



Overview of Trafficking in Human Beings Dynamics in Kosovo

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This thesis is conducted for a private institution focusing on Horizon Europe programs. The thesis aims to examine the dynamics of trafficking in human beings in Western Balkans, with an emphasis on Kosovo. The objective was to gain in-depth knowledge about the current state of human trafficking identification and create a factsheet for the client.

This thesis uses qualitative research methods to fulfil the objective. Methods used in this thesis were descriptive literature review, participant observation, and expert interviews. The material from participant observation was analysed using CoCo Cosmos, literature review through thematization, and interviews by content analysis.

Based on findings, Western Balkans is influenced by its geographical location, socio-economic conditions, and presence of organized crime. Most common exploitation forms are sexual exploitation, forced labour, exploitative begging, and child labour. Four factors causing challenges for combating human trafficking were identified: Mixed migration forms, lack of resources, cultural norms, and information sharing. One human trafficking victim profile and one trafficker profile was created based on results. Six categories of antitrafficking stakeholders consisting of 25 entities were identified. Further research using other data collection methods could provide additional information on the topic.

Keywords: Trafficking in human beings, Western Balkans, exploitation, organized crime

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1 Introduction

Trafficking in human beings is a grave violation of human rights and a complex global phenomenon that transcends borders, impacting both individuals and societies worldwide. Various estimates suggest that human trafficking constitutes a massive industry, generating annual profits ranging from US\$150 billion to US\$245 billion (Hope for Justice 2023; International Labour Office 2014). Typically associated with organized crime, human trafficking poses significant challenges for actors in the antitrafficking field, who frequently struggle to identify and safeguard trafficking victims (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2022). The figures are only estimations given the hidden nature of human trafficking, and it is likely that the actual numbers might even exceed the estimations (International Labour Office 2014; Al-Tammemi et al. 2023).

Reports conducted by Frontex reveal that the Western Balkans work as one of major gateways for human trafficking towards EU, expressing a comprehensive need to be taken into action within the region (Frontex 2023). The European Union (EU) is committed to combating human trafficking and protecting human rights through taking various initiatives aimed at addressing the issue. Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation and collaboration, the EU has engaged surrounding countries at its borders through joint efforts, such as EU funded programs, to combat trafficking in human beings.

Western Balkans including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, hold a significant position in combating human trafficking due to their geographic location and socio-economic dynamics. In this thesis, the country-specific setting is on Kosovo. However, as human trafficking is a complex phenomenon often including activity across borders, it is necessary to investigate the whole region.

The EU's involvement in addressing trafficking in human beings within the Western Balkans highlights a need for comprehensive understanding of key aspects shaping human trafficking situation in the region. This thesis seeks to investigate the dynamics of human trafficking within Western Balkans from EU perspective, excluding legal processes. By examining factors influencing the dynamics related to human trafficking and identifying entities for collaboration, the thesis aims to provide insights and supportive material for Horizon Europe projects related to human trafficking within the region.

In this thesis, ChatGPT has been used to edit the language of the text and make the text smoother.

1.1 Background

The client of the thesis is a private institution that focuses on project management as part of business, which funding comes to the Horizon Europe program. Horizon Europe program projects usually involve cooperation among different stakeholders across Europe, requiring knowledge about the local stakeholders within a specific geographic setting. The inclusion of local stakeholders and connections into projects is likely to have a positive impact on the outcomes of project proposals.

Incorporating local stakeholders into the projects aligns with both broader objectives of the European Union (EU) and Kosovo. Kosovo aspires EU-membership and is actively engaged in the EU's Western Balkans -Strategy, which emphasizes compliance with agreements progressing the integration process towards EU (European Commission 2018). Therefore, involving key national entities in the thesis can be viewed as mutually beneficial for all parties involved: the client, Kosovo, and the EU.

The thesis purpose is to provide supportive material in project preparations of trafficking in human beings for the client. The objective is to produce an informative factsheet that the client can utilize for various Horizon Europe project proposals involving elements of human trafficking, but it does not advocate for a specific project. The factsheet includes a summary of key factors in human trafficking within Kosovo, highlighting emerging trends, challenges, and local antitrafficking entities for collaboration.

1.2 Research setting, goals & exclusions

The authors visited Kosovo in the spring of 2023, engaging with public safety institutions and local antitrafficking entities for potential collaboration. The thesis combines on-site information collected through participant observation, a descriptive literature review, and an expert interview to elucidate cross-border human trafficking dynamics in Kosovo and various antitrafficking stakeholders within the region.

Two essential questions are presented in this chapter, which were based on requests by the client. Accessible online databases contain valuable information which are to be utilized to understand the key aspects of human trafficking within the region. It is necessary to search and identify information from online databases to achieve the targeted results. If certain key factors remain unknown, it is also valuable information. To achieve these goals, the thesis aims to answer the following question:

- 1) What are the key factors of trafficking in human beings within Kosovo?

During the visit in Kosovo, the authors had also the opportunity to visit various facilities, offices, and stakeholders. The possibility of future collaboration was often discussed. Many different

stakeholders and organizations had their own experiences and perspectives on issues related to trafficking in human beings. The authors of the thesis were collecting information through participant observing from local entities, such as opinions, suggestions, and experiences regarding human trafficking. It became evident that many local entities could contribute towards a common goal in identifying and preventing human trafficking, but that information could not always be shared or combined in the most effective way. For this reason, firsthand information and knowledge is utilized in the thesis. The idea is to map out stakeholders that could potentially benefit from and contribute to collaboration on this topic. This leads to the next question of the thesis:

- 2) Which stakeholders are potential partners for collaboration related to projects combating trafficking in human beings in Kosovo?

The topic of the thesis is multidisciplinary and touches not only potential victims of trafficking in human beings, but also many counter-trafficking actors in a central role, such as authorities, international organizations, and local organizations. Counter-trafficking activity is divided between multiple actors, but in terms of the scope of the thesis it is necessary to refrain from certain aspects.

For this reason, the research will highlight on the current situation of human trafficking in Kosovo. The perspective of this thesis is limited to focus on only the identification of trafficking in human beings. This thesis will not focus on the prevention of human trafficking itself, aftercare of the victims or criminal sanctions or prosecutions as it does not benefit the target group of the thesis. The geographic setting is limited to Western Balkans with an emphasis on Kosovo to include possible cross-border activity related to the phenomenon. In the context of this thesis the subject of trafficking in human beings has been divided roughly into three sections which are prevention, identification, and aftercare. Of these three sections this thesis will be only focusing on the identification of trafficking in human beings. To simplify this matter this thesis will not process anything that happens before or after the identification of trafficking in human beings and will only focus on what should be considered when trying to identify this crime itself. More specifically what comes to prevention this thesis will strive to identify the exposing factors and features but will not focus on the work of preventing them. When considering the aftercare and criminal sanctions, this thesis will only strive to create profiles of typical offender and victim. In this context, everything that happens after the identification of trafficking in human beings like for an example criminal charges, prosecution, and aftercare of the victims are excluded.

2 Trafficking in human beings

According to UNODC (no date) human trafficking consists of three components: acts, means, and purpose as presented in Figure 1. The acts form the initial phase of human trafficking process, and can be done through recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons. Usually, the victims are selected from rural areas with poor backgrounds (Demirovski & Berat 2019, 31). The second element of human trafficking is the “means”. It is used by the traffickers to exert control over their victims, and it can be done through threatening or using different forms of violence (Brunovskis & Surtees 2019, 79). The third element of human trafficking is the “purpose”. The purpose includes different types of exploitation forms, and its main objective is to create financial profit for the traffickers (Cockbain & Bowers 2019, 26). Understanding the elements of human trafficking is essential before elaborating the process in the fight against human trafficking.

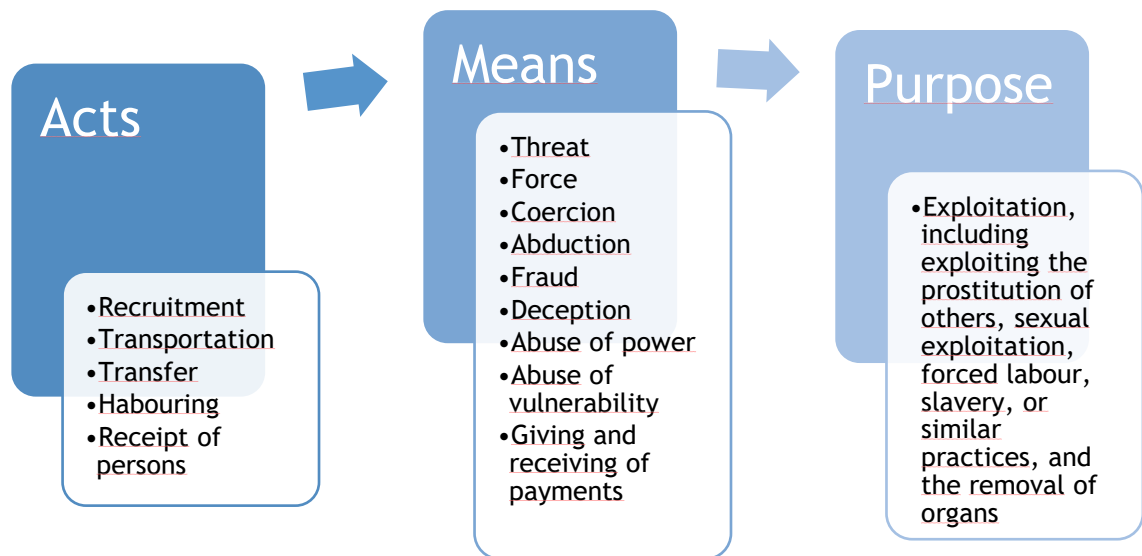


Figure 1: The three components of human trafficking. UNODC, no date.

2.1 Terminology

The terminology surrounding human trafficking varies globally, presenting challenges for this thesis as the use of multiple terms for the same concept may disrupt the flow of the text and lead to confusion. United States Department of State (2023, 39) presents that the terms “trafficking in persons” and “human trafficking” are umbrella terms, referring to their use in describing a wide range of exploitative practices. Through background research, it became apparent that human trafficking is described using various terms, such as trafficking in persons (UNODC 2004), trafficking in human beings (Directive 2011/36/EU), trafficking of human beings

(UNODC 2009a), and trafficking in humans (Newman and Cameron 2007, 1). Additionally, more specific terminology is employed to describe different aspects of the phenomenon, e.g. human exploitation, forced migration and exploitation, labour exploitation, debt bondage, and sexual exploitation. It is essential for the thesis to address the issue regarding the terminology to avoid inconsistencies. Klein and Wolin (no date, 2) states the European Union uses the same definition of human trafficking as the United Nations does. Therefore, the terms related to trafficking in human beings are predominantly adopted by the definition coming from the Directive 2011/36/EU and the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto -treaty. This covers the aforementioned key terms and more detailed terminology, unless otherwise specified.

The following terms are often used in the context of trafficking in human beings. The terms are listed and explained in detail. The use of these terms in this thesis aligns with these definitions.

Exploitation: In the context of trafficking in human beings, exploitation refers to person being used or exploited without person's consent or against their will. Usually, this exploitation aims to gain for an example financial, sexual, or other kind of benefit or profit. This kind of exploitation can take many different forms and usually happens through strong ties of power and coercion from which the victims may suffer severe physical, mental, and emotional damage. This term is often used when describing the definition of human trafficking. For an example the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000), use this term in following definition: "Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs".

Victim: In this context the word victim refers to a person who becomes the subject of human trafficking. This person can be a subject of different kind of exploitation and a victim can be a man, woman, or a child and can come from different kind of backgrounds. Most of the times the victim may lose the control of their own life and face different kind of physical, mental, and emotional abuse during and after becoming a victim of human trafficking. Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) defines the term "victim" as following: "Victim shall mean any natural person who is subject to trafficking in human beings as defined in this article.". In the article, the definition to trafficking in human beings is the same as in UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

Trafficker: In the context of trafficking in human beings, trafficker refers to a person or a group who engages in human trafficking. These people are responsible for recruiting, transporting, and exploiting the victims. Traffickers use many different methods to lure, recruit, or force people into human trafficking. Traffickers can work alone or as a part of organized crime network. Traffickers seeks to benefit from the victims and the motive can be profit, organised crime, or something else. The term “trafficker” can refer to any person who participates into human trafficking as defined in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000).

Smuggling: Smuggling refers to an illegal activity where something like a thing, or people are transported across the border illegally. In this context a smuggler can be a person or a group who engages in illegal activities to transport people across the border. Smuggler differs from a trafficker in the way that smugglers are usually not interested to exploit the people they are smuggling. Usually, smugglers only focus on the transporting people across the border in exchange of money. There can be many reasons to smuggle people and not all of them are connected to human trafficking. Some people can be paying themselves to get across the border, but some can also be victims of human trafficking. In this thesis, the term “smuggling” will be used in the context of smuggling of migrants. The United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air (2000) defines the term “smuggling of migrants” as following: “Smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”.

Modern slavery: Modern slavery is a term that is not yet defined by law. Although, it is widely used as an umbrella term to refer to situations where exploitation occurs. This kind of exploitation means a situation where a person cannot leave or refuse because of for an example violence, deception, abuse of power or other kind of threats (United States Department of State no date). Usually when the term modern slavery is used, it refers to different kind of forms of trafficking in human beings. This can include for an example forced labour, forced marriage or other slavery and slavery-like practices. All kind of trafficking in human beings can be included in modern slavery (Walk free no date).

2.2 Different forms of trafficking

Human trafficking is performed on a range of exploitative practices, each targeting vulnerable individuals for profit or other gains. Understanding the diverse forms of exploitation is essential for screening the situation in Kosovo. In the following subsections, seven forms of exploitation presented in the Figure 2, will be defined and briefly examined. These forms are restricted to the most prevalent exploitation types identified in the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in

Persons 2022. It should be noted that victims may also experience multiple types of exploitation simultaneously, such as forced labour and forced marriage (UNODC 2023, 23). Additional material is utilized to provide background information on the form of exploitation.



Figure 2: Different forms of trafficking

Trafficking for forced labour: Forced labour is a critical aspect of human trafficking, involving individuals working against their will. Currently, it is estimated that human trafficking for forced labour covers more than third of all exploitation forms (UNODC 2023, 23). International Labour Organization defines in the Forced Labour Convention no. 29 article 2 forced labour as “shall mean 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” (ILO 1930). Forced labour occurs especially in the private sector and is distributed varyingly between six service sectors: services excluding domestic work, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, domestic work, and mining and quarrying (UNODC 2023, 31).

Trafficking for sexual exploitation: Trafficking for sexual exploitation is another critical aspect of human trafficking, in which the victims are forced into prostitution, pornography, or other sexual services. Trafficking for sexual exploitation also covers more than a third of all exploitation forms (UNODC 2023, 23). The exploitation can take place in various places, visible and hidden. For instance, the exploitation may take place in the streets, clubs, bars, massage centres, hotels, or private apartments. It is important to note that trafficking for sexual exploitation affects especially women and underage girls. According to the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, more than two-thirds of trafficking for sexual exploitation victims are women, and more than a quarter are underage girls (UNODC 2023, 33).

Trafficking for forced criminal activity: Trafficking for forced criminal activity involves the coercion or manipulation of individuals into engaging in criminal behavior against their will. According to the Global Report on Trafficking on Human Beings 2022 (2023, 39) this form of trafficking often targets vulnerable individuals who may be subjected to threats, violence, or other forms of coercion to compel them to participate in illegal activities, such as shoplifting, pickpocketing, drug trafficking, fraud of different forms, and theft of different objects, such as cars and petrol. Majority of victims for forced criminal activity are males.

Trafficking for forced marriage: Trafficking for forced marriage is a less common and recognized phenomenon, which contains different sub-forms within itself. As per the United Nations definition, forced marriage entails that at least one party enters marriage without their consent or against their will. Forced marriage involving children constitutes a sub-form of this practice. Generally, any marriage involving individuals under 18 years of age is categorized as child marriage, as minors lack the capacity to provide full consent (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, no date). For example, instances have arisen in the European region where victims of human trafficking have been coerced into marrying individuals to facilitate the latter's acquisition of residency permits in the victim's home country. Such marriages are commonly referred to as sham marriages (UNODC 2023, 39). Additionally, another phenomenon involves the exploitation of young women as part of a trade exchange for marriage purposes.

Trafficking for exploitative begging: Trafficking for forced begging involves coercion or manipulation of individuals into engaging in exploitive begging against their will. According to the Global Report on Trafficking in Human Beings 2022, the victims forced into begging have different backgrounds: the majority are children with challenging backgrounds such as poverty, lack of parental care, or exploitation by their parents. Forced begging also concerns adults with physical disabilities (UNODC 2023, 39). According to the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage report, organized criminal activity is usually behind this type of exploitation of victims, and the profits are spent on the criminal enterprise's operations (ILO 2022, 90).

Trafficking for removal of organs: The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 defines "trafficking for removal of organs" as a form of exploitation where victims are trafficked specifically for the purpose of removing their organs. It is also a lesser-known form of exploitation (2023, 22). According to the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT 2021, 1-3) the harvested organs are typically sold illicitly on the black market to people seeking transplants. Trafficking for organ removal is recognized as one of the worst forms of exploitation, as it has a serious impact on victim's health. The victims are usually

tricked or forced into having organs removed under the pretence of medical treatment or other false promises. Detecting this type of exploitation is extremely challenging, as it usually carried out in a covert manner.

Trafficking for illegal adoption: The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 (2023, 22) indicates trafficking for illegal adoption as a lesser-known form of exploitation. The United Nations General Assembly (2016, 7-10) explain that illegal adoption includes illegal and unethical practices surrounding the adoption process, where children are sold for the purpose of adoption. The exploitation occurs through different acts, such as manipulation, deception, and bribe aimed at obtaining children from their biological parents. Usually, this form of exploitation is linked to larger criminal networks that exploit weak legal and child protection systems.

2.3 Combating trafficking in human beings

Combating trafficking in human beings refers to various antitrafficking activities aimed at tackling the phenomenon. The base foundation comes from the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, known as the Palermo protocol (UN 2000). The protocol has been signed by 182 parties around the world on this date (United Nations Treaty Collection 2024). The purpose of the protocol is to create antitrafficking laws in line with the protocol. Within the European Union the base comes from the Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. It follows the same footpath as the Palermo protocol in terms of definition, and it must be followed by all EU member states (Directive 2011/36/EU). The directive is also known as the EU Anti-trafficking directive (European Commission, no date). The law is carried out further with the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025. The strategy focuses on combating the modern state of human trafficking, but also promoting international cooperation (European Commission 2021). In Kosovo, the major method for combating human trafficking comes from the Law on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims of trafficking (Kosovo 2013).

The law outlines responsibilities of local authorities to combat human trafficking and protect victims in various ways, in line with international standards (Kosovo 2013). The law is carried out further by the National Strategy Against Trafficking in Human Beings in Kosovo 2022-2026. The strategy addresses Kosovo's commitment to combat human trafficking, emphasizing international cooperation in aspirations for European Union integration (Republic of Kosovo 2022). Together, the protocols, laws, and strategies form the basis of combating trafficking in human beings within the region.

2.4 Antitrafficking stakeholders

It is necessary to separate a stakeholder involved in antitrafficking activities from a general stakeholder to avoid misunderstandings. Antitrafficking stakeholder is widely used term for describing stakeholders involved in combating against human trafficking (UNODC 2009b, 45; UNODC 2023, 71; Kelmendi 2015, 33).

Combating human trafficking requires multidisciplinary approach and involves stakeholders from different fields of expertise (Global Protection Cluster 2020, 6). The variety of expertise is essential for effective and functional execution of antitrafficking activities. The importance of cooperation is emphasized in several sources, such as in the Palermo agreement, and the UNODC International Framework for Action to Implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. For instance, the Palermo agreement defines the basis for a multidisciplinary approach by committing state members to it (United Nations 2000). UNODC (2009b, 45) elaborates that antitrafficking activities require coordination among “governmental institutions, judicial authorities, labour inspectors, NGOs and other elements of civil society, private sectors, workers’ and employers’ organization, child and youth care providers, asylum authorities, all other relevant stakeholders”.

The Kosovo National Strategy Against Trafficking in Human Beings 2022-2026 is the guiding basis for the activities of antitrafficking stakeholders in Kosovo. The strategy outlines Kosovo’s antitrafficking policies, and how they should be improved. It also includes the basis of framework for antitrafficking stakeholders. In Kosovo, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is the key player, directing antitrafficking activities through various mechanisms. However, the strategy does not elaborate on these mechanisms, instead focusing on listing different antitrafficking stakeholders within the country (Republic of Kosovo 2022, 29-30). It also mentions that the stakeholders participate in national and international projects but does not detail their cooperation patterns (Republic of Kosovo 2022, 30). Filling the information gaps by mapping the current network of antitrafficking stakeholders is crucial to identify relevant antitrafficking stakeholders in Kosovo.

3 Methodology

The thesis was carried out using qualitative research methods through descriptive literature review, participant observation, and expert interview. Qualitative research endeavours to comprehensively understand the quality, characteristics, and meaning of a phenomenon under investigation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). This approach was selected to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional overview of human trafficking in Kosovo, aligning with the aim of the

thesis. By adopting this methodological approach, potential limitations from unresearched nature of the phenomenon or language barriers were mitigated, ensuring more in-depth analysis within Kosovo.

The purpose of utilizing the following three research methods is to address the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings as comprehensive as possible. The descriptive literature review was chosen as a method since it enables a comprehensive overview of trafficking in human beings in Kosovo and Western Balkans. Going through the already published documents and material available, creates a solid baseline when building a picture of the dynamics of trafficking in human beings in the region. To support and to compare information gained from the literature review, participant observation was chosen as a second method for the thesis. While literature review offers documented information about the phenomenon, participant observation yields firsthand insights from local entities. As the authors of this thesis, who had been on the scene in Kosovo, it was a clear that this kind of firsthand information should be utilized. After combining information from two diverse sources and environments, expert interviews were conducted as a third method for the thesis. Purpose of the expert interviews was to use the already gained material and contacts to form overall picture of the phenomenon. The results from the expert interviews were used to provide additional value to the thesis by validating existing information. It also gave the possibility to ask the right questions and fill the existing information caps. All the three methods had their own purpose in constructing a comprehensive understanding of the human trafficking situation in Kosovo, recognizing that the phenomenon under study pertains to a foreign cultural context.

3.1 Descriptive literature review

Literature reviews are often divided into three basic types. Most used one is the descriptive literature review, which is also utilized in this thesis. Other basic types include systematic literature reviews and meta-analysis, both qualitative and quantitative. A descriptive literature review is a so-called overview, where the materials are extensive and not restricted by methodological rules in their selection. This enables the comprehensive depiction of the subject of the study (Salminen 2011, 6-7). The purpose of a descriptive literature review is to structure existing knowledge, seek answers to questions, and outline the key concepts of the phenomenon as well as their interrelationships. Additionally, through a descriptive literature review, it is possible to explore the ongoing discourse surrounding the phenomenon and identify potential discrepancies or gaps in knowledge (Kangasniemi et al. 2013). A descriptive literature review was chosen as a method for this thesis because the recognition of human trafficking, especially in the Balkan region, is still relatively unfamiliar in Finland. Therefore, it is critical to strive towards creating a comprehensive overview of the current situation.

Furthermore, a descriptive literature review can be divided into two slightly different orientations: narrative and integrative reviews. In addition to this, the implementation methods of a literature review can be categorized into three different options which are editorial, commentary, and overview. For this thesis, a narrative overview was chosen as the implementation method. The narrative form of a literature review provides an opportunity to create a broad overview of the topic and to describe the development and history of the subject in more detail. The purpose of a narrative overview is often to examine and summarize existing research on the topic under study (Salminen 2011, 6-7).

3.1.1 Data collection

The data collection process began by identifying the key concepts relevant to the two essential questions of the thesis. This served as the starting point for sourcing the primary texts. In this data collecting process, also synonyms of the search terms as well as their longer or shorter forms were considered. Special consideration was given to the criteria of reliability, currency, and relevance of the materials. A test round was conducted and based on that preliminary search, the most effective and essential search terms were selected for the official search.

Selected databases for the thesis were EBSCOHost, ProQuest Central, Google Scholar and Finna. These databases were selected based on preliminary test rounds and were found to contain best and most useful material for the thesis. Different kind of limitations were used when searching from all databases, these includes for an example limitation in dates, languages, subjects, and sorting. Search terms used were the same in all databases, but limitations used might differ from each other based on what kind of limitation options were available in each database. When searching material from Google Scholar, search results with used search terms were 10 900. Most of these results were not relevant for this thesis but options to narrow the search were limited. Because of this, the search was limited to the first 10 pages of results, sorted by the most relevant at the top. Search terms and limitations used in the search are presented in their entirety in Table 1.

Database	Search terms	Limitations
EBSCOhost	("trafficking in human beings" OR "trafficking in persons" OR "human trafficking") (balkan OR kosovo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full text • Publication date 2015-2024 • In English • Search terms in abstract
ProQuest Central	("trafficking in human beings" OR "trafficking in persons" OR "human trafficking") (balkan OR kosovo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full text • Publication date 2015-2024 • In English • Subject: Human trafficking
Google Scholar	("trafficking in human beings" OR "trafficking in persons" OR "human trafficking") (balkan OR kosovo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full text • Publication date 2015-2024 • Sorted by relevance • First 10 pages of search results
Finna	("trafficking in human beings" OR "trafficking in persons" OR "human trafficking") (balkan OR kosovo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full text • Publication date 2015-2024 • Language: English or Finnish • Subject: Human trafficking

Table 1: Search terms and limitations used in the database search

The material selected for analysis was refined using the inclusion and exclusion criteria presented in Table 2. To ensure the reliability of the data, it was crucial that the publications were either scientific publications or produced by a well-known organization. In material selection attention was also paid in relevance of the data and the date limitations were made to be 10 years for the data to be as useful and relevant as possible for today. Material also had to be accessible for free so all material available for fee was excluded. Language requirements were either English or Finnish but based on test search conducted there were no material to be found in Finnish. This was anticipated given that the topic is not so well-known in Finland. Because of that, languages other than English were included in the exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication date 2015-2024	Publication date before 2015
Content of material is relevant after 2015	Content of material is not relevant after 2015
Language English or Finnish	Other languages
Material available for free	Material available for a fee
Material answers the first question	Material doesn't answer the first question
Scientific studies and articles, public administration publications	Other publications

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

All the search results were first reviewed based on the title. Despite the use of specific search terms, criteria, and limitations, majority of results were excluded based solely on their titles since they did not contribute to the topic of this thesis. Material with titles that met the criteria were compiled into a separate list, which shows results found from each of the databases. Some of the materials appeared in more than one of those databases, and this was considered when reviewing the materials. After this, these selected materials were examined more closely. Review was made for each material's introduction or abstract to achieve more comprehensive understanding of its content. Based on this review, materials that could best relate to the topic and could contribute to the thesis were identified. The relevance of the content for the thesis questions was the primary factor in the selection process. Materials that passed the abstract review were then read in their entirety, which led to the final selection of materials to be used in the descriptive literature review. After final review, twelve articles were chosen to be used in the final literature review. The process of material selection and the outcomes are presented in Table 3.

Database	Search results	Accepted based on title	Accepted based on the summary	Finally accepted
EBSCOhost	24	10	2	0
ProQuest Central	217	62	7	3
Google Scholar	10 900	55	19	7
Finna	127	51	5	2

Table 3: Selection of material for the literature review

3.1.2 Data analysis

When analysing the material for the literature review, theming was chosen as the method for analysis. The purpose of theming is to identify reoccurring topics from the materials that are relevant to the first question. Themes are formed by identifying consistencies or differences that frequently emerge in the data. The focus is not on the frequency of any specific theme within the data, but rather in the possibility for grouping of qualitative data into specific subject areas. This kind of grouping makes it possible to compare and to better understand the relationships between the themes. Theming can also be created with theory orientation; in which case the theming is guided by a specific theory or framework that forms the guidelines of the theming (Juhila 2021).

In this thesis, theming was conducted by material-oriented approach. Although the content, perspectives, and approaches of the selected articles varied significantly, many of the themes still appeared in several articles. The analysis began by identifying recurring subject areas, consistencies, and differences from the data. These themes were sorted and combined using different colour codes for each theme. The use of colour codes and the physical separation of topics from each other helped to create a clearer overall picture by visualizing the theming.

3.2 Participant observation

Participant observation was chosen as the method for addressing the second question in the thesis, aiming to leverage the authors' presence in Kosovo to gather qualitative insights from local entities. Interviews were deemed unsuitable due to the spontaneous and extensive nature of the observation, which often occurred opportunistically based on the availability of suitable organizations. Additionally, some observed subjects cited organizational constraints and bureaucratic hurdles, making it impractical to obtain interview permits within the limited

timeframe. For instance, rather than directly asking an employee about their willingness to engage in human trafficking projects during an interview, the researcher can immerse themselves in meetings or other gatherings and observe participants' attitudes toward international multidisciplinary initiatives focusing on antitrafficking efforts. Moreover, observation enables a longitudinal examination of the phenomenon as ongoing processes, as noted by Paalumäki & Vähämäki (2020). They highlight observation's advantage of comprehensive insight, as the obtained information is intricately linked to its contextual setting. This facilitates a clearer connection between individual terms and concepts within the cultural framework under examination. For instance, while employees across different departments may express the importance of collaboration in antitrafficking activities, observation reveals different variations in how cooperation is perceived and understood by individuals.

DeWalt & Dewalt (2010, 21-22) highlight the importance of distinguishing participant observation from both pure observation and pure participation, despite some overlap between the two approaches. Pure observation entails the researcher maintaining a detached stance from the observed actions and behaviours to avoid influencing them, whereas pure participation involves the researcher fully immersing themselves in the observed culture, engaging with all aspects of it. According to Puusa, Juuti and Aaltio (2020) the researcher's role is to observe, and the different levels of participation can be defined based on the researcher's relationship with the phenomenon being studied. Participant observation can serve as both the primary method and a supportive tool for other data collection methods. The levels of participation can be put into three categories: active participation, passive participation, and nonparticipation, with each level presenting the distinct benefits and requisites for the research setting. Moreover, the researcher's participation level may evolve throughout the research process between the three levels. For instance, active participation occurs when the researcher is actively involved in the phenomenon being studied, often within an organization they hold a position or are engaged in activities unrelated to the study. Within the context of passive participation, the researcher has the role of an outsider from the organization, with their presence and actions influencing the observed dynamics. Conversely, nonparticipation entails the researcher maintaining complete detached, refraining from influencing the course of events while observing the phenomenon.

In this study, the two authors undertook all three roles, depending on the environment, atmosphere, and amount of people present in the situation. For instance, seminars, while not directly related to the thesis topic, served as crucial networking opportunities often involving multiple stakeholders. In such events the role of the authors was only to observe with nonparticipation, to avoid influencing or taking a stance on the discussions. Conversely, during instances where personal connections facilitated networking and observation, the authors' involvement ranged from active to passive participation. This approach proved effective when

one researched assumed a more active role while the other adopted a more passive, allowing for diverse perspectives and comprehensive data collection. Moreover, this approach helped navigate cultural nuances, such as gender dynamics. It seemed in several situations' individuals preferred interacting with representatives of the same sex, irrespective of their underlying motivations.

3.2.1 Observation

Jorgensen (1989, 12) Defines participant observation as a qualitative research method where researchers immerse themselves in the environment, and actively participate in the activities of individuals or groups being observed. This method allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena, acquiring comprehensive data that may not be accessible through other research methods. Through participant observation, particular emphasis is placed on both the "explicit" and "tacit" dimensions inherent in the target culture and daily routines. Explicit culture refers to readily identifiable knowledge that individuals can easily articulate, while tacit culture encompasses knowledge that is not consciously recognized or attended to. According to Dewalt & Dewalt (2010, 1-2) it essentially constitutes hidden insights that can be discerned indirectly.

Field notes were created and maintained throughout the study to aid the authors in navigating in the foreign operating environment, and to ensure that no observations were accidentally overlooked. In addition, information can become distorted over time, affecting the reliability of the information. While it would have been beneficial to support the field notes in other ways, such as taking recordings, this was not feasible. Over the course of the study, the authors noticed that data collection became repetitive due to the reoccurrence of similar themes and concepts, leading to a decline in engagement infrequently.

3.2.2 Field notes

Writing observations into field notes is a large and important part of research work. Ten (2004, 118) presents three categories defined by Lofland & Lofland (1995) for field notes. *Mental notes* are made when it is inappropriate or impractical to write down observations. For example, during a coffee break people may find it inappropriate that work is done during their free time, or during activities like walking writing observations simultaneously can be challenging. *Jotted notes* or brief notes work as a purpose for describing specific aspects of conversations or events. These are usually keywords, short sentences, or mind maps, aiding the researcher in recalling key points and critical observations. *Full notes* are rich and informative notes, such as reports or logs, and are recommended to be written as soon as possible after the observation.

In terms of the second question, the primary focus was on identifying antitrafficking stakeholders interested in cooperation. As a result, the authors ended up limiting most of the field notes to jotted notes to facilitate subsequent analysis. This approach aligned with O'reilly (2011, 102) statement that the purpose of field notes is to write down all the information that the researcher finds essential for the research. There was no need for large and long reports, so the notes mainly consisted of mental and jotted notes. Mental notes were transcribed into jotted notes whenever feasible, typically immediately after the observations, such as at the end of meetings or on the same day as the observation had taken place. Majority of the observations were written directly as jotted notes. The authors noticed that writing down keywords and individual concepts during conversations in office settings demonstrated active engagement with the speaker enhancing the discussions, whereas in more casual environments like coffee shops or restaurants, individuals occasionally were suspicious. As a result, the researchers decided to use mental notes in casual environments.

3.2.3 Informal interview

Participant observation is often complemented by other data collection methods, such as different interview techniques. Among these, informal interviews stand out in the literature as a particularly valuable method for enhancing participant observation. An informal interview resembles a casual conversation between friends, aiming to establish a relaxed and natural rapport with participants while observing the unfolding events in the situation (DeWalt et al. 2010, 137). DeWalt (2010) cites Bernand's (2006) observation that the primary objective of this approach is to minimize interference and allow participants and challengers to freely express themselves.

During this study, informal interviews were conducted throughout the study. Specific people were selected to provide more information about different organizations, missions, and persons. These individuals were chosen because of their personalities, behaviour, and attitudes. The qualities of such people were seen as a benefitting factor in the research process. All the informal interviews were conducted in English, in many different places across Kosovo.

3.2.4 Gatekeepers & key informants

O'reilly (2011, 114) and Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault (2016, 44-45) explain the process of gaining access to different settings and organizations where the research is being conducted. These people are called gatekeepers or key informants, which hold a crucial role in the research process. Taylor et al. (2016, 65) describes that key informant is like a researcher's best friend. It is essential for the researcher to develop relationships with everyone involved in the research, although trust and rapport develop slowly. In some cases, rapport is never formed with certain individuals. According to Fine's (1980) observations cited by Taylor et al. (2016),

key informants serve as crucial entry points for accessing desired locations and serve as primary sources of information. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that key informants should not be relied on too much, as it can influence the development of the research and distort the findings with their own views and opinions.

The authors had a total of three gatekeepers. These were from different organizations, both local people and foreigners in high positions with lots of power and large networks. The gatekeepers did not act as a source of information for the authors, but instead helped to identify which organizations and people would be potential collaboration partners for the client. The gatekeepers facilitated the meetings with the organizations, informing the participants of the author's presence and mission. The key informants were the people accepting the authors' visit within the organizations, ultimately aiding in investigating if there were possibilities for cooperation or not with them.

Another way for conducting field research is through covert approach, where the people are not aware of the researcher in their midst (Taylor et al. 2016, 52). The pro to this method is its' preservation of naturalness of the setting, but as a downside it raises serious ethical considerations. Taylor et al. (2016) points out that there have been numerous studies conducted via covert approach, and even goes as far as saying it can be ethically justified and necessary if certain criteria are met (Festinger, Riecken, & Schacter 1956, Humphreys 1975, Rollins 1985, Rosenhan 1973, Roy 1952). Alternatively, an overt approach for field research allows the researcher to ensure work ethics and be transparent about the research. The authors utilized an overt approach, confirming from the key informants directly on top of the gatekeeper's facilitating. In some cases, some individuals did not give their consent to the research, as they worked in high governmental positions with access to extremely confidential information. These individuals' participation is therefore excluded from the study.

3.2.5 Data sampling & analysis

When sampling the possible organizations for the participant observation, snowball sampling was chosen as the most effective method for the thesis. Ruane (2016, 227) defines snowball sampling as a sampling technique that is particularly suited for qualitative research where understanding and insight into the participant's experiences is more important than statistical representativeness. Snowball sampling is often used in research when the participants are hard to locate or reach. The use of snowball sampling technique creates a possibility to uncover insights and perspectives that might not emerge from the use of other traditional sampling methods. As the authors were in a foreign operating environment looking for any kind of leads to antitrafficking stakeholders, snowball sampling turned out invaluable. On top of this, it seemed that without personal recommendations it was impossible to gain access to organizations, regardless of attempts. The authors tried contacting organizations through

emails, phone calls, and visiting on the spot without success. The sampling group had a requirement for specific professional expertise, with in this case was any kind of experience related to different aspects of human trafficking. With the aid of gatekeepers and key informants, the authors managed to access total of 16 different organizations. The authors did not keep track of how many people were in contact with, as some interactions could last a couple of sentences only.

The authors used CoCo Tool Kit for analysing the observation data. CoCo Tool Kit is an innovative co-creation toolkit developed at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The tool is designed to assist various stakeholders such as businesses, organizations, and the public sector. It is designed to help with communications and collaboratively shaping service environments to better meet user needs (Keränen, Dusch & Ojasalo 2013, 21). The data analysis is done through using the CoCo cosmos tool, which is part of the CoCo Tool Kit. CoCo Cosmos is a co-creation tool and design game that won the main prize in the Capacity Building category at a European innovation and innovator competition. It is a visually strong tool that helps various stakeholders communicate and conceptualize the environment, dimensions, challenges, and opportunities of the service under development. The physical game allows the concrete marking and visualization of ideas and plans (Keränen et al. 2013, 56). CoCo Cosmos was chosen to facilitate data analysis, as the authors were struggling to transform the field notes into a bigger, simple picture. The purpose of the tool is to create a situational view of various antitrafficking actors around the phenomenon. The tool helps to form a clear, user-friendly overall picture of the collected information, which can be utilized further by the client. The results of the game are presented in the findings section, but some content will be made anonymous in the public version of the thesis.

The authors tested the tool in the fall of 2023 to see how it suits the clients' needs. The testing consisted of a three-hour long workshop, where the authors familiarized themselves with the tool and its functions. The testing process had three different stages. In the first stage, the authors collected all their data and familiarized themselves with the game and its functions. This way it was easier to understand what type of information would be required to use the tool. The objective of the second phase was to play the game and see how it functions in practice with the collected data. The second phase consisted of a three-hour long workshop, which included the two authors, and their thesis supervisor acting as a host. During the game, the players drew various antitrafficking stakeholders and contact persons on the map, adding elements of existing cooperation and information channelling lines between the stakeholders, funding- and power relations, and sub-phenomena that affect the dynamics of human trafficking, such as corruption and organized crime. Once the map was ready, the players explained the content and recorded the explanations. The third and final stage included reviewing the recording and littering the content. Through littering it became evident that some exclusions should be made regarding the content. The stakeholders, contacts, and their

relationships were clear and easy to understand, but connecting with the sub-phenomena it became blurred. For this reason, it was decided that CoCo Cosmos would not be used to illustrate the dynamics of human trafficking, but only the antitrafficking stakeholders related to it. The game was replayed, but this time only with the information related to the antitrafficking stakeholders. It consisted of three stages again: the planning phase which meant recollection of data related to the stakeholders, execution phase which included playing the actual game, visualizing, and recording the explanations for the content. The final phase included littering the content of the videos into raw text to create simple and logical text version of the content of the game. The results of the game are presented in the finding section, but all content will be made anonymous in the public version of the thesis.

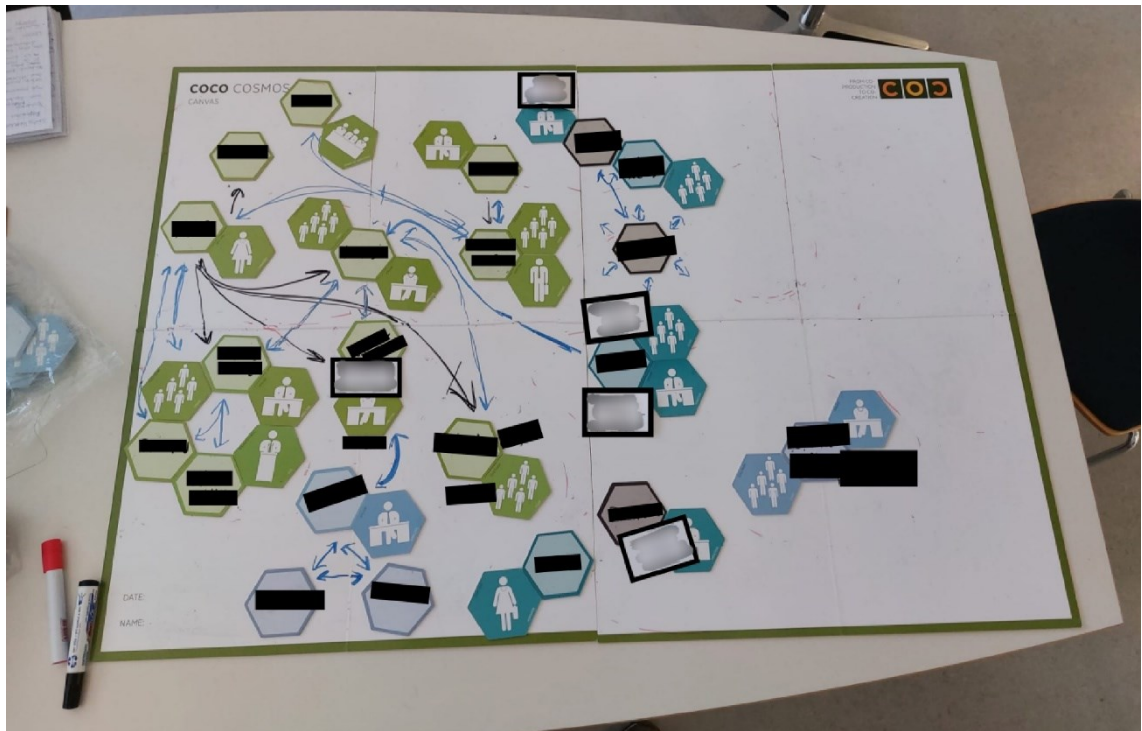
3.2.6 CoCo Cosmos

CoCo Cosmos includes one game board, different coloured board markers, cleaning cloth, and four sets of cards: stakeholders, actions, locations, and entities. The game's results give the participants a comprehensive understanding of their service setting. The picture it generates enables a better understanding of a company and its stakeholders' position and capabilities, identifying potential barriers and drivers for a more effective process. Additionally, it gives a deeper understanding of the concept of co-creation in general for a company and stakeholders. With all the data it facilitates, it assists in identifying areas for development within the company and its stakeholder network (Keränen et al. 2013, 53). Facilitator job list includes three main points: 1) introducing the objective of the CoCo Cosmos, 2) introducing the cards and how to use them, giving examples, and 3) explain and monitor that players follow the basic rules. The basic rules include that facilitators must not touch the cards once they are laid on the game board and must answer questions related to the cards and how to use them. Lastly, the cards should not be placed on top of each other (Keränen et al. 2013, 56). The steps for using the CoCo Cosmos are presented in Table 4. While the game is designed for company-customer activities in service business, Keränen et al. (2013, 53) expresses it can be used in different settings as well. For this reason, a unique setting was created for the game to answer the second question.

USER GUIDE FOR COCO COSMOS
1. Specify the value proposition by using the entity cards
2. Choose actors, both service provider & customer
3. Personalize the actors by writing in blank ink
4. Choose the locations of the service setting
5. Choose action cards
6. Demonstrate the interactions among the actors using the black ink
7. Demonstrate enablers using the green ink
8. Demonstrate the barriers using the red ink
9. Finalize the picture and tell the story: if needed, add more cards, check the clarity, sign the picture with the date, name, and players. Lastly, take photos of the picture.

Table 4: User guide: steps to build the CoCo Cosmos scene. Keränen et al. (2013, 56).

The authors reformed the steps and created a setting for identified antitrafficking stakeholders in Kosovo. The workshop took place in April 2024 in Laurea University of Applied Sciences Leppävaara campus, and included two people in total, the authors. The user guide recommends naming a facilitator for the game, however, as the authors were already familiar with the games' functionality, there was no need. The workshop lasted for two hours in total, and the players followed the step-by-step instructions presented in Table 4. The canvas was filled once, with all details. It contained confidential information that could not be publicly disclosed, hence the blurring of the text in the canvas.



Picture 1: Results of CoCo Cosmos. Picture by Oskar Leskinen (2024).

During the game, the authors came up with three types of stakeholders in the setting of Kosovo. The stakeholder categories were defined by their colour and an empty icon presented in Picture 1. A total of 21 entities were placed on the board via empty cards. Some cards included sub-entities within itself. Empty cards were titled with the names of the stakeholders. Cards presenting individual person indicates a person of significance, whereas group of people indicate a team or unit related to the context. After the stakeholder cards were placed on the board, blank ink was used to illustrate the hierarchy of the stakeholders. Some stakeholders were guiding or managing others. In the seventh step of the game, players were instructed to use green ink to mark enablers, but this step was unnecessary. Based on the field notes, players eliminated stakeholders that were not engaged in combating human trafficking or focused on aspects other than identification within human trafficking, such as aftercare. After the hierarchy flows were visualized on the map, blue ink was used to illustrate the flow of information between the stakeholders in terms of cooperation. Some stakeholders were known for their critical role in the antitrafficking network, but their information flow remained unknown. As the game was played based only on the field notes collected through participant observation, no excess flows were put on the canvas. The eighth step of the game seemed problematic, as it involved demonstration of barriers using the red ink. From the field notes, the players had come across multiple challenges between stakeholders, concerning especially the local entities.

To keep the canvas clear and simple, the players decided to not visualize challenges between the stakeholders, but instead explain that certain challenges concern within the whole region, affecting all stakeholders. Lastly, the players explained the content and recorded the explanations, followed by a review and a manual littering process.

3.3 Expert interview

Kallinen & Kinnunen (2021) defines expert interview as a qualitative research method in which researchers engage with individuals who have specialized knowledge, expertise, or experience relevant to the topic. Expert interviews focus on gathering insights and information from individuals who are considered authorities or specialists in their field. An open interview based on a topic guide was chosen for the expert interviews. According to Bogner, Littig & Menz (2009, 30) open interviews provide experts with more room to share their valuable experiences, opinions, and up-to-date information. Structured interviews with closed questions should be avoided for this reason. The topics for the interview are to be prepared with care and should be based on the expert's knowledge field.

Expert knowledge is based on four unique elements. Firstly, to understand the explored phenomena requires adoption of a process-oriented analytical approach to expert knowledge in modern society that is affected by socio-cultural settings. Secondly, expert knowledge is influenced by how insider groups and networks communicate, negotiate opinions, and decide who to include or exclude from their discussions. Thirdly, another aspect is how expertise is influenced by their personal experience across various aspects of life, including both private and public aspects. Lastly, as expert knowledge can be complicated and uncertain, an expert's habits, their understanding of uncertainties, and how they reassure themselves become an important part their knowledge (Bogner at al 2009, 31).

The expert interview for the thesis was conducted by a selected antitrafficking expert who holds a significant position within Kosovo's governmental network. The background or specific tasks of the individual are not further elaborated to protect their privacy and position. Efforts were made to interview multiple individuals for the thesis, but most people declined due to the sensitive nature of information and bureaucratic barriers. The selection of individuals was based on their background, as they have worked around the phenomenon. One contributing factor to the limited number of interviews was also the lack of interpretation services.

3.3.1 Conducting expert interviews

The formulation of the interview questions and themes was based on collected information through participant observation and literature review which were considered as crucial for achieving the objectives of the thesis. The interview questions and themes are presented in Appendix 1. The interviewee was informed about the purpose of the thesis, voluntary nature

of their participation, and how the collected information would be stored, used, and processed. The confidentiality and anonymity of the interview data was strongly emphasized by the researchers. The Interview were conducted through Microsoft Teams, as the interviewee were in Kosovo. With the consent approved of the participant, the session was recorded. The collected data, including the recordings, were handled with strict confidentiality by the researchers. Access to the recordings and data was restricted only to the researchers and will be destroyed once the thesis is finalized. The consent was originally planned to be obtained through Laurea Sign Service, but due to technical difficulties the researchers had to use written consent form. It seems that with certain foreign mobile operators, the strong SMS authentication does not work. The consent form was signed by the interviewee and scanned into electrical form and sent to the researchers through email. Due to the limitations of online interviewing, body language was not taken into consideration. The restricted camera angle did not allow for detailed observation of non-verbal communication performance. The interview was conducted in English and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The planned method for managing the interviews ensured that the information was both relevant and handled in accordance with the ethical research standards.

ChatGPT4.0 was used to modify the interview transcript to make it clearer and more concise. The raw interview transcript consisted of 22 pages of raw text, filled with unnecessary information like filler words, timestamps, and misheard words, which often occur in automated translations. Before using AI to clean the text, it was necessary to go through the text manually. During this process, all unnecessary terms were removed, and any personal information was also removed to ensure the privacy of the interviewee. After the cleaning, the next task was to reorganize the remaining words into full sentences. After the text was cleaned and anonymized, ChatGPT4.0 was used to further modify the text. This included restructuring and improving grammar to make the text easier to read and understand. As a result, from 22 pages the text was summarized into one full page of text. The processed text was manually proofread to ensure that no information was excluded or changed during the process.

3.3.2 Interview analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the interview data. Neuendorf (2017, 21) references Krippendorff (2013, 24) stating “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid references from texts to the contexts of their use”. According to Neuendorf (2017, 26), qualitative analysis can provide the researcher with highly detailed source of information. The structure of the interview was already categorized in different themes based on the literature review and participant observation, and the results matched with the themes as well. There were no significant overlaps between the themes. This allows a direct comparison

between the literature findings and interview insights. After the analysis, certain themes emerged from the analysis: exploitation, socio-economic factors, lack of resources, and information sharing.

The interview results were imbalanced, some themes and questions having more information than others. During the interview, the atmosphere was relaxed and there were no awkward pauses during the session. The first theme, trafficking in human beings as a phenomenon in Kosovo received most attention. The expert had lots of on-site information about Kosovo-specific features for human trafficking and combating it. The expert was able to provide valuable information regarding current forms of exploitation within the country, and how the law enforcement and social authorities work on tackling the issue. The expert also pointed out critical issues in combating human trafficking. Regarding the second theme, identification of human trafficking, the expert provided valuable information about the socio-economic dynamics affecting human trafficking in Kosovo but did not say much about the primary challenges in detecting human trafficking. The results coming from experiences and comments are limited. The third theme, cross-border cooperation & performance received also little attention during the interview. The expert did not go into details regarding the theme but made a general statement of its importance. However, the expert did point out critical factors regarding the theme, interlinking the cooperation against other forms of crime through various mechanisms, providing additional insight into information sharing. Lastly, the fourth theme information sharing received a lot of attention from the expert and was mentioned multiple times throughout the interview. The expert elaborated on training programs for the law enforcement on specific topics related to counter trafficking, on both national and international level. Challenges in information sharing were opened from the law enforcement perspective.

4 Results

After the three research methods were conducted, various important results were identified and combined. The methods were meant to support and complete each other and enabled systematic collection, review, and comparison of information. All results were collected by initially conducting a comprehensive literature review on the phenomenon. This allowed the examination of all existing information and helped create a solid foundation for the thesis. The information gathered from the literature review was effectively combined and compared with the data collected through the participant observation. This comparison of data collected with the two methods provided a comprehensive view of the consistency of theoretical knowledge and practically gathered data. The information was later utilized in the expert interviews. The purpose of the interview was to fill identified gaps in knowledge and to obtain more detailed

information and insights on various topics. Each of the three methods played important role in forming a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans.

After analysing all the material, several themes and topics strongly surfaced and were repeated across various materials. In this process, ChatGPT 4.0 was used as a tool to analyse, combine, and categorize the results. In the research of trafficking in human beings as a phenomenon, the background factors such as socio-economic factors, gender-specific nature of trafficking crimes, and the illegal migration that is connected to human trafficking were prominently highlighted. The data also extensively discussed border management and its impacts on human trafficking, the effectiveness of current laws and regulations in the fight against trafficking in human beings, and the requirement to improve international cooperation and development of preventative measures. From the collected data, it was also possible to identify specific features and challenges in human trafficking that are particularly connected to the Western Balkans.

4.1 Trafficking in human beings within the Western Balkans

Trafficking in human beings as a phenomenon is always complex and multidimensional. It includes many different forms of exploitation and can appear in various ways. The forms and features of human trafficking can also vary geographically by region. For example, in some areas human trafficking mostly appears in a form of forced labour, whereas in other countries the most common form is sex trafficking. Also, some regions may primarily be source countries for victims while others serve only as transit countries before reaching the final destination country. Demirovski & Berat (2019, 32-33) outlines that human trafficking in the Western Balkan region also holds specific characteristics that are typical in this area. Understanding these specific features in Western Balkan and in Kosovo is particularly important to properly target antitrafficking efforts (Brunovskis & Surtees 2019, 83-84).

Especially the location of the Western Balkans plays significant role in the trafficking in human beings in the area. Its unique position serves as a tactical transit route from the Middle East to Europe. Due to this geographic location, it is also a popular route for trafficking in human beings. Brunovskis & Surtees (2019, 79-81) states that although Western Balkans serves as a destination area for many victims, particularly those coming from the Middle East and North Africa, it still mainly acts as a transit area for human trafficking. The long borders with Western Balkans and non-EU countries are difficult to monitor, which enables exploitation of border controls and the transportation of the victims through the Western Balkans and towards Europe. According to Abdylil (2017, 28-29) traffickers exploit vulnerabilities such as deficient border control and the tactical use of less monitored routes, creating opportunities for the illegal transport of people. Migration flows are also exploited for illegal transport of people.

Trafficking victims can be integrated into larger migrant flows, making it difficult to identify these victims (Brunovskis & Surtees 2019, 80-82). The typically chaotic nature of large migration movements creates an environment in which it is difficult for authorities to identify and assist those who has become the victims of human trafficking. The geopolitical tensions and varying levels of cooperation between Western Balkan countries also affects the fight against trafficking in human beings (Kelmendi 2015b 70).

Kelmendi (2015b, 61) declares trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans is mostly managed by organized criminal networks. The criminal networks exploit the strategic location of Western Balkans as a route to the EU countries. These networks are usually highly sophisticated and well-connected to other forms of organized crime, including drug trafficking networks, arms smuggling, and money laundering (Demirovski & Berat 2019, 32). The extent and connections of these networks significantly complicate law enforcement efforts. Kelmendi (2015b, 21-22) states that the effectiveness of the fight against trafficking in human beings is also directly linked to the political stability and the effectiveness of legal frameworks. Antitrafficking efforts require comprehensive strategy that not only include law enforcement and legal measures, but also political commitment and international cooperation. These efforts can be undermined by unstable political situation and corruption in the region which can create possibilities for human trafficking (Maloku & Maloku 2020, 33).

According to Abdylil (2017, 21-23) other specific features related to human trafficking in the Western Balkans are the cultural and social challenges within the region. The stigma and prejudice against victims of human trafficking are undoubtedly factors that need to be understood better concerning the phenomenon in Western Balkans. Individuals who have become victims of human trafficking often face social stigma and shame after returning to their communities. The label of being a victim and the ensuing stigma can be significant barriers to seeking help, such as accessing healthcare, legal aid, or psychological support. Fear of rejection by the community may also prevent victims from coming forward and participating legal action against their exploiters. Additionally, there are other prejudices and stereotypes associated with human trafficking. For instance, gender differences and the prejudices associated with them must be acknowledged. Cultural norms and gender stereotypes significantly influence how trafficking victims are perceived and treated. For an example, women and girls are often automatically seen as victims of sex trafficking. This can easily lead to the neglect of other forms of trafficking and exploitation, such as forced labour. Conversely, trafficking involving boys and men is usually in the form of forced labour, which is not so well recognized, making intervention particularly challenging. This may be partly due to social norms that do not as easily view boys and men as likely victims of trafficking, leading to inadequate support services for these individuals (Cockbain & Bowers 2019, 1).

4.2 Factors influencing trafficking in human beings dynamics

According to Brunovski & Surtees (2017, 16-1717) the most common forms of human trafficking in the Western Balkans are sex trafficking and forced labour. Particularly prevalent is sex trafficking, which primarily targets girls and women. These groups are often seen as more vulnerable, due to factors such as the division of gender roles and the perceived value of women in the sex trade. The prevalence of this form of trafficking is directly linked to the high global demand for sexual services. According to Gomes & Sani (2023, 626-627) victims of sex trafficking are often lured with offers of legitimate employment or through relationships, and later forced into sex work. Control over victims is typically maintained through methods such as violence, psychological manipulation, and debt bondage. Victims' identification documents are often confiscated to prevent their escape. Another typical form of human trafficking in the region is forced labour. While this form of trafficking can affect any gender, it predominantly targets boys and men (Cockbain & Bovers 2019, 12-13). These victims are less frequently recognized, partly due to the prevailing notion that men and boys cannot be victims of human trafficking. It is commonly thought that men should be able to defend themselves against such exploitation, and therefore these situations attract less attention. This mindset and the lack of recognition of male victims contribute to the continuation and facilitation of forced labour. This also reflects in how the rights of male victims are less likely to be addressed in antitrafficking efforts (Cockbain & Bovers 2019, 24-27). Two other forms of exploitation, exploitative begging and child labour, occurred during the expert interview. The exploitative begging concerns children and women. Typically, the begging happens in crowded areas. The exploited victims are managed by a trafficker, who decides the hotspot for begging and drops the victims at the area. At the end of the day, the trafficker collects the earnings from the victims. The child labour is set in place in intersections by the traffic lights, and the children are used to wash windshields of cars against a fee (E1).

“The main issue in Kosovo currently is child begging in the streets, child labour, and activities by the traffic lights where children are used to wash windshields of cars.. [...] the widespread phenomenon of human trafficking through child and women begging, with beggars often managed by a person who positions them in crowded areas and collects their earnings at day’s end. It’s become a routine” (E1).

When conducting the research for the thesis there was many factors identified which can make individual more vulnerable for becoming a victim of human trafficking. A major factor influencing human trafficking is the economic and social conditions which is also affected by the post-conflict state that can be seen in Western Balkans. High unemployment rates and economic inequality can push people into situations where they seek solutions by any means necessary (Latifi 2022, 3-4). Traffickers take advantage of this opportunity by promising false

job opportunities or better living conditions abroad. Financial distress can make people vulnerable to desperate solutions, which can expose them to exploitation. Especially young people and those living in smaller communities are prime targets for traffickers. The limited access of education, economic opportunities, and young age can make a person vulnerable to the opportunities offered by traffickers for work and a better life. According to Maluku & Maluku (2020, 41-42) another significant factor is the lack of necessary awareness itself regarding trafficking in human beings, its indicative factors, and the risks associated with migration under uncertain circumstances or illegally. This limited awareness and understanding of these issues increase the risk of becoming a victim of trafficking in human beings. The current level of education and information contribution regarding these matters is not sufficient for people to recognize signs of potential human trafficking and to avoid situations and decisions that could expose them to such risks (Abdyli 2017, 29-31).

Based on the literature review, a profile of a typical victim of trafficking in human beings and typical trafficker were conducted. While the traits are not absolute and may not appear in every case of human trafficking, they are common factors among majority of the victims and traffickers. The purpose is to highlight most common factors which are presented in the Figure 3. When examining victims of trafficking in human beings turns out the victims can come from different backgrounds, genders, and ages, but the following are typically prevalent factors that predispose individuals to trafficking in human beings.

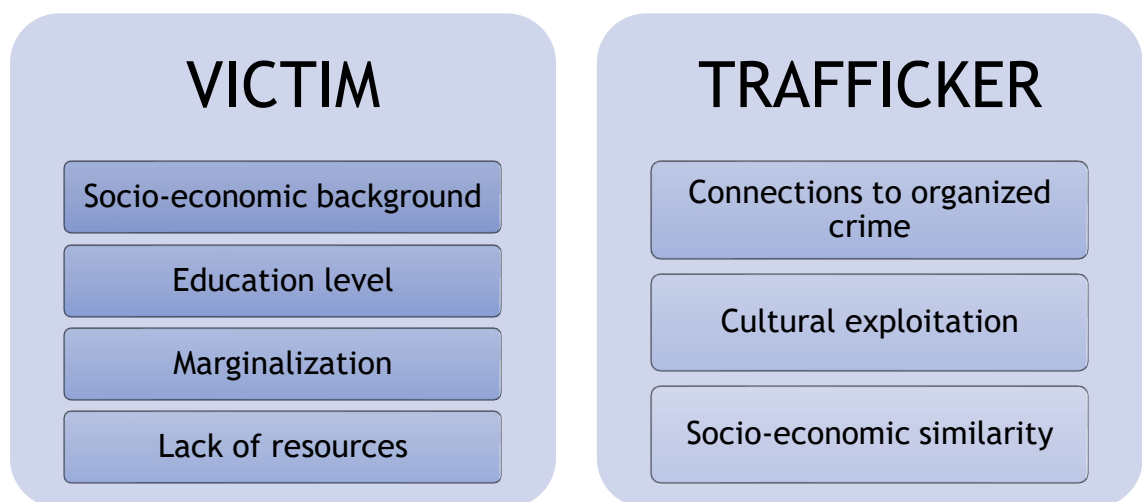


Figure 3: Typical victim and trafficker profiles

Socio-economic background: Victims typically come from economically difficult backgrounds, including poverty and limited employment opportunities. People living in these situations can be vulnerable and even desperate in their efforts to achieve a better quality of living. These aspirations make them susceptible to false employment opportunities and a better life offered by the traffickers (Cockbain & Bovers 2019, 26; Abdyli 2017, 21-22).

Education level: Many victims of trafficking in human beings have a low level of education. This lack of education can lead to limited employment opportunities and a lack of understanding of their own rights. Additionally, limited knowledge about the risks associated with migration and shady job offers makes them more vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking (Gomes & Sani 2023, 626-627).

Marginalization: Victims often belong to minority communities, which could include ethnic minorities or groups residing in foreign areas. Such individuals often experience discrimination and social exclusion, which can limit their access to resources. Due to mistrust or increased fear of discrimination, these individuals are also less likely to seek help from authorities or support services (Brunovskis & Surtees 2017, 26).

Lack of resources: A common factor among victims is their limited or non-existent resources. According to Brunovskis & Surtees (2017, 8) individuals in such situations are vulnerable to exploitation and have less possibilities to seek help or escape from the traffickers.

Based on the literature review, a profile was also created for a typical trafficker or person involved in trafficking in human beings as presented in Figure 3. There are many kinds of people involved in trafficking and they play various roles in this crime. However, the following are typical traits and characteristics that are usually connected to traffickers.

Connections to organized crime: Traffickers usually have strong connections to various networks of organized crime, which provide resources and logistics. Due to the involvement of many people and different components in these crimes, these networks are difficult to apprehend or dismantle entirely (Kelmendi 2015a, 33).

Cultural exploitation: Traffickers are familiar with the victim's culture and social customs and exploit these to manipulate their victims. They may use blackmail or coercion to force victims to act in desired ways, utilizing gender expectations or social stigma, for example (Latifi 2022, 16).

Socio-economic similarity: Traffickers often come from similar socio-economic backgrounds as their victims, which allows them to understand the situations these victims face in their life. This insight gives traffickers the ability to identify and exploit potential distress in their victims when planning ways to lure them. Traffickers might, for instance, pose as benefactors or employers to assist individuals in difficult economic situations (Brunovskis & Surtees 2017, 26-27).

These profiles reflect the cultural, socio-economic characteristics, and backgrounds that can be observed as unifying factors within these two groups.

4.3 Challenges in combatting trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings is a vast and complex equation, meaning that implementing countermeasures are also challenging. There are various factors that complicate antitrafficking efforts. The factors must be identified to be able to target the countermeasures effectively and efficiently. Factors such as politics and legal framework, corruption, lack of support services, cultural and social elements, border control, international cooperation, and challenges in victim identification are all challenges in the fight against this phenomenon (Maloku & Maloku 2022, 41-42; Latifi 2022, 15-17).). Identifying human trafficking and its victims plays a critical role in this fight. By identifying and understanding these challenges, it becomes possible to develop them, aiming for more effective measures to prevent trafficking (Demirovski & Berat 2019, 36). The biggest challenges related to identifying human trafficking in the Western Balkans presented in Figure 4 are defined in the following section.

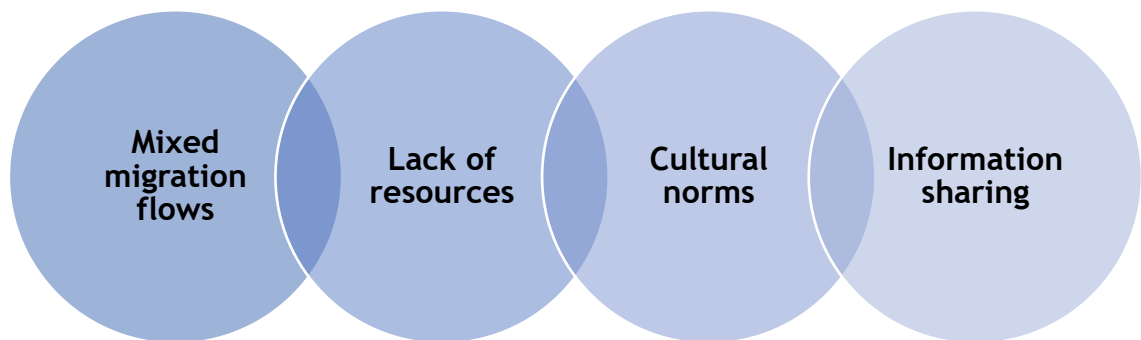


Figure 4: Key challenges in combatting trafficking in human beings

Mixed migration flows: Migrants are a significant challenge for the identification of human trafficking. The strategic location of the Western Balkans as a transit route also enables trafficking in human beings. Traffickers follow the movements of migrants and exploit this to hide their victims among them. It is extremely difficult for authorities to identify trafficking between voluntarily migrating individuals and victims of trafficking in human beings (Podvorica 2015. 218-219). During the expert view, the summer season was highlighted as a seasonal peak point related to human trafficking (E1).

“During the summer, it (human trafficking) becomes a profitable business for criminal groups because of the influx of people from Western Europe who are generous with their money”. (E1).

Lack of resources: The lack of resources resulting in lack of training, knowledge, and understanding of trafficking in human beings among authorities, such as police and border officers, is a major challenge that complicates the identification of trafficking victims according to Kelmendi (2015a, 32-3333). Human trafficking typically involves crossing multiple borders, and tracking it requires strong cooperation, consistency, and clarity in practices between authorities. A general lack of awareness among the public (E1) also contributes to the failure to recognize and report trafficking. During the interview, lack of resources affecting antitrafficking activities was also brought up. The lack of resources has a significant effect on identifying human trafficking, but also in combating it.

“The police are trying to do their job to remove these (child beggars) people from the street, but they can't hold them for more than six hours. Social Welfare Departments in Kosovo lack the capacity and budget to offer more substantial help. They don't have adequate places to house these individuals, which makes it a national issue that should be addressed at a central level. Kosovo need shelters to process and prevent them from returning to the streets.” (E1).

Cultural norms: Cultural norms also play a significant role in the identification of trafficking in human beings. In the Western Balkans, cultural and social prejudices and the stigma associated with the phenomenon often lead to a failure to recognize victims of trafficking, particularly boys and men who are seen less likely victims of trafficking. This often results in unreported cases of trafficking and unidentified victims (Cockbain & Bowers 2019, 1-3).

Information sharing: Information sharing is conducted by antitrafficking stakeholders in cooperating against trafficking in human beings and other forms of crime. It also affects awareness and educational purposes for people interacting with the victims. In certain areas, such as within the law enforcement, lack of information sharing affects the identification of human trafficking victims and combating other forms of crime (E1).

“Yes, information sharing is crucial across all stakeholders because awareness about human trafficking should be integrated into the training for officers [...] The Kosovo Police have a liaison office connected to other international organizations, which helps in information sharing. However, being part of Interpol would simplify and enhance these processes significantly” (E1).

All these factors should be considered when creating antitrafficking efforts targeting the Western Balkans. Since the region acts as a transit area for trafficking, it is crucial to identify these victims before they leave the area and reach their final destinations (Kelmendi 2015a, 38-39).

4.4 Stakeholders in combating trafficking in human beings

After the authors had recorded the game of CoCo Cosmos and written the storyline process, the next step became a lot easier through the canvas presented in Picture 1. The authors created six different categories that all the relevant stakeholders could be put into: governmental agencies, international law enforcement agencies, international organizations & NGOs, embassies, local NGOs, and the media as presented in Figure 5. The full list of observed antitrafficking stakeholders is presented in Appendix 2: List of antitrafficking stakeholders. The stakeholder-specific results are not presented in the public version of the thesis. It is crucial to consider that the table does not represent the official antitrafficking system in Kosovo, as the list is purely based on the field notes obtained through participant observation.



Figure 5: Categories of antitrafficking stakeholders

Starting with the governmental agencies, in Kosovo, the fight against human trafficking is coordinated by several governmental agencies. The agencies are involved in two different ways: at a strategic or operational level. On the strategic level, the National Human Trafficking Coordinator (NATC) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is the highest-ranking official in combating human trafficking. It is responsible for overseeing the national strategy and policy implementation, engaging in international cooperation, and reporting the progress to the Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG). The Office of the National Human Trafficking Coordinator

(ONATC) and Antitrafficking in Persons Secretariat (ATIPS) provide administrative and logistical support to the NATC. The office is a hub for coordination and communication, partly managing a comprehensive database that includes all information related to combating human trafficking, ranging from active projects, contacts, and active NGOs. The MIA is responsible for the regulatory and administrative antitrafficking framework for executing strategies. One of its crucial instruments is the implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Trafficked Persons in Kosovo that provide a structured approach to handling human trafficking cases for all the relevant parties processing human trafficking cases. Under the jurisdiction of MIA, the Kosovo Police (KP) and its Directorate for Investigation of Trafficking in Human Beings (DITHB) undertake direct actions on operational level against human trafficking. The actions can include targeted raids, detailed investigations, arrest of traffickers, etc. The KP also plays a critical role in the initial identification and protection of trafficking victims.

Moving to the next stakeholder, the international law enforcement agencies, Kosovo engages with international law enforcement agencies, and it greatly enhances its capabilities in combating human trafficking. Agencies such as Interpol and Europol are essential partners, providing support that includes expertise in cross-border trafficking cases, special training for law enforcement, and valuable information sharing from criminal databases. It is crucial to note that Kosovo is not part of Interpol and does not have direct access to its critical databases. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) is not directly applicable to the context of the thesis, as it mainly focuses on legal matters.

Following category of stakeholders, the international organizations & NGOs are critical antitrafficking stakeholders for Kosovo. For instance, organizations like United Nations (UN), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the International Centre for Migration and Policy Development (ICMPD) bring different perspectives, resources, and expertise to fight against human trafficking in Kosovo. The organizations collect vast amounts of information about the country's activities in their respective areas of interest and pass the information on to the national level through media for instance. International NGOs contribute to critical antitrafficking projects within the country.

The next category of stakeholders, the embassies, are active antitrafficking stakeholders, varying on the embassy. There was not much information gathered about these stakeholders, and there is no exact estimate of the extent to which these organizations have an impact in Kosovo. The researchers came across three embassies: USA, Switzerland, and Finland. Some embassies mainly focus on migration and visa related processes, and some are active players in contributing to projects combating human trafficking through donations and other methods of sharing expertise.

Following up stakeholder category of local NGOs function the victim support system and other services that are made for the victims and vulnerable people prone to being trafficked. Local actors receive resources through donations and co-operations projects, carrying out activities at operational level. In turn, they report the results of their activities to the donors, and sometimes publicly. The donors are both local and international. For instance, the execution of different strategies on operational level can be a local NGOs objective, which is set by certain governmental agencies.

The last category of stakeholders, the media, is a powerful antitrafficking stakeholder in its own way in Kosovo. It works as a tool for the people and international organizations to promote transparency and accountability. It highlights trafficking cases and reports both successes and failures in antitrafficking efforts, influencing policy and public perceptions and raising public awareness.

5 Discussions

The aim of this thesis was to examine dynamics of trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans, with an emphasis on Kosovo. The guiding principle behind this work was to develop comprehensive information package about the phenomenon, highlighting all aspects and factors relevant to the subject, which the client would be able to utilize in future projects addressing identification of trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans region. The foundation of this thesis was based on two essential questions from which the first aimed to provide an extensive background of the phenomenon under study, and the second was to focus on identifying key stakeholders in antitrafficking efforts in the region. Based on the conducted research, it can be credibly stated that the objectives of the thesis were achieved.

The first question was to identify the main factors influencing trafficking in human beings in Kosovo. A descriptive literature review was primarily used to map out the situation. Investigating this topic, several factors and perspectives emerged that have a significant impact on the form of human trafficking, its background factors, and enabling causes. Trafficking in human beings is a complex phenomenon that can be found globally in various forms and contexts. This thesis, however, focused solely on the features of human trafficking in the Western Balkans and Kosovo. The research successfully identified typical traits and factors and created an overview of trafficking in human beings in that region. Recognizing these specific characteristics of trafficking in the area is crucial, so that antitrafficking efforts can be appropriately targeted and therefore effective. Due to the broad nature of trafficking, generalizations and assumptions based on stereotypes can easily be made, which is particularly dangerous because, without a closer examination of the specific traits of trafficking in human beings in a particular area, it could lead to misdirected and ineffective countermeasures.

Factors that strongly emerged and seemed to play a particularly significant role in the formation of trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans and Kosovo included the strategic location of the Western Balkans, organized criminal networks, and the region's socio-economic situation. This combination creates perfect conditions for the flourishing of trafficking. The strategic location of the Western Balkans serves as a transit route to the EU area, making it particularly valuable and popular among traffickers and other forms of organized crime. Related to this, the impact of visa liberalization granted to Kosovo in January 2024 and its effects in trafficking in human beings in Kosovo remains to be seen, and definite information about its effects will only be seen in the coming years. Also, the organized crime, which mainly controls the operations of trafficking in the region, also skilfully exploits the socio-economic situation, political instability, and migration. It is clear that all these factors contribute to creating an ideal environment for crime of trafficking to operate. Also, as these traits can be identified as essential parts of the factors affecting trafficking in human beings in the area, it can be concluded that stabilization of the political situation, increase in employment opportunities, and improving education and awareness about trafficking could have significant impacts in terms of antitrafficking and prevention. Based on the findings, it can be stated that currently, the economic situation, migration, political situation, and the inefficiency in cooperation allows traffickers the opportunity to benefit and operate their activities undetected. Especially improving border control, more comprehensive training for authorities on the subject, developing international cooperation, and standardizing laws and regulations in the region could, based on the findings, lead to changes that would allow antitrafficking efforts to be targeted correctly. Some of these problems, however, require significant structural and legal changes, which are slow and difficult to implement and do not happen overnight. However, recognizing these traits can be seen as a step in the right direction and serves as a starting point for any change.

The study also aimed to identify common traits and factors that can predispose individuals to become victims of trafficking in human beings. Many common and unifying factors were identified, and profiles of both typical victims and traffickers were also formed based on these findings. Recognizing such traits can play an important role in planning and correctly targeting antitrafficking measures. Issues that emerged as predisposing individuals to victimization included socio-economic background, lack of education, marginalization, and a lack of resources. In other words, for example, a poor economic situation, insufficient education and understanding of trafficking in human beings as a phenomenon, and a lack of a sufficient support networks can make an individual vulnerable to situations where they may become targets of trafficking. Some of these emerging traits and characteristics may be innate or difficult to change, but some of these factors could be preventable. For instance, providing necessary education and information and spreading knowledge more widely could potentially help people understand and better recognize traits indicative of trafficking in human beings,

thus enabling them to avoid situations and report what they have seen. This could also have an impact on better identification and statistics of human trafficking. Recognizing trafficking as early as possible plays a large role in its counter-efforts.

Based on the research, the biggest challenges in identifying and combating trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans and Kosovo were also identified. The most significant finding in every part of the study was the factor of lack of resources. This theme seemed to emerge in the literature review, observations, and interviews. This lack of resources appears to affect everything from the training and information of authorities to cooperation and information sharing between different stakeholders. There was also a lack of understanding and information availability among the people. The fact that resources are not found sufficient for authorities' training, spreading information to people, forming the necessary cooperation, and sharing information in real-time and as needed between stakeholders inevitably leads to trafficking staying unrecognized. Based on the information compiled in research for this thesis, it can be concluded that this lack of resources, their targeting, and information sharing is one of the biggest problems in antitrafficking efforts in the Western Balkans. Solving this problem requires strong political and legal will as well as the development of cooperation and the correct targeting of resources so that better, clearer, and more consistent operating models can be created in antitrafficking efforts, which would make it possible to better prevent, identify, and reduce trafficking crimes.

The second question in the thesis was to clarify which stakeholders are potential partners for collaboration related to projects combating trafficking in human beings in Kosovo. The topic was explored through participant observation that were collected on-site in Kosovo. The analysis was utilized using CoCo Cosmos as there were many different types of stakeholders involved, and it was challenging to form a clear overall view. The visual tool aided significantly in the process. Through the identified stakeholders, six different categories of antitrafficking stakeholders were formed, consisting of a total of 25 antitrafficking stakeholders. The original number of stakeholders was even higher, but some were excluded due to not matching with the criteria within the scope of the thesis. For instance, judicial institutions and prisons were excluded on this basis.

The mapping of antitrafficking stakeholders was limited to data collected solely in Kosovo. Although new stakeholders emerged through the literature review and more detailed research, they were not included to maintain a clear structure in the thesis for participant observation. The literature review also revealed elements that supported the observations collected on-site about the activities of antitrafficking stakeholders. However, these observations were not elaborated on or expanded in the mapping process, as the aim was only to map the existing

antitrafficking network. One reason for this was the imbalance of collected information between stakeholders, and some observations regarding certain stakeholders were confidential, leading to an uneven distribution of results.

Governmental agencies emerged as one category based on their role as local authorities. A total of ten stakeholders were identified in this category. The nature of the governmental agencies varied significantly, as their responsibilities encompassed different types of tasks. The diversity among the antitrafficking stakeholders is crucial for collaboration and the development of various antitrafficking measures, in line with the multidisciplinary approach (ref1). This diversity provides a primary and robust network for implementing activities in Kosovo. Some agencies stood out more than others, explained by the fact that antitrafficking efforts are more concentrated within specific stakeholders. The National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (NATC) is a prime example, as it is responsible for overseeing all related activities within Kosovo. The more influential a governmental antitrafficking stakeholder is, the greater its overall significance is in terms of collaboration. International law enforcement agencies emerged as the second category based on the observations. Four different stakeholders were identified in this category, and they are characterized by their strong roles in law enforcement on an international level. International law enforcement agencies play a critical role in combating human trafficking as part of transnational organized crime. Information sharing between the stakeholders is emphasized, a process in which Kosovo is at a disadvantage due to lack of direct access to certain databases requiring alternative methods for access. International organizations and NGOs formed the third category based on the observations. A total of seven stakeholders were identified in this category. The stakeholders play a significant role in Kosovo's antitrafficking efforts and in raising general awareness. Embassies were identified as the fourth category based on the observations. They were grouped separately due to their diplomatic status. Only three embassies were identified, although more are present in the country. Some embassies were excluded due to insufficient information. Embassies act as critical support elements within the antitrafficking network. They interact directly with potential trafficking victims through visa processes and participate in various antitrafficking projects. Finally, the media emerged as sixth category. While not directly identifiable as an antitrafficking stakeholder, the media's overall role is significant in Kosovo. One of its biggest strengths is spreading awareness.

Out of all the six categories, two distinct categories seem to fit best for cooperation. The stakeholder specific results are presented in the factsheet for the client. The governmental agencies and international organizations & NGOs seem the most valuable entities for collaboration. The governmental stakeholders are heavily involved on operative level on identifying human trafficking, and the same category also leads the whole antitrafficking strategy within Kosovo. Specific stakeholder within this category is also responsible for the training of authorities in terms of awareness and other techniques in identifying human

trafficking. Conducting a strong cooperation partnership with the stakeholder would provide effective results in the law enforcement sector, which in turn would yield results in other areas as well. However, the responsibilities of higher authorities need to be taken into consideration. It is not possible to establish a direct relationship with a specific stakeholder if approval is required from higher authorities. Embassies seem to be unfit for direct collaboration due to bureaucracy, but in terms of discussion and networking they can be useful. Local NGOs were also seen unfit in the scope of the thesis. However, if the cooperation focuses on working with the victims in the aftercare phase local NGOs could provide valuable insight from their perspective. Lastly, the media is not taken into consideration as the authors did not establish a connection with any stakeholders in the category. However, their capabilities for spreading awareness should be noted.

Common issues that emerged from the literature review and expert interview are also partially reflected in the antitrafficking network. For instance, lack of resources was highlighted in both the literature review and the expert interview. The support network for victims of human trafficking suffers from a resource shortage, preventing victims from receiving the appropriate help they need. As a result, a visible form of human trafficking, in this case child begging on the streets, can be seen in Kosovo (E1). Although the interview did not specify how this phenomenon affects the work of authorities, it can be speculated in various ways. It is possible that the phenomenon receives less attention due to passivity, whether it involves the police or ordinary citizens. If people are used to seeing beggars living in poor conditions on the streets, they may not consider that it is related to human trafficking. Another issue that arises among antitrafficking stakeholders concerns mixed migration forms (Brunovskis & Surtees 2017).

This particularly affects authorities who handle immigration related applications and border officers. The third issue highlighted is cultural norms (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019), which are linked to cultural and social prejudices and stigma. This particularly affects stakeholders whose tasks involve identifying human trafficking. However, it should be noted that this phenomenon may not specifically concern Kosovo, as the context is based on the Western Balkan region. Lastly, the fourth issue was information sharing. Kosovo is not a member of Interpol, and some other information sharing mechanisms are conducted through third parties (E1). It is likely that this will significantly affect efficiency and complicate cooperation processes, especially at the international level.

6 Reflections & developments

The research for this thesis aimed to examine and form a comprehensive overview of the dynamics and current state of trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans, particularly in Kosovo. In this study, qualitative data collection methods were used to ensure a broad and

comprehensive understanding of the topic. However, during the literature review, it became clear that there is not enough recent comprehensive material to maintain an up-to-date complete picture. There was a noticeable spike in available material between the years 2016 and 2020, with the most published material available compared to the last fifteen years. However, recent major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and the effects of those on trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans and Kosovo, are not yet to be sufficiently updated with new information. Also, the impacts of Kosovo's visa liberalization in January 2024 (European Commission 2024) and its entry to the Schengen area on trafficking in human beings are still impossible to reliably assess. Predictions and estimates can be made considering how this will affect the amount and form of trafficking in the future, but accurate statistical data will only be obtained in the coming years.

The study also faced its own challenges due to the extent of the phenomenon under investigation. Trafficking in human beings is such a multidimensional and diverse form of criminality that comprehensively addressing it is generally very difficult (Cockbain & Bovers 2019, 27). Although the content of the research on this topic could potentially be expanded in almost any direction, this thesis strived to keep precise boundaries for the subject under study to enable as comprehensive and clear an overall picture as possible. The topic has been approached with an emphasis on examining the phenomenon as a whole and creating a comprehensive overview at a more general level, rather than delving too deeply into each sub-area, which could easily lead the research off track. The result aimed for in this thesis is to create accurate and concise a package of the dynamics of trafficking in human beings for the client, which they can use as an information package for their projects in the future.

The objective of this study was achieved by combining theory from the literature review and already published materials as a broad and comprehensive basis for the research. To this foundation, unique practical knowledge and observations gathered through participatory observation and expert interviews were added, which would be impossible to collect in other ways. The time the authors spent on the ground in Kosovo provided a unique opportunity to see, experience, and monitor many of the topics discussed in the thesis up close. All this helped to develop a deeper understanding of the subject and the opportunity to hear firsthand from people who work with the phenomenon in daily bases. This provided a chance to gather information and perspectives on the subject that might not be possible to find from written documents. As authors of the thesis, we found it absolutely important and a unique opportunity to utilize this information as part of the process.

6.1 Reliability & ethical questions

When writing a thesis addressing trafficking in human beings as a topic, it brings up several ethical and reliability-related questions that must be carefully considered due to the nature of the topic alone. Addressing such a sensitive subject requires precision and responsibility, especially when considering cultural and social perspectives, making it crucial to approach the topic appropriately. This thesis aims to adhere to good ethical and scientific practices in both information gathering and research. The good practices include honesty, general diligence, and accuracy in both the actual research work and in the recording, presentation, and evaluation of research results. It is important that information acquisition, research, and evaluation methods adhere to the criteria of scientific research and ethical sustainability. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the work and achievements of other researchers by following proper citation practices. Good scientific practice also requires that the standards set for scientific knowledge are applied to the planning and execution of research, as well as to the reporting and preservation of research data (Tutkimuseettinen neuvottelukunta 2012, 6).

In addressing the topic, the diversity and nature of the subject needs to be kept in mind. Ethical and reliability-related perspectives that the topic entails are considered in every part of the thesis. Ethical considerations such as privacy and anonymity when required are clearly notable, particularly in expert interviews and observations. While collecting material, it became evident that although there was information, views, and comments related to the topic, many were not willing to be named in the context. At the request of the interviewees, all comments have been documented anonymously. This allowed for broader information gathering and the use of material adhering to ethical principles.

Understanding the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings and avoiding oversimplification and stereotypes are in crucial role. When addressing trafficking in human beings, it's easy to oversimplify or generalize the problem as a one, which may not reflect its complexity or diversity. It's important to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices and to present the topic comprehensively and holistically. Understanding that the phenomenon can appear in many different forms and that its characteristics can vary by region is important. Excessive generalization and the use of stereotypes and assumptions can harm the topic itself and are ethically questionable because they can reinforce existing generalizations around an already sensitive subject.

As authors of the thesis, we also have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the information we collect is used as agreed and for its intended purpose, in this case in the creation of this thesis aimed at improving antitrafficking efforts. For example, video recordings collected during expert interview will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis.

Regarding the reliability of the information provided by the thesis, it is important to consider several factors. For instance, the diversity and verification of sources are crucial to ensure the information is as accurate and comprehensive as possible. Understanding the context when addressing this topic is also particularly important. Trafficking in human beings is a complex phenomenon that can be found in various forms and across different societal and cultural contexts. It is important to understand and explain these differences to ensure the material is relevant and sufficiently comprehensive. The currency of the information must also be considered to maintain its reliability and relevance.

Reliability questions must also be considered regarding the chosen research methods. The reliability of the materials used in the literature review is the easiest to assess. The reliability of a descriptive literature review is enhanced by clearly describing the methodology section and conducting the process transparently. The selected materials are strictly defined and meet the criteria for scientific research. Materials have also been chosen from a wide range of sources and covering different aspects of the topic to ensure the diversity of information. Moreover, insufficient connection of the analysed data to the theoretical background and their selective and one-sided examination can undermine the method's reliability. It is also noteworthy that describing the results is a subjective process (Kangasniemi et al. 2013, 297-298). Participant observation, on the other hand, includes multiple perspectives. A significant advantage of this method is firsthand information gathering. The information is seen, experienced, or learned directly from the sources and people on-site without intermediaries. All this collected material can thus be said to be accurate as far as it has been directly gathered. However, the objectivity of the collected information could be considered a downside, as all information is collected and observed by the two thesis writers and is limited to the sites and topics visited or discussed. In expert interviews, the accuracy of the information can be reasonably trusted. The interviewed person is an expert in their field with a long history and experience working with the topic. The information can thus be believed to be reliable and diverse. Although, the reliability of the results of this interview can be questioned to the extent that the information comes from one expert and represents their views and experiences on the subject. The transcribed interviews or interpretations made from them were not confirmed by the interviewee, which may reduce the reliability of the results. However, confirmation can also overly constrain the researcher's interpretations (Hyvärinen 2017, 32.) More interviews could provide comparisons and potentially multiple perspectives. The principles of ethical research were followed in organizing the interview. The interviewee was informed in advance about the implementation of the study, and the voluntary nature of participation was emphasized. Additionally, interviewee was informed about the confidentiality of the study and the anonymization of the collected data. Taking these perspectives into account, the thesis can not only meet academic criteria but also promote antitrafficking efforts in an ethically and socially responsible manner.

6.2 Future developments

The result of the study indicates that human trafficking is a multidisciplinary phenomenon that requires broader and more specific research, as well as collaboration across different stakeholders for comprehensive understanding. The results highlight the significant role and importance of governmental and law enforcement stakeholders, suggesting that further research should focus on their framework. One possibility is to measure and develop the effectiveness of SOPs used by law enforcement for combating human trafficking. Another aspect is enhancing and increasing training human trafficking awareness and identification, whether for law enforcement authorities or other officials working with trafficking victims. The multidisciplinary nature of the phenomenon shows that collaboration must also be developed with other stakeholders.

Based on the literature review, that there is not much up to date information available in English about human trafficking in Kosovo. This could be caused by issues with data collection, untranslated documents, and general resource shortages. This presents a unique opportunity to produce primary information from the ground on human trafficking through various research methods, creating a scientific basis for understanding human trafficking in Kosovo. The information can be used to delve deeper into current issues, which would allow for the development of recommendations for antitrafficking efforts. For further research, it is important to consider what information the NATC maintains but is not publicly available. If the data were accessed upon request, it would be possible to produce precise research information, benefiting the highest authorities in combating human trafficking in Kosovo. One of the shortcomings of the thesis is the number of expert interviews conducted. Unfortunately, only one individual ultimately agreed to be interviewed. Many people withdrew from the interviews despite initial agreements, and some could no longer be reached. Considering the effort the authors put into finding and contacting interviewees, securing even once interview is a significant achievement. The knowledge and experience of an antitrafficking expert are unique and difficult to replace in other ways. The process of identifying human trafficking should be studied in more detail from the perspective of specific authorities due to the fragmented nature of the research results. This would provide more precise information on what is essential in identifying human trafficking at an operational level. The information could then be used to review and develop existing models and methods, as well as to share best practices with authorities in cooperating countries.

The results of the thesis can be applied not only in client-oriented materials but also in areas such as the prevention of human trafficking, increasing general awareness, and aftercare of trafficking victims. The thesis results can also support decision-making when evaluating local antitrafficking stakeholders. Based on the results provided by the thesis, it is also possible to

continue further development work in antitrafficking projects. The factsheet created for the client provides excellent conditions for further work, especially since it includes practical observations on how operations are conducted in the country.

7 Conclusions

Conducting this thesis addressing trafficking in human beings, have made it clear that this phenomenon is a multifaceted and pervasive issue that continues to pose significant challenges in the Western Balkans. This thesis has explored the complexities of identifying and combating human trafficking in this region, highlighting the critical factors that hinder effective intervention and the necessary measures to improve current efforts. Conducting a study for this thesis created a comprehensive picture and better understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon, challenges in the identification and counter measures and the effect of the cultural and social barriers in the subject matter. Identified key factors to improve antitrafficking efforts are listed below.

1) *Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:*

Unifying and clarifying laws and regulations is essential to establish clear guidelines and operational models for combating trafficking in human beings. Comprehensive training for law enforcement, border officers, and social workers is also necessary to improve the identification and handling of trafficking cases.

2) *Enhancing International Cooperation:*

Improving cooperation between Western Balkan countries and EU member states is crucial for sharing intelligence, resources, and best practices. Conducting joint operations and investigations will effectively help to dismantle transnational trafficking networks.

3) *Raising Awareness:*

Implementing widespread awareness campaigns to educate the public about the signs of trafficking in human beings and the importance of reporting suspicious activities is vital. Ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of victims will encourage more individuals to come forward and seek help.

Addressing trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, enhancing international cooperation, and raising public awareness. By implementing these measures, Kosovo and the wider Western Balkan region can make significant strides in combating this violation of human

rights. The fight against trafficking in human beings is complex, but with dedicated efforts and collaboration, it is possible to protect vulnerable individuals and dismantle the criminal networks that perpetuate this heinous crime.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

Theme 1: THB as a phenomenon in Kosovo

1. Kosovo-specific features for trafficking.
2. Combatting human trafficking in Kosovo.

Theme 2: Identification

1. General attitude towards human trafficking.
2. Primary challenges in detecting human trafficking. Experiences and comments.

Theme 3: Cross-border cooperation & collaboration

1. Current performance.
2. Areas or initiatives in need of improvement.

Theme 4: Information sharing

1. Performance of antitrafficking stakeholders in information sharing.
2. Challenges and barriers to information sharing.

Appendix 2: List of antitrafficking stakeholders

