as an organized crime driven by profit, rooted in factors like poverty, inequality, and lack of employment opportunities. The impact of THB on fundamental rights is profound, with labour exploitation posing significant threats to human dignity, equality, and freedom. Victims often face abusive treatment, unsafe working conditions, and denial of lawful wages, which are violations explicitly prohibited by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Indicators are provided to help identify both traffickers and victims of labour exploitation. Indicators of traffickers include holding the victims’ documents or money, acting as their spokesperson or guide, and being familiar with their travel or work arrangements. Victims might show signs of physical abuse, poor hygiene, nervousness, and fear, among other indicators.

The document also includes “key questions” as part of a guiding process to approach potential victims of THB for labour exploitation. These questions cover employment contracts, employers, salary, job specifications, accommodation, ID/travel documents, debt, and safety concerns.

The guide concludes by suggesting that if there’s suspicion but lack of evidence of THB, contacting the Labour Inspectorate (or equivalent authorities) is advised. For any doubts, referring the case to competent authorities is recommended. Eradicating THB for labour exploitation requires a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach focusing on prevention, protection of victims, prosecution of traffickers, and partnerships among all relevant actors.

1. Introduction – Definition of THB

Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) is a multi-aspect phenomenon that disrespects human life in the pursuit of profit, a serious form of organised crime, having different root causes such as poverty, inequality, gender-based violence, absence of employment opportunities etc. The eradication of THB calls for a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive approach, from the protection of victims to the prosecution and conviction of traffickers.

The acts of “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation” consider as THB. Exploitation shall include, as a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs.¹

The crime of human trafficking consists of three core elements: **the act, the means, and the purpose**. Physical and sexual abuse, blackmail, emotional manipulation, and the removal of official documents are used by traffickers to control their victims.

Exploitation can occur in a victim’s home country, during migration, or in a foreign country.²

¹ Council of the European Union, European Parliament (2011, April 14). Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. European Sources Online. www.shorturl.at/z1b3e

² United Nations. Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.). The Crime. www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/crime.html

ACT	MEANS	PURPOSE
Recruitment Transportation Transfer Harboursing Receipt of persons	Threat or use of force other forms of coercion Abduction/Fraud/Deception/ Abuse of power Abuse of a position of vulnerability Giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person	Exploitation of the prostitution of others Sexual exploitation Forced labour or services Slavery/ Servitude Organ removal Other forms of exploitation

1.1. Impact of THB on fundamental rights

Labour exploitation significantly affects fundamental rights, posing a serious threat to the essential principles of human dignity, equality, and freedom.

Exploitative labour practices, abusive treatment, unsafe working conditions, denial of lawful wages or benefits, isolated – undocumented migrants, are some aspects of fundamental rights violation through labour exploitation.

THB, is a gross violation of fundamental rights and explicitly prohibited by the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2009)**.

1.2. Forced labour³

Forced labour, as set out in the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29),¹ refers to “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”

Based on report the “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery/Forced Labour and Forced Marriage” **created by “ILO, Walk Free and IOM”**:⁴



There are 27.6 million people in situations of forced labour on any given day. This absolute number translates to 3.5 people in forced labour for every thousand people in the world. Women and girls make up 11.8 million of the total in forced labour. More than 3.3 million of all those in forced labour are children.



Forced labour has grown in recent years.



No region of the world is spared from forced labour.



Most forced labour occurs in the private economy.

³ International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions: Specifically, the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105), and the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189), among others, set standards for the treatment of workers and the prevention of forced labour. normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C029

⁴ International Labour Organization (2022, September). Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage. www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-estimates-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage

Combatting labour exploitation requires a comprehensive approach involving legal protections, enforcement of labour standards and support for victims. The most common forms of trafficking in the EU is **sexual exploitation and labour exploitation**. Both forms of exploitation amount to an equal share of victims. Most **traffickers** in the EU are EU citizens and often of the same nationality as their victims. More than three quarters of perpetrators are men.⁵

The prevalence of labour exploitation is almost equal that of sexual exploitation. Meanwhile, exploitation by forced labour and services reached the highest prevalence in 2022, at 41.1%.⁶



⁵ European Commission (2024, April 23). Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings. home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings_en

⁶ Eurostat (2024, January 1). Trafficking in human beings statistics. [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Trafficking_in_human_beings_statistics#The_prevalence_of_labour_exploitation_is_almost_equal_that_of_sexual_exploitation](https://statistics-explained/index.php?title=Trafficking_in_human_beings_statistics#The_prevalence_of_labour_exploitation_is_almost_equal_that_of_sexual_exploitation)

2. Indicators

THB for labour exploitation is one of the most challenging aspects, because of differences in the interpretation and application of labour standards, due to lack/fear of the victims to address themselves to competent Law Enforcement Authorities (LEAs), and because eradicating THB for labour exploitation calls for coordinated reaction of all relevant actors, Civil Society – Trade Unions – State's Authorities.

To this end, **“indicator – based”** approach consider as the optimal way to deal with this heinous crime. **An indicator stands for a common sign that drives to a potential case of THB for labour exploitation.**

Victims are typically exploited as low-skilled, seasonal and cheap workers for transportation, construction, agriculture, forestry, food processing, factory assembly lines, hospitality, retail, carwashes, beauty and cleaning services, housekeeping and domestic assistance.⁷

The first subsection 2.1 deals with indicators for traffickers, the second subsection 2.2 with indicators for victims.



⁷ Europol (2021). European Union serious and organised crime threat assessment, A corrupting influence: the infiltration and undermining of Europe's economy and society by organised crime. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/socta2021_1.pdf

2.1. Indicators for traffickers, applicable in all aspects of Labour Exploitation

“**Indicator – based approach**” means that there is reasonable ground for further investigation. It’s crucial to understand that the presence of one or more of these indicators does not automatically confirm human trafficking. The following indicators may suggest that someone is involved in labor exploitation as a trafficker, and such cases should be referred to the appropriate “second-line” competent services responsible for investigating human trafficking.

✓ They are in the possession of the documents / money.

✓ They play a role of the -spokesman- or -guide.

✓ They have the knowledge of the whole details concerning the travel.

✓ They have the knowledge of the whole details concerning the working terms.

✓ When speaking, potential VOT seeks approval of the trafficker trying to get the eye contact.

✓ Are in the possession of the “employment contract”.

✓ They are in possession of payments documents (banks accounts, cards, transfer receipts, currency rates etc.).

✓ Someone who has contact details of employers.

Traffickers modus operandi on keeping victims under control.

Traffickers instrumentalize various methods to keep their victims under control. Physical violence (less nowadays) and psychological suppression (more) prevail in traffickers' modus operandi. Understanding this, is crucial for identifying and assisting victims, as well as for developing effective prevention. Below are some common actions traffickers use to maintain control over their victims, in the process of labour exploitation:



- ✓ False promises and financial control over the victim.
- ✓ Staying of victims in the same place of working.
- ✓ Providing to the victims accommodation with poor hygienic conditions, lacking of basic commodities.
- ✓ Isolation, victims are literally locked up or confined to certain spaces.
- ✓ Deprivation of ID documents.
- ✓ Physical abuse or harsh punishment.
- ✓ Debt Bondage.
- ✓ Monitoring of workers' movements or communications.
- ✓ Threats of legal action or deportation.

2.2. Indicators for victims, applicable in all aspects of Labour Exploitation.

2.2.1 Physical Appearance

- ✓ Poor hygiene condition indicates specific work.
- ✓ Person has visible signs of physical abuse (e.g. bruises, burns, scars).
- ✓ Person's clothes and behavior not fitting.
- ✓ Person shows signs of nervousness, anxiety and fear.
- ✓ Isolation, constantly under surveillance.
- ✓ Very bad working conditions.
- ✓ Under strong influence of substances.
- ✓ Under restriction of movement.
- ✓ Lack of safety equipment and work appropriate clothes and uniforms.

2.2.2. Travel document

- ✓ Person crossed the borders with false documents.
- ✓ He/ She is not in possession of his/her travel documents.
- ✓ He/ She is not in possession of his/her ID documents.
- ✓ Person's ticket was bought last minute.
- ✓ Person has numerous border crossings of border without reasonable explanation.
- ✓ Person presents documents too much damaged and worn-out considering their date of issue.

2.2.3. Behavior

- ✓ Difficulties in answering questions.
- ✓ Avoids eye contact.
- ✓ When he/ she is addressed directly, allows others to speak on his/her behalf.
- ✓ Reluctant to speak to the authorities.
- ✓ Being in a group of people, although staying – working all together, they seem not to know each other.
- ✓ Uncertainty about the place where he/ she is.
- ✓ Cannot give details about the type of work he/ she is performing.
- ✓ Debt bondage.
- ✓ Deception.
- ✓ Person is changing attitude during an interview.

2.2.4. Employment

- ✓ Limited or no knowledge about the employer.
- ✓ Cannot provide details regarding experience to the type of work that will be performed.
- ✓ Lack of knowledge about the money that he /she will earn.
- ✓ Deceived about the nature and location of the job.
- ✓ Excessive working hours/days.
- ✓ Deplorable living conditions.
- ✓ Workers live where they work.



2.2.5. Contract

- ✓ There is no employment contract.
- ✓ Employment contract is incomplete or written in a language not understandable or unclear.
- ✓ Deceived about salary/earnings.
- ✓ The terms of the contract are incoherent/vague.
- ✓ Contract does not afford social and/or medical protection.
- ✓ Withholding wages.
- ✓ Unpaid or withheld wages, including deductions for living expenses or debts.

3. Key Questions to Uncover and Clarify aspects of Labor Exploitation

“**Key-Questions**” is a guiding process to approach potential victims of THB for labour exploitation, in an indicator – based perspective, as far as there is reasonable ground, with due respect to fundamental rights, gender, age and cultural sensitivities, protection needs, vulnerabilities and relevant legislation.

The following categories of “Key-Questions” are just indicative and not exhaustive, with due respect to “**Victim Centered Approach**” principle.

3.1. “Key-Questions” *about Employment Contract*

- ✓ Do you have an employment contract?
- ✓ Where is your employment contract?
- ✓ What language is your employment contract written in?
- ✓ What are the terms of employment according to your contract?
- ✓ Are you aware of your labour rights?

3.2. “Key- Questions” *about Employers*

- ✓ Who is your employer?
- ✓ What are the contact details of your employer?
- ✓ What is the name of the company you are working for?
- ✓ How did the employer recruit you?

3.3. “Key- Questions” **about Salary**

- ✓ Is your salary defined in a written contract?
- ✓ What is your monthly salary?
- ✓ How is the salary be paid (cash or bank transfer)?
- ✓ Can you keep the full salary for yourself?
- ✓ Are costs related to lodging, food or transportation be deducted from your salary?

3.4. “Key- Questions” **about Job Specifications**

- ✓ What kind of work are you performing?
- ✓ How did you find this job?
- ✓ Who arranged the job (employment agency, friend, stranger)?
- ✓ Did you have any certificates proving your skills for the job?
When did you obtain these certificates?
- ✓ What is the location of your new workplace?
- ✓ What are the conditions of the job?
- ✓ How many hours per day and days per week are you working?

3.5. “Key- Questions” **about Accommodation**

- ✓ Can you choose your own accommodation?
- ✓ Where are you living?
- ✓ Will you have to share the accommodation with other employees?
- ✓ Do you know the conditions of the lodgings?
- ✓ Is your place of residence near your workplace?

3.6. “Key- Questions” *about ID/Travel documents*

- ✓ Where are your documents?
- ✓ Who is keeping your documents for you (if so)?
- ✓ Why is someone else in possession of your documents?
- ✓ Did you have your travel documents on you during the entire trip?
- ✓ How did you obtain your travel documents?
- ✓ Where was your passport/visa issued?
- ✓ Who booked and paid for your tickets?
- ✓ How much did your tickets cost?

3.7. “Key- Questions” *about Debt*

- ✓ Do you have any debts or have you incurred any debts to travel to this country?
- ✓ What is the amount of the debt you incurred?
- ✓ When do you have to pay back this debt?
- ✓ How will you pay back the debt?
- ✓ Is your family also responsible for the payment of your debt?
- ✓ Do you have to pay the return flight yourself if you decide to move back home?

3.8. “Key- Questions” *about Safety*

- ✓ Are you worried about anything?
- ✓ Do you fear for your safety or your family’s safety?
- ✓ Does your family know where you are?
- ✓ Do you have any means to contact your family or friends? (i.e. mobile phone, pre-paid card)

4. Risks of people, fleeing from war in Ukraine, becoming victims of THB

The ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine has drastically heightened vulnerabilities to THB, particularly among displaced individuals facing economic hardship, social isolation, and lack of access to essential services, making them prime targets for exploitation by traffickers who prey on desperation and instability. **The primary risks include:**

4.1. Risks of refugees from Ukraine to become victim of THB

4.1.1. High Vulnerability Groups:

- ✓ Women and children make up the majority of refugees, of those fleeing Ukraine.
- ✓ Particularly vulnerable groups include unaccompanied minors, stateless individuals and people with disabilities.

4.1.2. Exploitation Opportunities:

- ✓ Increased demand for cheap labour, sexual services, and other exploitative conditions.
- ✓ Traffickers exploit desperation with false promises of employment, housing, or assistance.

4.1.3. Online Recruitment:

- ✓ Use of social media, job portals, and encrypted messaging apps to lure victims under false pretenses.

4.1.4. Economic and Social Challenges:

- ✓ Displacement, loss of income, language barriers, and difficulties accessing legal employment create dependency and increase susceptibility.

4.2. Key Indicators related to people, fleeing from war in Ukraine, which entail possible cases of THB

The following are critical signs for first responders and stakeholders to identify potential trafficking cases:

4.2.1. Situational Indicators:

- ✓ Strangers offering unsolicited assistance, such as housing or jobs, often under suspiciously favourable conditions.
- ✓ Offers for jobs with unrealistic pay or vague terms.
- ✓ Persons suddenly disappearing from accommodation centers or assistance facilities.

4.2.2. Behavioural and Physical Indicators:

- ✓ Restricted movement or lack of access to personal documents like passports.
- ✓ Individuals showing signs of physical abuse, psychological manipulation, or stress.
- ✓ Evidence of forced labor or sexual exploitation.

4.2.3. Financial and Employment Indicators:

- ✓ Nonexistent or unfair contracts for employment.
- ✓ Denial of wages or improper working conditions that violate labor laws.

4.2.4. Child-Specific Indicators:

- ✓ Children separated from their guardians or accompanied by adults who cannot prove a legitimate relationship.
- ✓ Signs of neglect, malnourishment, or signs of being coerced into criminal activities like begging.

SUGGESTIONS:

- ✓ If you have any suspicion but lack evidence of THB, call for dedicated Antitrafficking Units and for Labour Inspectorate.
- ✓ If you have any doubt, refer the case to “second – line” competent authorities.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR REPORTING SUSPICIOUS SITUATIONS OF LABOUR EXPLOITATION AND SEEKING HELP:

I can reach my responsible clerk at:

My contact persons at the superordinate police department:

Responsible at the National Police Office:

My contact persons at the national or regional labour inspectorate:

Resident victim protection NGO for human trafficking:

Further contact points:

I can get more information at:

www.eradicating2project.eu/de/home-de/

www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/trafficking-in-human-beings

www.humantraffickinghotline.org/en/human-trafficking/labor-trafficking

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html

www.home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings_en

