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Portraying the Invisible: Media Coverage of Sex Trafficking in Cyprus

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Master in International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Resumo

Esta tese investiga a forma como o tráfico sexual é retratado na mídia em Chipre entre 2021 e 2025, utilizando um exame comparativo de jornais em inglês das comunidades grega-cipriota e turco-cipriota. Como o cenário político da ilha é extremamente dividido, após a separação de Chipre entre a República de Chipre e os territórios administrados pelas autoridades turcocipriotas, este estudo busca compreender se os jornais retratam com precisão o crime de tráfico sexual ou se são usados mais como um meio de promover uma agenda do que de denunciar o crime organizado. O estudo emprega análise de conteúdo, definição de agenda e análise crítica do discurso para investigar como são construídas as narrativas sobre vítimas, traficantes, causas sistêmicas e responsabilização, com suporte das teorias feministas e dos estudos sobre conflitos.

Os dados mostram que o tráfico sexual é reconhecido em ambos os contextos, mas raramente é tratado como um crime separado. Os jornais grego-cipriotas publicam com frequência matérias sobre tráfico, mas muitas vezes confundem tráfico e migração, reforçando narrativas centradas no Estado, minimizando a responsabilidade local e transferindo a culpa para o norte. A cobertura turco-cipriota é limitada, começando com notícias do exterior e, posteriormente, ligando o tráfico à corrupção sistêmica. Em ambos os contextos, vítimas são despersonalizadas, traficantes permanecem invisíveis e a corrupção sistêmica é apresentada como questão de governança, não de direitos humanos. A mídia contribui para narrativas incompletas, politizadas e, ocasionalmente, prejudiciais. Fragmentação política, falta de educação sobre o tema e pouca cooperação entre comunidades dificultam uma representação precisa. Recomenda-se treinamento de jornalistas, colaboração bicomunal e ampliação da voz das vítimas para melhorar a cobertura e aumentar a responsabilização.

Palavras-chave: Tráfico sexual, estudos de conflitos, representação na mídia, corrupção, Chipre

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the media portrayal of sex trafficking in Cyprus between 2021 and 2025, using a comparative examination of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Englishnewspapers. As the political landscape of the island if extremely divided, following the division of Cyprus between the Republic of Cyprus and the territories administered by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, this study seeks to understand if newspapers portray accurately the crime of sex trafficking, or if they are used as a way to pushed an agenda more than to call out organized crime. It employs content analysis, agenda-setting, and critical discourse analysis to study how narratives about victims, traffickers, systemic causes, and accountability are produced, with contextual support from feminist theory and conflict studies. The study seeks to assess both the veracity of reporting and the amount to which political, social, and cultural variables influence coverage.

The data demonstrates that sex trafficking is recognized in both contexts but is rarely portrayed as a separate crime. Greek Cypriot newspapers commonly publish trafficking-related stories, but often confuse the line between trafficking and migration, strengthening state-centered narratives while downplaying local culpability and shifting the blame on the north. Turkish Cypriot coverage is relatively limited, beginning with overseas stories and eventually linking trafficking to systemic corruption. However, victims continue to be depersonalized, traffickers remain invisible, and systemic corruption is presented as a governance issue rather than a human rights issue. The findings indicate that media on both sides contribute to incomplete, politicized, and occasionally damaging narratives. Both fail to deliver consistent victimcentered reporting. The study indicates that political fragmentation, a lack of education on trafficking, and poor cooperation across the Green Line all impede accurate representation. Improving journalist training, encouraging bi-communal collaboration, and elevating victim voices are among the recommendations for reshaping public knowledge and increasing responsibility.

Keywords: Sex trafficking, conflict studies, media representation, corruption, Cyprus

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Glossary of Acronyms

RoC – Republic of Cyprus

TRNC- Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

TC- Turkish Cypriot

GC- Greek Cypriot

VoT- Victims of Trafficking

THB- Trafficking in Human Beings

MCG- Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group against Human Trafficking

NAP- National Action Plan

NRM- National Referal Mechanism

RRA- Refugee Rights Association

I. Introduction

Human trafficking is now the fastest growing and most lucrative crime around the world and does not show any sign of decreasing. Defined by the UN Palermo Protocol (2000) as *« the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of 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, for the purpose of exploitation »*, this transnational crime happens in a context that has been made favourable by multiple factors. In a globalized world where everything is moving fast, migration and displacement flux are multiplying, tracking humans has become challenging, and the economic disparities between regions with different levels of wealth and development have created economic gaps. The presence of these gaps, for instance between EU countries and Africa, or between the United States of America (USA) and Central America, combined with the demand for cheap work and sexual services explains why human trafficking has been skyrocketing. The use of new technologies, such as social media, dating apps, online job ads, and hidden online platforms, has made it easier to recruit victims; and the presence of corruption among border agents and the legal loopholes between the different European and international frameworks have increased the opportunities for criminal networks. Within the European Union (EU) only, between 2020 and 2023, the number of identified victims has increased from 6,534 to 10,792, and the number of convicted traffickers has grown from 1,297 to 2,309. (European Commission, 2025). Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) mainly results in forced labour or sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking is defined under the UN Palermo Protocol and U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) as *« the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under 18 years of age »*. Sexual exploitation targets especially women and girls, as 87% of the victims are female (UN, 2023), which underlines the gender-specific aspect of this phenomenon and the need to include a gender-based perspective when addressing sex trafficking.

Human trafficking, sexual exploitation of the female body, corruption, lack of protection for refugees and migrants: I met these challenges in Cyprus when I was there as an Erasmus student during Fall 2024. Little island but big influence, its geographic position right between the Middle East, Europe, and Africa makes it a hub for migration flows, both legal and illegal: refugees from the Middle East, fleeing the war and the bombings, meet migrants from Sub-Saharan countries, escaping the political instability of their homeland and looking for better

luck in Europe. The University of Nicosia is filled with Ukrainian, Russian, Israeli and Palestinian students, and as I am attending Politics classes with them, I understand very quickly that the unspoken rule of not mentioning any controversial political topic seems very well implemented, not only at university, but in all aspects of the life in Cyprus.

The main contention point of the island lies in the division between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, division that has been embodied by a frozen cease-firing line called the Green Line and set up in 1963 by a British officer because of recurrent violent altercations. The two communities have been repeatedly pushed against each other under the British colonization of Cyprus, starting from 1878, until an extremely polarized situation has been reached. After the independence of the island in 1960, the two communities didn't manage to compromise and share the governance of the island, which led to a bloody and unresolved conflict. Located in the north of the island, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is ruled by the Turkish Cypriot authorities. Its existence being only recognized by Turkey following the Turkish invasion provoked by a Greek-backed coup in 1974, it is internationally considered an invaded territory. In this study, I only referred to the TRNC as “the north” or the “Turkish Cypriot territories”. To the south of the Green Line, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is administered by the Greek Cypriot authorities and has been part of the European Union since 2004. Between the two sides exists the Buffer Zone, a demilitarized area controlled by the United Nations. The Green Line makes Nicosia the last divided capital city in the world. It works like a border: if I want to cross, I must show my ID/passport at two different 2 checkpoints. Within a few meters, the language switches from Greek to Turkish, the currency changes between euros and Turkish liras, and the economic situation is radically different.
This unique situation has created a tense political atmosphere as the two sides deeply resent each other for the conflict that led to the partition of Cyprus, and both communities show a very limited willingness to communicate, cooperate, or set up any joint frameworks or laws to tackle transnational criminal networks. As a result, human trafficking is growing to become a massive issue, traffickers taking advantage of the geographic location of Cyprus, the economic and legal gaps between the north and the south, and the void in-between in which victims disappear.

Trafficking is part of the topics to not bring up, as if it didn’t exist. However, Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) appears to be a prominent issue in Cyprus: according to the US Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report 2024, the Republic of Cyprus has been ranked Tier 1, but the north has been categorized Tier 3, which is the lowest ranking and underlines how much of an emergency human trafficking is in the northern part of the island. The difference in ranking between the RoC and the north can be explained by the difference in the results regarding the

prosecution of traffickers and the recognition of victims over the past few years. But once again, the more rampant the issue is, the more it gets ignored. The more space it takes, the more invisible it becomes. As I mentioned, living in Cyprus made me realize the unspoken rule of not speaking up. Fortunately, this is not respected by everybody, and the general insensitivity is disturbed by a few individuals, media outlets and civil society organizations (CSOs) that care to bring the spotlight on the issue of THB in Cyprus. Media outlets have a significant role to play as part of the anti-trafficking mechanism: they can gather evidence, spread information, and raise general awareness about this understudied, misunderstood topic. Worldwide, many journalists are dedicated to informing the public about the real face of human trafficking, to narrate survivors' stories, and to use documentaries and social media to reach a broader audience; and here in Cyprus, the combination of the growing sex trafficking industry and the general silence about it makes the work of the media more needed than ever. The critical analysis of investigative media outlets serves plenty of goals, such as holding authorities and governments accountable by speaking up about their leniency (or even their complicity in some cases) when fighting human trafficking. The lack of convictions, appropriate punishment, support of the victims, or trained authorities can be proven and denounced by journalists with a solid sense of ethics, and public action can even be mobilized thank to mass campaign and lobbying. However, media outlets face a recurring issue when it comes to covering sex trafficking: many people are willing to talk about it, except the victims themselves, who are often put under pressure by their pimps and know that they would face consequences if they ever spoke up against their traffickers. The complicated political landscape in Cyprus makes the issue even worse, and journalists lack access to reliable and accurate information, as the authorities do not always collect trafficking data and lack transparency when reporting and publishing their findings. Consequently, it becomes quite challenging to portray an accurate description of the issue: some trafficking mechanisms and recruitment scams, and profiles of victims or traffickers get ignored, which perpetuates harmful stereotypes and makes it easier for criminals to trick victims as they keep using methods unknown to the public.

Considering the extent of the trafficking industry and the lack of awareness about it, at the intersection between human rights and media representation, this study aims to better understand how sex trafficking in Cyprus is being portrayed in English-language Cypriot newspapers, and seeks to analyse the role, the action, and the relevance of the media.

In order to understand if this media coverage is accurate or not, I articulated my analysis around two questions: how Cypriot newspapers frame the issue of sex trafficking and shape public awareness; and how their narrative can be useful or harmful by influencing policymaking. This

study addresses the need for an intersectional analysis as both the conflictual political landscape of the island and societal norms impact this issue.

This study is structured in 5 chapters. The first chapter explains the introduction to the topic and its importance. The second chapter contextualizes the investigation by detailing the legal anti-trafficking framework and reviewing the published literature on the subject. The third chapter analyses the methodology used for this study. The fourth chapter focuses on a content analysis of articles published in English by both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot newspapers about sex trafficking in Cyprus between 2021 and 2025, as well as interviews conducted with NGO workers, police members and experts in tackling sex trafficking to understand their experience of being part of an anti-trafficking mechanism. I analysed the findings in order to compare the narratives and understand how accurate newspapers are when portraying sex trafficking in Cyprus. Finally, the fifth chapter sums up the conclusions drawn from the study, interprets the key results, suggests some best practices for the media to adopt and underlines the limitations of the study. This study aims to integrate both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot perspectives and voices, as both communities have been living on the island and are impacted by the trafficking industry, independently of their political status and recognition.

To understand better the specificities of the anti-trafficking mechanism in Cyprus, and especially the role of media outlets as part of this mechanism, I completed a 4-month internship at the MIGS (Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies), a feminist research institute focusing on Gender Equality and Women's Rights. MIGS was recommended to me by one of my teachers from the University of Nicosia, to whom I had presented a draft of my work on sex trafficking in Cyprus. When I got in touch with them, MIGS was just starting a bi-communal assessment study mapping and comparing the anti-trafficking mechanisms implemented in the north and the south of the island. It was then decided that I would join their team as an intern, taking part to their research and using the findings for my own thesis as well, which gave me the opportunity to connect with many Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot experts, and to create and use a network extremely useful for my own investigation. I experienced being an assistant researcher and I was given a detailed and comprehensive insight of the anti-trafficking field, which was the fieldwork I needed to complete this study and make it as nuanced and detailed as I possibly could.

II. Literature review

This chapter contextualizes the issue of sex trafficking in Cyprus and its current legal anti-trafficking framework, highlighting the role of the media as a tool to disrupt the trafficking industry, and presenting the gaps this study aims to answer.

2.1. Background of Sex Trafficking in Cyprus

Cyprus represents a destination country for Trafficking in Human Beings: the geographic position of Cyprus makes it a hub for the trafficking industry, and the tense political landscape of the island, split in two since 1963 by the Green Line, increases this issue and slows down, if not annihilates, initiatives taken against this crime (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022). In 2023, 31 victims of trafficking were identified in the Republic (8 victims of sex trafficking, 17 of labour trafficking, and 6 in other forms). 6 traffickers were convicted (4 for sex trafficking and 2 for labour trafficking), but 5 of them received suspended sentences, which reveals leniency in the way trafficking is being tackled in the RoC. In 2022, the north registered 1 conviction (a Nigerian trafficker was condemned to 4 years in jail), while recognizing and assisting 23 victims. However, in 2023, no trafficker was convicted, and no victim was identified, while the number of women deported after reporting abuse skyrocketed, rising from 11 in 2022 to 805 in 2023. (US Department of State. 2024)

Most of the sex trafficking happens in the north of the island. Many of the victims are third country nationals, mainly international students lured by trafficking rings: traffickers trick them into registering in Turkish Cypriot universities, promising them a visa, a scholarship, education, and housing. However, they only pay for the enrolment fees of the student, and not the actual tuition fees. Consequently, upon arrival, the students find themselves in a situation of illegality: they are on a student visa but cannot attend classes as they are not properly enrolled, and most of them cannot afford the tuition fees. They remain stuck on the island, vulnerable, not able to legally work, and the traffickers take advantage of this vulnerability to force them into forced labour or sex work. In her work, one of the few studies documenting sex trafficking in Cyprus, Hadjigeorgiou explained that two types of prostitution are the most widespread: the first one is high-end prostitution, mainly happening in apartments, extremely difficult to spot and investigate, and exploiting mostly African students; the second and most common one is taking place in nightclubs and cabarets, where women are forced to work as prostitutes. Commonly, women are recruited from abroad, often from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Central Asia, thinking that they are applying for a manager position in a hotel or similar opportunities, and they are then deceived and coerced into sex work. Women who work in nightclubs get their

passports confiscated, are locked up in their accommodation, and must comply with frequent STD checks, always accompanied by private security. Survivors explain that when they didn't want to work as a prostitute, they would be coerced, drugged, raped, videotaped, and blackmailed. Debt bondage is commonly used by the traffickers to get the women to stay until they have paid their debts back, and for some cases, as lots of victims come from West African countries, Voodoo is used to bound the victim to the trafficker through an oath-taking ceremony (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022).

In March 2025, the case of Anastasia Melega illustrated the trafficking industry in Cyprus: a Moldovan woman was found dead, hanging, at Prenses, a Turkish Cypriot nightclub. As the death was classified by the authorities as a suicide, many started to raise questions regarding sex slavery, but mostly the involvement of the state in the trafficking ring: *"prostitution occurs with the knowledge and for the benefit of the state"* (In-Cyprus, 5 March 2025). This strong accusation by a Greek Cypriot newspaper aims to call out a corrupt government by identifying it as a factor enabling the sex trafficking industry, which makes me realize how rampant this crime is in Cyprus. Moreover, no reports have been published about that so-called suicide to the point that the only way one can learn about it is through newspapers. It is not the first time that the involvement of the state gets questioned, as the 2022 report published by the Human Rights Platform mentions that authorities may be complicit in trafficking activities and undermine enforcement efforts (Human Rights Platform, 2022). *"The nightclubs' close ties with the Turkish Cypriot community and their financial contribution to the Turkish Cypriot economy through the payment of taxes, ensure that they are tolerated, or even supported, by the authorities, ensure that they are tolerated, or even supported, by the authorities"* (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022, p.19). Moreover, when women go to the police to report the abuse they are enduring, they often get rejected, police officers answering that they came on the island to work, and now this is what they are doing, which highlights the complicity of the TC (Turkish Cypriot) authorities in running the nightclubs. (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022).

In the RoC, despite the abolishment of the artist visas (a 6-month visa allowing third-country citizens to work in nightclubs and cabarets, which was widely used to import sex workers), sex trafficking keeps happening but in private places, which makes it harder to detect and investigate. To convince women to prostitute themselves, the Lover Boy strategy is often used: a man approaches a vulnerable woman/girl, starts a romantic relationship, and then gets her into prostitution by manipulating her. It also happens that girls are tricked into thinking that they will model and then get deceived and coerced into prostitution. The very long delay when the police investigates cases of sex trafficking plays a huge role in favour of the traffickers:

"The physical division of the island and the inability of the RoC authorities to quickly recognise and protect trafficking victims who were exploited in the TRNC, at least in some cases, directly contribute to their re-exploitation" (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022, p.24).

This issue is nowhere close to stopping. The Turkish Cypriot community has been facing many challenges, such as huge economic and political instability. The Turkish Lira has lost a lot of value: at the beginning of 2023, 1 euro was worth 30 Turkish Liras; now (beginning 2025) it is worth 40 TL. Various elections and protests kept the political sphere unstable, hindering the efforts of Civil Society to bring up human rights and gender violence. Peace negotiations did not take place in 2023, racist and discriminatory attitudes keep growing, and Turkey kept politically interfering. These trends created a very favourable context for trafficking, as the instability and the lack of focus on human rights are stopping initiatives taken against this crime. A study led by the researcher Christina Kaili, *Mind the Gap Report: COALESCE for Support in Cyprus*, analysed the integration of migrant female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Findings showed us that the presence of the Green Line is a factor that benefits the traffickers: as the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot authorities refuse to collaborate, set joint frameworks, or communicate their data about the victims, trafficking rings exploit this transnational weakness to boost their activity. When victims of trafficking managed to escape, they fled to the RoC, where they applied for asylum through their recognition as victims of sex trafficking. This migration flow adds a layer of complexity to the tackling of sex trafficking in Cyprus, as it creates a situation where migrants and victims of trafficking get mixed up, making it easier for traffickers to get away, as they are less likely to be tracked by the competent authorities. As a result, victim identification and trafficker conviction rates remain very low from both sides of the Green Line (Kaili, 2021). This study helped me to fully understand the sex trafficking industry in Cyprus as a complex, multi-dimensional crime, enabled by many factors such as government corruption and migration flows, and the Green Line as a non-official border, a deep gap between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot authorities, and the materialization of a conflictual past that was left unsettled.

2.2. Anti-Trafficking Mechanism and Legal framework

The anti-trafficking legal frameworks implemented in the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot-administered territories present several disparities.

2.2.1. In the Republic of Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus' legislative framework for combating trafficking and exploitation is harmonized with EU Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating Trafficking in Human Beings (THB), and the Council Directive 2004/81/EC on the residence permit issued to third country nationals who are victims of trafficking and cooperating with relevant authorities (GRETA, 2025). The legislative framework in Cyprus implements the European and international Conventions, such as the Framework Decisions on the European Council 2002/629 and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which has been in force since 2008, all ratified by the RoC (Kaili, 2021).

In the Republic of Cyprus, sex trafficking was criminalized in 2000 through the Combating of Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Exploitation of Children Law of 2000 (Law 3(I)/2000), addressing child trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cyprus (Republic of Cyprus, 2023). The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and the Protection of Victims (Amendment) Law of 2019 (Law 117(I)/2019) criminalizes the use of services from trafficking victims (European Commission, 2025). The artist visa, allowing third-country nationals to work in nightclubs and cabarets for periods of 6 months, was abolished in 2008. This visa was often associated with the sex trafficking industry as it was considered an easy way to import sex workers: many women working in the cabarets and nightclubs were mistreated by their employers and literally held prisoners (Cyprus Mail, 2008).

Overall, the most impactful and relevant legal framework against THB in the RoC is certainly the **Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and of the Protection of Victims Law of 2014 (L.60 (I)/2014)**: it aims to implement measures for the prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings and exploitation of persons, the protection and support of victims and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms. The Law focuses on measures for the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of such offenses, and provides for the recognition of the victims and the protection of their rights. The sentences go from 10 to 20 years in jail for the perpetrators of sexual exploitation, and from 6 to 10 years for perpetrators of forced labour. The law also penalizes the use of services by a victim of trafficking, and punishments can include confiscation of personal documents, fines, and other penalties. (Republic of Cyprus, 2023).

Institutional measures have been implemented as well: the Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group against Human Trafficking (MCG) monitors the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking

Law and coordinates the national action against THB, involving state services and four Non-Governmental Organizations: Caritas Cyprus, Cyprus Refugee Council, SPAVO, and Cyprus Stop Trafficking (Republic of Cyprus, 2023); the National Reporting Mechanism (NRM) defines a co-operation framework between the involved services (Police, Social Welfare Services, labour authorities) and NGOs in order to identify Victims of Trafficking (VoT) according to a standardized procedure, assess their vulnerability and provide them with the needed support as fast as possible (GRETA 2025); the National Action Plan (NAP) relies on the paradigm of the 4P (Prevention, Prosecution, Protection, Partnerships) in order to cover four pillars : I) enhancing prevention and reducing the risk of victimization, II) suppressing the crime, III) protecting, supporting and reintegrating the victims, IV) implementing cooperation and coordination (Republic of Cyprus, 2023).

However, this legal and institutional framework presents some challenges and shortcomings. Despite the abolishment of the artist visa in 2008, sex trafficking is still happening in the RoC; it just takes place more secretly, in private apartments and hotel suites. The identification procedure (NRM) for potential victims of trafficking isn't as efficient as it is supposed to be. There are long delays for each phase of the process of assessing the needs of the victims, and there is a lack of a gender-specific and culturally appropriate approach. As a result, Social Welfare Services (SWS) fail to assess the needs of the victims in a timely and adequate manner, and the shelter system is not as efficient as it should. The situation of victims of trafficking is very uncertain, and the lack of communication between them and the competent authorities and services keeps the victims in a stressful and anxious state, as they have no information regarding their status or the ongoing procedure (GRETA, 2025). Police officers lack training, and when they conduct interviews with potential victims, it can result in re-traumatization and create an unfavourable environment for the prosecution of the criminals. Consequently, the conviction rate remains very low and continues to decrease (GRETA, 2025). The NAP is lacking funding, as there is no separate budget allocated for its implementation, the MCG doesn't meet up often and lacks transparency when it comes to publishing reports (GRETA, 2025).

2.2.2. In the Turkish Cypriot territories

In the north, the legal framework is weaker: there is no comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation, and the only legal instruments are the Criminal Code (Fasıl 154, Article 254), the Work Permits for Foreigners Legislation (63/2006), and the legislation on **Night Clubs and Such Entertainment Places (7/2000**). Sex trafficking was only criminalized in 2020, with the addition of Article 254 to the Criminal Code, which aims to address THB by criminalizing

forced labour and trafficking, and providing penalties of up to 16 years of imprisonment for convicted traffickers. The Legislation on nightclubs and Such Entertainment Places prohibits prostitution in nightclubs, forcing women into prostitution, detaining women against their will for the purposes of prostitution, and pimping. Regarding international compliance, the Turkish Cypriot authorities also ratified the Palermo Protocol in April 2018, which showcases their willingness to meet international standards when tackling human trafficking (Human Rights Platform, 2022).

However, the law enforcement is quite lax: the nightclubs legislation stipulates that dances are the only kind of entertainment allowed, but in reality, the powerful nightclub industry is where most of the sex trafficking is happening. It is detailed in the anti-trafficking monitoring reports *Nowhere is safe !* published in 2022 and 2023 by the Human Rights Platform that the law, despite its explicit condemnation of prostitution, enables sex exploitation by allowing the police to confiscate the passports of women employed in the nightclubs and mandating regular medical checks for STD for these women. This institutionalizes their exploitation under the guise of public health regulation, as women are usually not allowed to talk during these medical checks and are always accompanied by their pimps or the security guards working at the nightclubs, which prevents them from speaking up. The legislation for work permit for foreigners prohibits workers from changing employers, which increases the risk for workers to be trapped in exploitative conditions and creates and environment favourable to trafficking (Human Rights Platform, 2022).

According to the law, there is an explicit right given to victims for delayed prosecution while the human trafficking investigation is ongoing, but very often, this right is not respected, and many abuses are perpetrated. Victims are often deported after they denounce the exploitation they are enduring, officially under the excuse of expired visas, and the only protection provided by the current framework is not implemented. There are no shelters, no legal aid, and victims receive very limited social protection. NGOs such as the Human Rights Platform and the Refugee Rights Association (RRA) are the primary providers of support and services to victims. However, they have limited funding and capacity, and when the victims are not deported, the lack of support available puts them in a situation of vulnerability, leaving them isolated and dealing with the risk of re-victimization. As a result, the victims chose to stay silent and not report any abuse, fearing deportation or worse (Human Rights Platform, 2023).

The lack of comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation represents a legal barrier that stops the victims from receiving the protection, the legal and social support, and the residence permits

they need. As they have no rights, and the only article providing them with protection is very badly implemented, they prefer not to refer to the authorities, and many cases remain unidentified. There is no training of police officers on THB, as there is no law allowing for this training or establishing a separate Anti-Trafficking police unit. During my internship, the Turkish Cypriot researchers I knew told me about a past police unit dedicated to violence against women: the Violence Against Women Unit (VAMU), a specialized unit where members were trained on gender violence and working closely with the Nicosia Shelter for Domestic Violence Victims. This unit was successful, leading to multiple prosecuted cases and convictions, demonstrating that good training on a specific issue can be a success. However, the moment influential individuals started to be prosecuted, politicians or businessmen, a political backlash followed, which led to the transfer of the members of this unit to other units, while they were replaced by new, untrained, and non-enthusiastic members. This case shows how important it is for a police unit to be properly trained on such a specific topic, highlighting the need for a dedicated Anti-Trafficking Police unit. The interconnection with the Civil Society and dedicated shelters is one of the most important good practices when combating THB, and this can be done within the current legislation. The main obstacles, as showcased in this example, are the lack of political will, the rampant corruption, and the entanglement of powerful individuals with criminal networks, which annihilates any measures implemented against these violent behaviours and trafficking networks.

2.3. Media and Human Trafficking

As the internet has reshaped the world we live in, the media have become omnipresent, for the best and the worst. They play a major role in the industry of sex trafficking, as they can help prevent trafficking by spreading awareness and educating the general audience, but if the coverage is done without ethics, they can also support the trafficking industry by reinforcing stereotypes and framing the issue in a way that negatively impact trafficked persons.

Media are prevalent when it comes to educating the public on the multiple manifestations of trafficking in persons, mobilizing public support, and bringing social change. The media have the power to educate the public about the phenomenon of human trafficking, especially the at-risk population, about their rights and the common recruitment scams, and can train everyone to recognize early signs of trafficking and how to seek help. Some investigations manage to track trafficking routes, notice new trafficking strategies emerging, and can even result in the exposure of criminal networks and trafficking rings. There is a need for compassionate and

well-informed journalism in order to prevent sex trafficking: the process has to be ethics entered and fact-based to describe this phenomenon accurately and without getting entangled with any political influence (White, 2017). If the covering is done ethically, the media can really empower survivors by portraying their stories, highlighting the challenges that they face, and covering the story in court. The role of the media is closely related to the role of the public regarding reporting trafficking, as they help educate the audience to recognize the signs of sexual exploitation in someone and where to report it (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008).

Sound of Freedom is a strong example of how investigative journalism can disrupt the sex trafficking industry: instead of sensationalizing or oversimplifying the issue, which can happen when portraying sex trafficking, the documentary brings the spotlight on the voices of survivors, which allows them to describe their narratives and vocalize the complexity of their experiences. Survivors are humanized rather than portrayed them as passive victims, and the structural conditions that contribute to trafficking, such as poverty, gender inequality, and migration vulnerabilities, are highlighted which avoids portraying trafficking as isolated criminal acts and instead exposes the systemic failures that allow it to persist. The project also serves as a tool for advocacy. Survivor narratives collected and shared through the project have contributed to awareness campaigns, influenced policy discussions, and educated professionals. When collaborating with NGOs, educators, and policymakers, ethical journalism can have a social impact. Journalism offers survivors a platform without retraumatizing them or exploiting their experiences, respecting their dignity and increasing the credibility and depth of the reporting. In this study, using *Sound of Freedom* as an example of how journalism can help disrupting the sex trafficking system by empowering survivors, exposing systemic issues, and contributing to advocacy, I tried to understand how relevant and solution-oriented the media portrayal of the trafficking industry in Cyprus was and if there was a similar relationship between journalism, the police and civil organization societies.

Nonetheless, as useful as the media can be, if the coverage of sex trafficking is not done in an ethical and fact-based way, it can also turn into a support of the trafficking industry by propagating harmful narratives, reinforcing stereotypes, and misrepresenting traffickers and victims, provoking the marginalization of the latter. Misrepresentation happens through incomplete or inaccurate portrayals of trafficking victims, which negatively shape people's perception of them and can result in violent and discriminatory behaviours towards them. This may happen if journalists choose to present the issue of sex trafficking through sensationalized

narratives, instead of facts, statistics, and accurate portrayals of victims (Houston-Kolnik, Soibatian, & Shattell, 2020). It has been reported that human trafficking stories with a sex angle were more likely to get coverage than other forms of trafficking, which represents an issue when it comes to reporting and discussing the bigger problem of modern slavery. Lots of journalists integrate explicit images of violence or sex in their articles, which can help the audience in understanding the gravity of the issue, but also leads to situations of voyeurism and sensationalism, reinforces clichés and narratives that can be misleading and not representative of the trafficking system. It can keep the exploitation of the victims going, as their image will be used to simplify their situation and arouse curiosity and other harmful behaviours from the audience, rather than empathy (HoustonKolnik, Soibatian, & Shattell, 2020). It has also been noticed that negative voices over immigration seem to get more media attention, which is a clear example of how politics can influence the portrayal of sex trafficking and frame it according to a perspective that will support distorted information. (White, 2017). This distortion and over-simplification fail to educate the public on how complex and severe the issue of sex trafficking is, don't demonstrate how rampant this phenomenon is and how we are all impacted by it, and lack a focus on solutions.

As Wallinger writes, *"focusing as it does on trafficking as a transnational criminal, migratory and sexual crime, the dominant discourse on trafficking overlooks serious issues of complicity on the part of capitalist governments, corporations and networks. This oversight has had severe consequences for subjects of human trafficking"* (2010). Trafficked persons end up marginalized through misrepresentation, dehumanized, and sex trafficking gets confused with human smuggling, which is a very different crime; the public get distracted from new networks and the underlying roots of this exploitation, desensitized and violent behaviours are developed against victims of trafficking, including victim-blaming and discrimination (Wallinger, 2010).

2.4. Media Effect Theories

As I analysed what was the role of the media in disrupting the sex trafficking industry, I also focused on how the media have such a big impact on the public. Living in a digital age, we are permanently overwhelmed with information through the internet, social media, online newspapers, documentaries, radio programs, the TV, etc. This permanent flux of data does have an impact on us and our perception of the world, even if it can get difficult to assess the extent of the influence it has on us, especially for social justice related cases such as sex trafficking.

In this regard, the Media Effect Theory explains the relationship between mass media and the attitudes and perceptions of societal issues by audience members (Borah, 2015). It helped me to understand how media shape our daily lives, opinions, and behaviours: as most of the time, the only way to learn about sensitive and complex topics is through the media, the influence they have on our beliefs is not to be underestimated. Here is a list of a few of these effects: the cognitive effects (how media influence our knowledge, understanding, and memory), emotional effects (how media impact our emotions and mood), attitudinal effects (how media shape our attitudes and beliefs on political and social matters), and behavioural effects (how media impact our behaviour positively or negatively). Two of these media effects theories are commonly used in the study of political communication: framing and agenda-setting (Borah, 2015).

The Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that media provide information and influence which information becomes important to audience members, underlining the role of mass media when shaping the agenda of decision makers and influencing policy making and the general judgment of problem importance (Cook et al., 1983). This theory is explained by the fact that media coverage is limited: there is not enough time in one day to cover all the issues in the world, so media outlets will have to choose what they emphasize on, which leads the public into perceiving some issues as more important than other (Wallinger. 2010). The media's attention to specific issues influences not only the public's perception of this issue but also the decision makers' perception of how the public views the importance of the issue, influencing them into believing that policy action was necessary or not. This theory supports that the importance given by the public to an element is heavily influenced, if not determined, by how covered and highlighted it is by the media. It altered governmental policy elites' perception of the issue's importance, their belief that policy action was necessary, and their perception of the public's view of issue importance.

Often considered as an extension of the agenda-setting theory, Framing Theory explains that the presentation of information influences the audience's perceptions and choices: the way information is framed impacts the way people understand and interpret it, which will eventually impact their behaviours. As media outlets describe new events using familiar context and narrow contextualization, the audience members can interpret these new items according to their past experiences and knowledge. Frameworks help audience members interpret data, and according to the angle and lenses used by media outlets to describe the new phenomenon, it happens that media emphasize, reduce, or oversimplify some phenomenon (Arowolo, 2017).

2.5. Gender and Migration in trafficking discourse

As aforementioned, the sex trafficking industry in Cyprus is a sensitive issue because of the separation of the island, the Green Line favouring transnational crime because of the disparity of legal anti-frameworks creating gaps between the north and the south. Moreover, most of the victims of sex trafficking are Third-Country National (TCN) women, which adds a layer of complexity to the issue of sex trafficking, as the response has to include a gender-dimension and a culturally sensitive approach, in a society where the norms are influenced by a growing racism and a deeply rooted misogyny.

Some victims of trafficking manage to escape the north and immediately cross the Green Line to apply for the victim status; as the Republic of Cyprus is part of the European Union, the recognized victims are entitled to rights, housing, financial, legal, and social support. But the RoC is lacking proper help for Victims of Trafficking (VoT): all illegals crossing the Green Line end up at the Pournara reception centre, where VoT are mixed up with migrants and refugees. The entanglement of the migrants' flows and the VoTs creates a general confusion, and trafficking often gets confused with smuggling, which oversimplifies a very complex and nuanced issue. Plus, the lack of cooperation and transparency from each side of the Green Line creates an extremely taboo and difficult situation: victims get even more ignored than usual, especially in the northern part of the island, where traffickers get away with their crimes easily, as shown by the low rate of conviction. Because of the overwhelming amount of people staying at Pournara, the understaffing of the reception centre, and the lack of proper and comprehensive training for the staff members, VoT are not always detected and cannot benefit from their status and rights as victims. Staff members are not trained enough on the cultural differences from victims coming from a non-European background, such as Central Asia or Africa: as a result, when they conduct interviews with potential victims of trafficking who escaped from the north and they hear testimonies mentioning witchcraft or Voodoo, they don't understand that religion has been used as a way to assert psychological and emotional dominance over the victims. They consider them unreliable, unable to testimony in court, and the prosecutions are not taken further. On top of that, as most of the victims of sex trafficking are women and girls, there is a need for a gender-based approach that is, for the moment, missing: *"women and men are not equally integrated and protected under asylum processes"* (Kaili, 2021). Women, especially vulnerable women, underage, pregnant or with children, are not supported as they need, they do not benefit from childcare, which means that they cannot go to work as they have to take care of the kids; it is harder for them to find an accommodation, as landlords discriminate VoT

and the shelter system is not adapted to women who are pregnant or mother. The financial support provided to single mothers is reported to be inadequate. There is no fast communication between them and the competent authorities, which leaves them in an anxious and stressful state.

The lack of culture-sensitive and gender-based approach can be put in correlation with the conflictual past of Cyprus and generalized racist and misogynistic behaviours. To fully grasp its complexity and to understand the impact of the political context and societal norms, this study incorporates elements of Conflict Studies and Intersectional Feminist Theories as theoretical frames. Adopting a feminist lens allowed me to understand sex trafficking as shaped by gendered power structures (Walby, 1990), especially in the Cypriot society where the patriarchy and misogynistic behaviours are still the norms. Judith Butler argues that gender is socially constructed through norms that shape which bodies become vulnerable to exploitation, according to the male dominance (Butler, 1990). Moreover, the feminist approach based on intersectionality understands racism, colonialism, sexism, and ethnicity as factors of gender inequality, and portray the non-white women experiences as an overlaying of multiple categories including race and cultural identity. These overlapping systems of power create unique vulnerabilities and forms of marginalization that cannot be understood through gender or race alone. As most of the victims of sex trafficking in Cyprus are women from African and Asian countries, traffickers use cultural, misogynistic and racist bias against them to make them even more vulnerable and less heard in case they tried to speak up. In this context, I judged relevant to use Intersectional Feminism, as it understands victims as a non-homogenous group, using culture and colonial history to portray them more accurately and to analyse the sex trafficking industry as an oppressive system shaped by both gender and racial hierarchy (Crenshaw, 1989). The system of gender and social inequalities is reproduced in institutional practices and in the treatment of female VoTs that I previously detailed, which explains how survivors' experiences and positions in society are shaped by dominant norms and hierarchies. Consequently, trafficking has to be thought as structural violence and cannot be separated from global patterns of inequality, migration and racial vulnerability (O'Connell Davidson, 2015), especially in Cyprus where migration flows and culture bias shape this crime.

To intersectional feminist theory, I added elements of Conflict Studies: the concept of Structural Violence as defined by Galtung provides a lens through which I analyse how Cyprus' division and its unresolved political conflict influence present-day governance migration policies, and public perceptions of trafficking. Structural violence can be defined as the *"manipulation of the meaning framework within which individuals and communities live"* (Jones, 2011, p133).

In the given context of Cyprus, the Island has been split in two, creating the north and the Republic of Cyprus, and Nicosia is still today divided by the Green Line. This conflictual past, being never resolved, created structural violence around the opposition of Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Greeks and Turks. This violence shows through the rejection of a collaboration between the north and the south of the island, creating a perfect setting for trafficking rings to operate. Later, Jones describes the effects of structural violence as patterns that affected the lives of people, rather than events themselves. The parts of the population that find themselves affected by structural violence suffer through a process with no clearly identifiable culprits, but a steady process (Jones, 2011). In Cyprus, using the concept of structural violence helped me to understand the treatment of victims of trafficking as suffering from direct violence (the trafficking itself) as well as structural violence, especially how trafficking is perceived and tolerated by the society, or how VoT aren't properly taken care of once they got out of the ring. Azar's theory of Protracted Social Conflict helps situate trafficking within the island's unresolved ethnic tensions, demonstrating how weak cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities facilitates criminal networks. Protracted social conflict can be defined as a set of conditions that transform non-conflictual situations into conflictual ones. Among these factors Azar notices communal content, which is when a multi-communal society has been formed because of divide-and-rule policies from former colonial powers (Azar, 1990). It can happen that, in multi-communal societies, the government doesn't represent the interests of all groups, which creates a gap between the state (usually dominated by one single group that is unresponsive of the needs of others) and the society. The state not being able to guarantee everyone under its jurisdiction to meet their basic needs is another of Azar's factors (Azar, 1990). This is exactly what is happening in Cyprus, as the polarization of the political landscape is the result of the British colonial power that put the Greek and the Turks against each other's for decades. Nowadays, the current government doesn't represent the interests of the diverse population of Cyprus, including the multiple ethnicities living on the island, and the current framework does not integrate well migrants, which put them in a situation of vulnerability and creates a general resentment. Conflict studies, thought the theories of structural violence and protracted social conflict, helped me understand trafficking in Cyprus in a broader societal context, and I was able to analyse better how the unstable political landscape produces the conditions that the traffickers exploit, such as unequal protections, legal gaps and restricted mobility. Together with intersectional feminism, these frameworks helped me situate the experiences of women VoTs within both gendered social structures and the broader political dynamics of conflict, offering a deeper understanding of how systemic factors constrain survivors' opportunities for protection and empowerment.

2.6. Gaps in literature and importance of the study

As I analysed, media outlets play a massive role in investigating sex trafficking, and media reporting can be part of the response to tackle the trafficking industry. However, the situation in Cyprus is especially sensitive regarding the extremely polarized political landscape that may impact the way media portray the issue. Media are likely to be more biased according to their political views and the agenda they support, and self-reflection is almost non-existent. It is challenging to get information on such a sensitive topic, due to the language barrier between English, Turkish, and Greek. The RoC and the north governments' unwillingness to cooperate and publish statistics and reports is also an obstacle, and the media have quite limited opportunities to research the neglected topic of sex trafficking. It has been recorded by the Turkish Cypriot NGO Human Rights Platform that their legal advisor wasn't allowed by the police to interview victims of trafficking during an investigation, and that a TC police officer shouted at the advisor, attempting to intimidate her and subjecting her to disrespectful behaviour (Human Rights Platform, 2022). Everything was done to prevent the NGO from accessing the testimony of the victim, while the victims were deported less than 24 hours after this happened. This is a common procedure for cases where women are victims of sexual exploitation in nightclubs (Human Rights Platform, 2022). Among the many challenges they deal with, Cypriot journalists may face threats from the criminals they oppose, as well as pressure and censorship from governments involved in corruption and trafficking rings. Media outlets don't receive enough funding. As it has already happened with the VAMU, they may find themselves stopped by the government, authorities (police, army), businessmen, or NGOs entangled in trafficking networks who want to keep control of the narrative by applying pressure on journalists.

So far, no study has been done about the accuracy of the coverage of sex trafficking in Cyprus by Cypriot newspapers, despite how prominent this issue is. There might be a gap between the mainstream media narratives about trafficking and the actual trafficking situation, a result of the previously mentioned elements about the gender and migration dimension, and the political sensitivity of this complex phenomenon. There is a need for a better understanding of the relationship between Greek and Turkish Cypriot media, each one facing their own challenges depending on the legal framework and political context, and the trafficking industry, as the latter has become a bigger problem in Cyprus year after year. This study aims to understand and analyse this relationship and draw some recommendations for best practices for committed media outlets that investigate sex trafficking in Cyprus.

III. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for this study: it covers the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, analysis procedure, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

Sex trafficking in Cyprus is a multi-layered issue rooted in the island's political landscape, conflictual past, and societal realities. To understand if media outlets report the issue of sex trafficking accurately, this study is split in three phases and adopts a multi-method qualitative approach, suitable for complex social issues involving power, representation, and institutional dynamics (Creswell, 2014).

First comes an analysis of newspaper articles to understand how local media outlets portray the issue of sex trafficking within Cyprus and to identify patterns in media coverage. I focused on articles published in English by both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot newspapers about sex trafficking within Cyprus, which helped me identify the mainstream narratives and most recurrent patterns, the language used to describe the victims and the traffickers, and the uncovered trafficking mechanisms. I tried to determine to what extent newspapers are biased by their political views and if it impacts the way they cover the issue of sex trafficking. By using a combination of both media content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, I used qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the rhetorical devices used when covering the issue of sex trafficking, portraying the victims, the systemic causes, and the influence of Cyprus' political situation. Content analysis identifies recurring themes in newspaper coverage, while CDA situates these patterns within Cyprus's political and cultural context, exposing how narratives around victims and traffickers reflect underlying gender and power relations. Combining them avoids the risk of reducing media analysis to frequency counts or, conversely, to isolated textual interpretations, and it links empirical patterns with deeper socio-political meaning (Fairclough, 1995). Details of the data analysis are explained in section 3.3.

Then, I conducted semi-structured interviews with front-line workers in tackling sex trafficking to understand their experience of being part of the anti-trafficking mechanism, and how they describe this issue based on their knowledge. While media content analysis underlines public narratives, semi-structured interviews use personal and professional insights to develop other narratives, which is interesting and relevant when researching sensitive topics and when participant interviews need to be explored in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This strategy develops diverse perspectives from experts who worked with survivors, contributing to a more

nuanced understanding of the topic of sex trafficking, as their voices are often ignored when it comes to portraying sex trafficking. These semi-structured interviews, centred on their experience and perception of how accurately media outlets portray their story, focus on the gaps present in the main narratives while allowing flexibility in investigating this sensitive and understudied topic, in order to provide deeper insights about mainstream representations and draw a critical analysis of media narratives.

Finally, I used the method of triangulation to compare the front-line workers' narratives, less known and non-mainstream, to those supported by the media in order to understand how accurately Cypriot newspapers portray sex trafficking in Cyprus. The method, theorized by Denzin, enhances credibility and understands if the narratives align with or challenge each other, the impacts on policymaking and public awareness, and what best practices media outlets could adopt to improve their impact (Denzin, 1978). The combination of these methods highlights gaps or convergences between media portrayals and real-life experiences, as well as systemic challenges in addressing sex trafficking.

3.2. Data Collection

The study's data collection is gathered from primary sources: articles published by Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot newspapers about sexual exploitation and human trafficking in Cyprus, and semi-structured interviews with NGO workers, to give us a first-hand account of the phenomenon of sex trafficking within Cyprus.

3.2.1. Media Analysis

The first part of this study is made of a media corpus that gathers articles about sex trafficking within Cyprus published in English by Greek and Turkish Cypriot newspapers from 2021 to 2025. As the island of Cyprus is administered by both Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities, and the two communities have been facing the issue of sex trafficking, media outlets from both sides of the Green Line have covered this phenomenon. However, influenced by their own political views and agenda, and facing different kinds of sex trafficking, they have developed different narratives, which makes it interesting and relevant to compare them to each other before confronting them with the narratives of experts, as it gives us an insight into the challenges that each community is facing. The more specific and detailed our analysis is and the easier it will be to understand how to improve the media coverage of THB within Cyprus.

A total of 85 articles has been sampled, which were selected from the following criteria: written in English, published between 2021 and 2025, published by a Greek Cypriot or a Turkish

Cypriot newspaper, found on the website of the newspaper with the keywords « sex trafficking », « forced prostitution », « human trafficking". The timeframe from 2021 to 2025 is explained by the fact that human trafficking was only criminalized in the north of Cyprus in 2020, and the first article about it to be written by a TC newspaper was published in 2021. The following newspapers have been selected: Cyprus Mail, In-Cyprus, and Knews. These articles cover the main aspects of sex trafficking, such as trafficking incidents, arrests of traffickers, and government interventions, and international policy measures. Articles are thematically organized: victim and trafficker representation, systemic causes, and the government's (lack of) accountability.

I chose to focus on English published newspapers, first because I don't speak Turkish or Greek, and also because newspapers are the media outlets that have done the most reporting about the trafficking industry, and the newspapers selected are all widely spread and popular on the island, which was interesting for me as I looked to understand the relation between media presentation and audience perception. The more popular the newspaper, the broader the audience, and the more impactful the reporting, which made it easier and more interesting for me to underline the correlation between the portrayal of sex trafficking and the behaviour of audience members resulting from (or provoking) this portrayal. The Cyprus Mail, founded in 1945, leans to the right-wing and covers all type of news; Knews has been operating since 2000, covers local news from Cyprus and remains politically neutral; In-Cyprus covers all kind of news and has been working since 2001. Kibris Postasi was founded in 2001 and has the largest audience among the Turkish Cypriot population. These media, translated in both the local language and English, reach the largest audience and the diversity of their political orientation gave me a broad range of opinions, allowing me to get as close as possible to a neutral and detailed covering of the trafficking industry in Cyprus.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Another source of data is semi-structured interviews with specialists, which allowed me a better insight into the experience of the anti-trafficking mechanism and expertise on the issue. As this study aimed to identify gaps in the mainstream narratives spread by newspapers, the knowledge from front-line workers underlined the aspects of the sex trafficking industry that are usually left out by media outlets and remain unknown to the public. I used semi-structured interviews as they provide sufficient structure to important core themes while allowing participants the freedom to describe complex and sensitive experiences in their own terms (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The flexibility of this method made it useful for studying trafficking, migration, and gender-based violence. The use of purposive and snowball sampling

aligns with qualitative research targeting specialized professional communities (Bryman, 2016).

I conducted six interviews: four with Greek Cypriot professionals, including one staff member working with a shelter for women victims of violence, one member of the Anti-Trafficking police unit, one member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, and one social advisor of the Pournara reception centre; two with Turkish Cypriot researchers from the Refugee Rights Association during a joint interview. There is some asymmetry is the selection of the interviewees as my Turkish Cypriot interviewees are only researchers while my Greek Cypriot interviewees are NGO and public administration workers. This choice is due to the very low acceptance rate that my invitations faced: as Cyprus is a small island, speaking up against trafficking, even anonymously, can be dangerous (especially in the north of Cyprus where the government is closely related to trafficking rings). Scared of consequences, most of the workers and researchers I contacted declined an interview, which explains why the range of my interviewees ended up being quite broad. Considering how difficult it is to find experts willing to publicly speak up about this crime and to face the consequences of it, getting in touch with them is a great progress and it did give me great and nuanced insights.

All my interviewees have been found according to the relevance of their jobs within the anti-trafficking field. The Pournara Centre is a reception centre for asylum seekers arriving in the Republic of Cyprus, and emerges as a major structure gathering migration flows, vulnerability and potentially exploitation dynamics. The Cyprus Media Ethics Committee is the independent press council responsible for the self-regulation of media in the Republic of Cyprus, playing an important role in shaping issues such as trafficking, migration or gender violence. The Anti-Trafficking Police department has been working since 2004 to investigate cases of human trafficking happening in the RoC. The Refugee Rights Association addresses deficiencies in asylum law and refugee protection in the north of Cyprus, and supports the project United Action Against Human Trafficking, helping to raise awareness and to support victims of trafficking. I chose to interview front-line workers from these structures as they were the only ones who positively answered my request. These interviews have been done in person, online through Zoom or Teams, or by phone, according to the availability of the participants. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1h30, and participants were recruited by invitation emails, according to purposive sampling (they were based on their relevance to the topic of sex trafficking) and snowball sampling (some of them were recommended to me by MIGS, and some interviewees referred me to their colleagues or acquaintances). To respect research ethics, the invitation email sent to participants included the purpose of the study and an informed

consent form promising anonymity to the interviewees, to be returned signed by the participant. All interviews have been recorded and safely stored, making sure that the anonymity of the interviewees would be respected.

Emails also included an interview guide, detailing the questions asked during the interview, which were articulated around three main themes: media representation of the issue of sex trafficking (if the interviewees read newspapers covering sex trafficking and what do they think of the language used by media outlets and the representation made of the victims and traffickers according to their own experience), political landscape (if the different political dynamics of the island influence media reporting) and recommendations for best practices. These questions aimed to confront the mainstream portrayal of the sex trafficking industry to identify whether newspapers reinforce stereotypes or call out systemic weaknesses and understand if underlying issues such as government accountability and legal frameworks are properly addressed or overshadowed by sensational narratives.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study, to properly understand how newspapers shape the views of the public on sex trafficking, required a dual approach made of both qualitative and quantitative methods, which was made possible by a combination of media content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Media content analysis is a sub-set of content analysis specializing in mass media content initially thought by Harold Lasswell to study propaganda following a “who says what to whom” model (Macnamara, 2018). It is defined by Neuendorf (2017) as a message-centred methodology, initially used to study the portrayals of racism, violence or the representation of women in movies. Using this framework and its sampling methods allowed me to identify patterns and understand the analytical focus on how newspapers construct trafficking discourse across a large volume of media texts. Content analysis was particularly suited for media research because it allowed quantitative frequency mapping as well as qualitative categorization, both of which were used in this study (Neuendorf, 2017). Critical Discourse Analysis examined how power relations are embedded in media language, informing me on how newspapers reproduce national biases or political agendas in representation of sex trafficking (Fairclough, 1995). Given Cyprus’ layered conflict history, a discourse-historical approach helped me contextualize media narratives within long-standing ethnopolitical divisions following (Wodak, 2001). By grouping articles into themed categories such as victim

representation, systemic causes, and policymaking, content analysis used quantitative methods to identify patterns in coverage, such as the frequency with which particular themes were mentioned or given priority. Content analysis mapped the data, and CDA added a critical dimension by interpreting these patterns, identifying frames used in reporting, such as criminal justice and immigration control, the articles' language, tone, framing, and imagery. Language being shaped by social norms, cultural values, power structures, bias, and subjectivity, the way the information is described matters as much as the information itself. CDA critically analyses the social context of the information being told, the narrative, structure, lexicon, and moment in time, in order to detect underlying power structures, political views, historical, cultural, and political factors that influence discourse, to understand how they both shape and reflect social realities. (Fairclough, 1995). A criticism of the framing analysed whether newspapers sensationalize the victims' experiences, developed empathy for them, or blamed and marginalized them. Imagery allowed me to understand if images or pictures reinforced prejudices or gave victims a human face. Through these techniques, the media analysis evaluated whether the newspapers' coverage supports systemic change or reinforces harmful narratives.

As the issue of sex trafficking in Cyprus is a multi-layered issue due to its human rights, gender, and political dimensions, there was a need for a multi-theoretical analysis of how the media portrays it, to understand if media reporting in Cyprus actually has an impact when disrupting the trafficking industry. Throughout this study, I included elements of Agenda Setting to underline how and which narratives are constructed, which political views are prioritized, and most importantly, if media outlets accurately portray the phenomenon of sex trafficking in Cyprus. As previously mentioned, I also used Feminist and Conflict Studies Theory: Feminist theory highlighted how gendered power structures and social inequalities shape the treatment of female VoTs and showed the importance of examining gendered inequalities and centring marginalized voices. Conflict studies showed how Cyprus's ethnic division and unresolved political tensions influence governance, migration policies, and social vulnerability (Azar, 1990), which directly affects media discourse and trafficking dynamics. Combined, these frameworks situated women's experiences within intersecting gendered and political dynamics, revealing how systemic factors limited survivors' protection and empowerment.

Thematic analysis has been used for semi-structured interviews, following a hybrid approach of deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) frameworks. As I compared Greek and Turkish Cypriot perspectives on the same issues, an inductive framework was beneficial, as it let the themes emerge from the findings without any pre-set categories, which was great for an

under-studied topic since some areas are still unknown. If I only used inductive framework, I was scared that the mentioned topics would be too different and unable to compare with each other, so I implemented themes (media misconception, victim support system gaps, institutional barriers) to organize the comparison, but I did let some flexibility in the way I categorized the findings, so I could still notice if a theme I haven't thought was mentioned.

I looked for similarities and differences when I compared the findings from the media content analysis and the interviews, using the triangulation method by Denzin. The similarities (how many of them and which ones) helped me understand if newspapers accurately reported the sex trafficking industry in Cyprus, and the gaps underlined which areas and parts of this crime were not covered enough. To compare the mainstream narrative to the experience and point of view from experts working with survivors revealed other themes, giving depth and nuance to the portrayal of sex trafficking. For instance, dimensions that were likely to be ignored by media outlets, such as the structural, gendered, and racial aspects of trafficking, were uncovered thanks to the experts' opinions, analysis of reporting techniques, and perceptions of media representation. I also looked for similarities and gaps in media reporting and experts' analysis between the north and the south of the island: they faced the same issue but not in the same way, as they don't have the same framework and the same support system for victims. Comparing findings was interesting to understand the difference in perception of this crime by audience members, as well as to draw some recommendations on what to improve.

3.4. Fieldwork

To gain knowledge and experience in the field of human rights in Cyprus and enrich my study, I did an internship at MIGS, the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, a feminist research centre focusing on Human Rights and Gender Equality. I was applying for an internship in NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) related to human rights (especially helping migrants) after I completed my Erasmus semester at the University of Nicosia. I had in mind that if I were in touch with migrants and refugees coming from the north and having crossed the Green Line, I would have gained a valuable insight and understood better how vulnerable they were, what challenges they were facing, and what best practices could be implemented to improve the system. Maybe I could manage to get in touch with potential victims, which would be extremely useful for me. However, I was getting rejected by most of these organizations, their teams being already full. I received a few offers for interviews, but eventually, I felt like this was not what I was looking for: most of the opportunities offered to me were not in direct relation to vulnerable persons, and I would be handling paperwork for the company more than

doing fieldwork. I ended up applying for the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS): one of my teachers at university had recommended me to MIGS when I presented him a draft of my work on sex trafficking in Cyprus, mentioning that they had done research on the topic before, and they could be an interesting source for me. After visiting their website, I did find interesting reports and studies about sex trafficking in Cyprus, especially about the challenges faced by victims, and advocating for the integration of a gender-based perspective when addressing trafficking and supporting victims, as most of them are female. I applied for an internship at MIGS, which offered me an interview during which they explained to me that they had been commissioned by the EU to conduct an assessment study about the antitrafficking mechanism in the north and in the south of the island. This assessment study would require the help of Turkish Cypriot researchers, on the basis of Bi-Communal cooperation. Because I was writing my thesis on a very similar topic, the MIGS team decided to offer me an opportunity as an intern: I would work for MIGS, and I could use the findings of my work for my own thesis as well. I accepted and completed a 15-week internship. This internship was what made me able to achieve my thesis: I gained a lot of knowledge by working with the MIGS team. It was my first experience as a researcher, and while MIGS has been around for 25 years and all their team members were extremely knowledgeable, I was able to develop a feminist culture and perspective that helped me growing as a woman, as a feminist, and as a professional. I benefited from the MIGS network to get in touch with Turkish Cypriot researchers and Greek Cypriot front-line workers (police members, shelter staff members, and many others), which has been a massive help for me when I conducted my interviews. I was given do attend conferences and workshops about diverse topics, all related to the broad field of feminism, and when it came to write the assessment study as well as my own thesis, my colleagues were always super helpful and willing to answer my questions and correct my language, knowing the challenge of writing about this topic in such a complex political landscape.

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

As I was getting deeper into the topic of sex trafficking in Cyprus, I found myself facing many challenges, and this study presents some limitations due to how complex the topic of investigating sex trafficking is.

It was part of my initial plan to conduct interviews on both front-line workers and victims of trafficking, to have the most precise and accurate narrative about the trafficking in Cyprus: who

better than the victims to talk about that phenomenon? However, I decided to not do it for two reasons: first, I needed an ethical committee clearance to be allowed to get in touch with victims, which I would not be able to get in a few months only as it is a lengthy process; second, I was not trained to conduct this kind of interviews, as it is a very sensitive topic and victims have to be approached and interviewed according to an adequate and comprehensive procedure in order to avoid re-traumatization. I realized that I was not qualified, trained, and educated enough to get in touch with victims, and I got scared to re-traumatize them, preferring to focus on professionals working with them who could share their perspectives.

By doing a content analysis of English-language Cypriot newspapers, the study benefited from an in-depth examination of the general perception of the issue of sex trafficking but faced some limitations: English-language newspapers may not be representative of all Cypriot media outlets and the way they cover sex trafficking. Moreover, nowadays newspapers are not the main source of information anymore: through the Internet and TV, information available online, such as documentary films, radio programs, online blogs, and social media information accounts, is at least as popular as newspapers among audience members. I may find myself limited in my findings, as maybe audio-visual media in Greek or Turkish portray sex trafficking in Cyprus in a different way than newspapers, and this study might not be able to represent all media and all newspapers published in Cyprus. Moreover, when I was sampling Turkish Cypriot newspapers, one of them, LGC News, got taken down, and I lost half of my data for Turkish Cypriot (TC) newspapers, leaving me with only one of them. I faced difficulties when gathering TC data, because the issue is barely covered by media outlets, and the government doesn't publish any reports about anti-trafficking mechanisms. All my information came from Turkish Cypriot NGOs, such as Human Rights Platform and Refugee Rights Association, which publish reports about it. Consequently, I faced difficulties to find sources when contextualizing the trafficking industry in Cyprus: my main sources were articles from newspapers as, especially in the north of the island, the government is entangled with trafficking rings. There were no reports done by the state on the topic (only the *Nowhere is safe !* series by NGOs), and most of my knowledge on the topic has been collected through newspapers or during my fieldwork, when things were unofficially discussed with my colleagues.

A very important ethical consideration in this study was to integrate both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot perspectives. The international narrative about Cyprus, its history, and the current situation is extremely inaccurate. Turkish Cypriot voices are mixed up with the Turkish perspective, even though they have an extremely different history, relation with Cyprus, and

perspective on the current Cyprus situation. Many tend to assimilate Turkish Cypriots to the Turkish community that invaded the island in 1974 and has been occupying a third of it since then, pushing away the Greek Cypriots living there. However, it is not known that the Turkish invasion was a response to a coup that was organized by the armed Greek far right, concluding years of Greek and Greek Cypriots trying to push away the Turkish Cypriot community, to withdraw their rights to co-lead the island, and terrorizing them using armed groups such as EOKA A and EOKA B. It is never mentioned as well that the Turkish Cypriot community, instead of being helped by Turkey, got even more oppressed: the Turkish government keeps interfering, which created a severe political instability, and Turkish people keep moving to Northern Cyprus, making the Turkish Cypriots not only a minority, but a disappearing minority. The internationally unrecognized status of the territories led by the Turkish Cypriot authorities makes it extremely challenging for Turkish Cypriots to make their voices heard, as they get demonized, and to implement proper law enforcement, because of the Turkish semi control and interference. However, both Turkish and Greek Cypriots are affected by the issue of sex trafficking. Due to the correlation between the increase in sex trafficking and the gaps in legal frameworks between the north and the south of the island, the solution to tackling sex trafficking lies in a Bi-Communal cooperation, hence my desire to equally highlight the two perspectives. This was not easy: sex trafficking being a dangerous topic, not so many people, even the activists, agree to be interviewed about it. Lots of my invitation emails were left without an answer, especially when I tried to contact journalists. Greek Cypriot journalists did not answer my emails, while Turkish Cypriot journalists were simply impossible to identify, as they publish their articles anonymously to avoid being targeted by criminal networks. Other Turkish Cypriot experts did not answer, and the few who agreed to meet me mentioned potential intimidation from the authorities or the criminal networks themselves.

The last big challenge I had to overcome was the writing of this study. This topic being entangled with Cypriot politics, language is extremely important: each word has a political influence. For instance, I am not allowed to use the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) to refer to the north, it is an illegal state, but if I refer to it as just the north, I will offend those who think that the TRNC is as valid as the Republic of Cyprus and has the right to exist. Choosing the proper language to cover this issue in Cypriot politics is an extremely sensitive process, and I needed my Cypriot acquaintances to correct my work and advise me with appropriate language alternatives.

IV. Analysis

4.1. Media Representation of Sex Trafficking in Cyprus

Using a multi-layered theoretical framework, I started with an analysis of articles published by Greek and Turkish Cypriot English-speaking newspapers about sex trafficking within Cyprus between January 2021 and March 2025, to get a deep insight into how the Cypriot society perceives the crime of sexual exploitation, what main narratives are drawn by popular newspapers, and how media representation shapes the general understanding of the trafficking industry. Content analysis, Agenda-Setting, and Critical Discourse Analysis Theories helped me read through the articles to uncover these mainstream narratives. Content analysis was employed to track the frequency of coverage, recurring terms, and omissions across articles, while agenda-setting theory helps explained which aspects of trafficking are prioritized (crime, migration, or morality) over others, like gender or systemic exploitation. To question the underlying ideologies and rhetorical strategies, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was applied, highlighting how language choices criminalize victims or deflect responsibility from state institutions. At the same time, Conflict and Feminist Studies gave me contextual elements to understand the dynamics shaping narratives and behaviours better. Conflict studies provided a lens to understand how the Cyprus Problem shapes reporting, with trafficking often framed through nationalistic narratives that reinforce division rather than cooperation; intersectional feminist theory grounded the analysis in questions of gender and power, focusing on how women's voices are silenced, marginalized, or stereotyped in news portrayals. Taken together, these frameworks allowed for both quantitative and qualitative insights into the political, cultural, and gendered dynamics of sex trafficking coverage in Cyprus. Results are organized into three themes: the representation of victims and traffickers, the coverage of the systemic causes, and the presence of self-accountability and policymaking analysis.

4.1.1. Representation of Sex Trafficking in Greek Cypriot newspapers

- Overview

Between January 2021 and March 2025, the portrayal of sex trafficking in Cyprus in English was mainly done by three influential newspapers: Cyprus Mail, In-Cyprus, and Knews. They have published a total of 70 articles related to sex trafficking in Cyprus. In the following tab, I reported the articles published according to the year and the newspaper to analyse which

newspapers were more dedicated to covering that topic and which years were more challenging or favourable when reporting sex trafficking. The number in parentheses represents how many articles mentioned human trafficking in the headline. So far, only 3 articles have headlines explicitly mentioning sexual exploitation; for the rest of the articles, the headlines usually mention crime, human smuggling, and domestic violence.

These data give us a valuable inside: the quantity of articles published about sexual exploitation and the explicit mention of human trafficking in the headline of articles reveals a lot about the willingness of the media to clearly and publicly address this crime. So far, sexual exploitation itself was barely mentioned in the headlines, which is an issue as it is a very distinct form of trafficking: specific recruiting mechanisms are used, victims and survivors face unique challenges, and sexual exploitation is happening because of a specific set of systemic causes. It is a crime by itself, not just a sub-crime or the consequences of a broader issue, and it has to be portrayed as such, which starts by naming it.

Table 1: *Themes identified in Greek Cypriot newspapers*[1]

Newspapers	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Cyprus Mail	4 (2)	11 (7)	5 (5)	7 (4)	4 (0)	31 (18)
In-Cyprus	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (1)	9 (8)	2 (2)	17 (14)
Knews	5 (1)	3 (0)	9 (3)	3 (2)	2 (1)	22 (7)

Source: Nolwenn Martins (2025).

[1]Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of articles that mentioned human trafficking in the headline. Data extracted from *In-Cyprus, Knews and the Cyprus Mail* (2021-2025)

- Victims and Traffickers Representation

Reading articles covering sex trafficking, I noticed a strong victim-centred narrative: Greek Cypriot newspapers focused a lot on the victims, describing them as foreigners: *"Women most commonly exploited came from Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa"* (Cyprus Mail, 2024 June 26) vulnerable, helpless, trapped, coerced, women and kids, people with disabilities that are more likely to be coerced in forced labour or prostitution. The story of the victims is often detailed with an emphasis on how helpless the victims are. Sometimes it happened that victims were not described first as trafficked persons, but as migrants, as most of them passed the Green Line to seek help in the South, and then they were mentioned as victims, which is slightly inaccurate as they actually were first trafficked, and following that they used the only opportunity they had to escape trafficking.

Traffickers were sometimes mentioned in articles about convictions, but there were not many details about them, and it was difficult to get an idea of who they were. In a couple of articles, traffickers were described as foreigners, such as Romanians or Nigerians, but that is far from accurately portraying all traffickers: when the trafficker is from Cyprus, it is not mentioned.

In-Cyprus once detailed the case of a 29-year-old football player caught for human trafficking: *"The 29-year-old, who plays football for a third-division team in Limassol, was arrested at 9:30 a.m. following an outstanding court warrant (...) Investigators allege the suspect managed adult service advertisements on a well-known online platform, playing an active role in the operation"* (In-Cyprus, 2024 October 23). But that was the only time such detailed coverage has been written, and most of the time, there was little to no description of who the traffickers were. Regarding the rhetorical devices used to portray the footballer-trafficker, I noticed that the language describing the suspect and his operating mode might be a bit too soft for someone charged with *"trafficking of adults and sexual exploitation":* doesn't *"adult services advertisement"* hide a much more horrible truth than what this wordage suggests?

I noticed a similar phenomenon in the coverage of a sex trafficking story by the Cyprus Mail and Knews. Three men got convicted for sex trafficking, one of them for pimping out a minor, and one for buying sex from a victim of sex trafficking. This story took a massive importance as it was the first time a customer was convicted for buying sex from a trafficking victim: *"A Cypriot court convicted a man who paid to have sex with a human trafficking victim about two*

years ago in Nicosia in a first ruling of its kind (...) Her sexual exploitation started when she was still a minor. One of the defendants had moved her to a different district and deprived her of basic necessities to force her into prostitution. The legal service said that the trafficking victim initially provided consensual market sex services, but later these services became nonconsensual" (Cyprus Mail, 2023 June 30). The case here was a bit confusing: the victim was a displaced minor without access to basic facilities and forced into prostitution, but her sexual services were considered consensual by the legal service. This seems like a massive contradiction, and unfortunately, none of the Greek Cypriot newspapers called it out by critically analysing this statement; they all just plainly covered it without any more criticism or investigations. Instead, journalists seemed more worried about the conviction itself, that they did not forget to question: *"the law passed a year later remained controversial and vague to this day, with defendants in court trials not being allowed to argue in their defence whether they had any prior knowledge of a person being a possible trafficking victim" (*Knews, 2023 July 01). The portrayal of the teenager as *"a young female prostitute described as a trafficking victim" (*Knews, 2023 July 01) reeked of scepticism. Moreover, journalists questioning the conviction of a suspect *"found guilty for obtaining sexual services from a victim of sexual exploitation while he was also convicted on rape charges" (*Knews, 2023 July 01) rather than questioning the so-called consensual sex services of a victim of sexual exploitation showed that the priority of Greek Cypriot newspapers was not always the accurate portrayal of the trafficking industry in Cyprus.

- Systemic Causes Representation

Trafficking networks are operating in Cyprus thanks to a specific set of factors and causes, which are overall reported in detail by the media, such as its location and divided political landscape.

Cyprus was generally portrayed by English-speaking GC (Greek Cypriot) newspapers as a *"destination country"* (In-Cyprus, 2021) because of its location between Europe, Africa, and Asia, making it a hub for migration flows, trafficking networks, and a *"backdoor to the EU"* (Cyprus Mail, 2024 March 17). The entanglement between migration flux and sex trafficking was detailed, which helped understanding the trafficking industry as a multi-layered issue including a migration dimension: *"Cyprus, due to its geographical location, is the first point of entry of many immigrants to Europe and is therefore a destination country for victims of trafficking in human beings"* (Cyprus Mail, 2024 January 03). However, it happened that these two different phenomena got mixed up by journalists, creating confusion between trafficking

and smuggling. This would lead to an oversimplification of the crime of trafficking, reinforcing the general ignorance about trafficking, and even criminalizing the victims by portraying them as a potential threat in the form of illegal migrants entering the Republic of Cyprus.

Newspapers described in detail three of the most famous trafficking mechanisms based on deception: the misuse of visas, the lover boy approach, and university traps.

In-Cyprus used the story of Oxana Rantseva, a 20-year-old Russian woman found dead, to warn us about the misuse of the artist visa: *"under the 'artist visa' scheme, she had worked at a cabaret in Limassol where she was subjected to sexual exploitation"* (In-Cyprus, 2021). Women brought in Cyprus on a six-month artist visa and exploited in nightclubs and cabarets used to be the most common trafficking scheme in the Republic of Cyprus until 2008, when the artist visa was banned. Since 2008, it has often been assumed by the Cypriot population that sex trafficking disappeared from the RoC as the artist visas got banned. However, that would be wrong as trafficking is still happening, but in a more secretive way, often behind closed doors, which the media tried to alert about: *"One possible explanation is that once the pubs are closed, traffickers make use of apartments and their actions are made even more difficult to be detected"* (In-Cyprus, 2021). The use of short-term visas or tourist visas is still happening, which is another massive scheme: *"traffickers exploit short-term tourist visas available to Ukrainians and Russians to recruit young women for sex trafficking (...) Employment agencies recruit and exploit migrant workers who enter the country on short-term work permits in labor trafficking. After the permits expire, traffickers use debt-based coercion, threats, and withholding of wages and documents to further exploit migrant workers"* (Cyprus Mail, 2024 June 26).

The second method was the lover boy approach: *"where a man approaches a vulnerable girl in her home country, pretends to fall in love with her and alienates her from her family, and brings her to Cyprus"* (Cyprus Mail, 2022, November 08). Underage girls and young women were described as groomed into prostitution by the man they trusted, and as this man moved them abroad, they found themselves trapped and forced into sex work.

Finally, a lot of sex trafficking is happening in the north of the island, mainly through illegal universities and nightclubs. Traffickers target African students, promise them that they will be able to study in the TRNC, and bring them to Cyprus on a student visa. But as the traffickers paid for the enrolment fees but not the actual tuition fees, students cannot attend university. Their student visa expires, and the students are left without resources. They cannot go to the police as they are now irregular migrants, and the traffickers are free to sexually exploit them:

"The ease with which student visas are issued, the inadequate legal framework, and the general lack of controls in the northern part of Cyprus is increasing human smuggling and trafficking through universities (...) [traffickers] falsely promise students low tuition fees, accommodation and access to good jobs in an EU member state. Once in the northern part of Cyprus, they end up being exploited as cheap labor or forced into prostitution or drug trafficking" (Cyprus Mail, 2023 May 28). A lot of sex trafficking is also happening in nightclubs, where women are usually forced into prostitution, which has been highlighted by the case of Anastasia Melega, a young woman found dead in a nightclub in the north in March 2025: *"Many people employed at these venues have had their human rights violated and have been raped (...) girls under the age of 18 years old are "brought and made to be sex slaves" at the venues"* (Cyprus Mail, 2025 March 04).

Even though these trafficking schemes were the most portrayed, Greek Cypriot newspapers did highlight other forms of trafficking as well, such as sham marriages or the sexual exploitation of domestic workers. Sham marriages are marriages of convenience, legally registered and contracted primarily for immigration or residence purposes. It can be used as a gateway for trafficking when women are subjected to abuse or sexual exploitation. Domestic workers, brought to Cyprus on a short-term visa, are likely to be exploited for forced labour, but in some cases, they can also be vulnerable to sexual abuse: *"For the first time, two cases of sexual exploitation with domestic workers as victims were investigated by the police"* (In-Cyprus 2023, December 24). Sexual exploitation is really hard to detect among domestic workers, as it takes place behind closed doors and remains extremely secret. This trafficking scheme is slowly starting to get known, but as domestic workers are very likely to come from South or Southeast Asia, it takes a lot of time to unravel and investigate it. Cypriots tend to overlook the abuses these workers go through, and might even perpetrate these abuses, out of racism and/or ignorance, as I will discover later during the interviews.

The division of Cyprus was regularly mentioned as one of the main systemic factors that enable trafficking networks: *"The division of the island makes it easier for human traffickers to trick their victims into coming to Cyprus and harder for the authorities to arrest them (...) individuals are trafficked in the north and later escape and apply for victim status in the south but Greek Cypriot authorities are unable to access information about what happened to the victims in the north"* (Cyprus Mail, 2022, November 08). Another factor described by newspapers is the general ignorance about trafficking for sexual purposes or forced labour among the Cypriot population: "*As regards trafficking for labour exploitation, the report said the average Cypriot does not recognise labour exploitation when they see it and might even*

practice it themselves" (Cyprus Mail, 2022 November 08). Finally, institutionalized racism was reported by the media as part of the problem *"one case worker, who upon hearing that the presumed victim was from Cameroon, and before the interview had even started, determined that she was lying and that she could not have been trafficked to Cyprus"* (Cyprus Mail, 2024 March 10). The racist bias is so strong that investigations cannot be done properly: the prejudices about foreigners by Cypriot workers ruin their impartiality, leading to situations where victims are not heard, their suffering is disregarded, their voices are silenced, and consequently, traffickers are not caught.

• Self-reflection, Accountability, and Policymaking

Greek Cypriot newspapers were critical of the lack of efforts from the RoC and called out the shortcomings of the state-led regulations, as well as the trafficking networks taking place in Northern Cyprus. In 2021, the US Trafficking in Persons report downgraded Cyprus from Tier 1 to Tier 2 because of *"the weakness of the state services in dealing with human trafficking (...) there had not been any trafficking convictions for the past four years,"* which was coming from a lack of *"political will"* (Cyprus Mail, 2021 September 06). The lack of effort from the police and issues related to the status of asylum-seekers were mentioned as well. This downgrade had an impact on GC newspapers as they had to cover it, which pushed them to look into the reasons for this decision. It did feel like international reputation mattered more than the issue of trafficking itself, as they started to call the government out on these shortcomings only after a report published by a bigger organization was released, but at least the investigation happened. The Cyprus Mail even took the responsibility to publish the article *Our view: practical steps needed to see human trafficking cases brought to court, not new laws,* where were listed reasons why the Republic of Cyprus did not improve its tackling of sex trafficking: *"police inexperience in investigating cases, failings of the prosecution, judges that base their rulings on technicalities rather than the spirit of the law and the long delays in trials (...) the long court delays lead to victims going abroad and the suspects fleeing the country (...) victims were not adequately protected by the authorities which often left them at the mercy of the traffickers (...) It is a support system that has to be set up by the state for trafficking victims who want to stay here until a trial"* (Cyprus Mail, 2021 September 08). Journalists were critical of the long delays of the procedures, the lack of action from the police, the lack of convictions, and the inadequate sentences, which lead to situations where traffickers could get away with their crimes. There was also an emphasis on the state-led reforms to stop trafficking networks, and journalists care dto detail precisely the new initiatives set up to reinforce the anti-trafficking mechanism, such as a trauma-informed approach, NGOs specialized in sex trafficking, the

reinforcement of the National Referral Mechanism, the eradication of corruption, and better funding (Cyprus Mail, 2023 October 09).

However, there were a few biases that limited the action of the media in raising awareness. Journalists did consider the Greek Cypriot state authorities as both perpetrators of neglect and potential saviours through policy reform but tended to criminalize the north a lot more. Greek Cypriot newspapers underlined the role of the north in enabling criminality by calling it *"a safe haven for criminals(...) that can easily be a safe shelter for those wanted by Interpol or involved in illegal dealings"* (Cyprus Mail, 2024 March 17). *"The lack of international recognition creates serious legal gaps in terms of crime and criminals"* and annihilates frameworks and initiatives to fight sex trafficking (Cyprus Mail, 2024 March 17 & June 26). Because the north of Cyprus isn't recognized by any other state except Turkey, its status as an invaded land makes it challenging to enforce the law, especially when it comes to sex trafficking. The Cyprus problem is a huge factor allowing sex trafficking in Cyprus, because of the inability of the authorities to set up joint measures. *"And the mechanism in place to facilitate cooperation, called the Joint Communications Room, has proved unable to respond to, or even shed light on, the crime of human trafficking"* (Cyprus Mail, 2022 November 08).

Such a criminalization of the north of Cyprus consequently lead to overlooking the unwillingness of the Cypriot government to cooperate with the Turkish Cypriot government, as well as its lack of transparency regarding the effort to tackle trafficking. There was not enough self-reflection about the shortcomings of the RoC to address sex trafficking. It happened that newspapers called out the RoC on how the laws to tackle sex trafficking and the protection frameworks implemented by the RoC weren't enough and could not guarantee the safety and wellbeing of the victims. However, it always happened after a report published by bigger organizations, such as the US TIP, blames Cyprus for the lack of action, which made me consider whether Greek Cypriot newspapers cared about the issue of sex trafficking in Cyprus as much as the international reputation of Cyprus when addressing this issue.

4.1.2. Representation of Sex Trafficking in Turkish Cypriot newspapers

- Overview

The Turkish Cypriot newspaper I used for this content analysis was the Kibris Postasi, the only English-speaking TC newspaper I found. At first, I had also integrated LGC News, but the website was taken down and turned into a casino-promoting blog before I could save the

articles. I sampled 15 articles between 2022 and April 2025 (nothing was published before 2022). In the following tab, I reported how many articles were published each year; the number in parentheses indicates how many articles explicitly mentioned human trafficking in the headline.

Over these five years, 0 articles mentioned sexual exploitation in the headline. Very few articles were published before 2024, and none mentioned Human Trafficking in the headline. There was a huge increase in trafficking-related articles published in 2024. Still, again, very few of them mentioned Trafficking in the headline, and for a reason: these articles covered the scandal of fake university diplomas that have been distributed over the past years. This scandal became big as it turned out that even some MPs were involved, and it uncovered lots of questions regarding the legitimacy of the government, but also of the Turkish Cypriot universities, and lots of articles linked this scandal with the broader issue of fake universities that are used to traffic international students. This explains how these articles brought up the topic of human trafficking without, however, focusing on this crime, and why so many articles were published without mentioning trafficking in the headline. The disparity between the articles published about human trafficking (2), the articles mentioning human trafficking (13), and the articles published about sex trafficking (0) is a good example of how rampant the issue is, and how hesitant journalists were to publicly address it and call it by its name. As they tried to bring attention on it by linking it as a consequence of broader systemic issues, they never focused on it as a crime and an issue of its own, which downplayed its gravity and amplitude.

Table 2: *Themes identified in Turkish Cypriot newspapers*[2]

Newspaper	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Kibris Postasi	0	1 (0)	2 (0)	11 (2)	1 (0)

Source: Nolwenn Martins (2025)

[2] Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of articles that mentioned human trafficking in the headline. Data extracted from the *Kibris Postasi* (2021-2025).

- Victims and Traffickers Representation

There was no victim-focused narrative used by the Kibris Postasi. At best, when sex trafficking was covered, it was described as a sub-form of human trafficking, which itself was described as the consequence of another broader issue, such as human smuggling or economic crisis. Sometimes, noticeable victim-blaming was propagated by the newspaper, which described the crime of international students being trafficked through universities as the students' responsibility: *« Individuals who come under the guise of students but engage in activities unrelated to education and take advantage of the lack of supervision, tarnish the reputation of genuine students, increase societal prejudices, and hinder the development of well-performing universities (...) Some universities are now reluctant to bring third-country nationals to Northern Cyprus due to the abuse of students by certain universities, which has been seen as "human trafficking." »* (Kibris Postasi, 2023, July 05). This portrayal of the trafficking industry in the TRNC was inaccurate and confusing: students were described as the ones engaging in criminal activities, when it was known that traffickers were the ones who bring students to Cyprus without paying the full tuition fees, and then coerced students whose visas had expired into trafficking. This state-based approach, focusing on the damage done by criminality to the state welfare and the reputation of the university rather than to the human victims, is extremely harmful as it dehumanizes the victims and puts the blame on them for being trafficked, shaping the audience's behaviour to look down on the victims and hold them responsible for the trafficking industry.

From 2024, I noticed a change in the way victims are portrayed: there was no more victim blaming, but there was no emphasis on the victims themselves, no description of the person, no portrayal of their stories, no human dimension, nothing more than the word "victim" to describe them, which consequently lead again to their dehumanization. At best, their nationality was mentioned as international, African, or Asian, but the only detailed portrayal of a victim that has been done was in March 2025, when Anastasia Melega was found dead in the nightclub where she was working. Here, this description was done because the Daily Mail covered the story first, and then the Kibris Postasi reacted to the article because it had no other choice, as the information about the victim had already been aired.

Traffickers were not portrayed, which was closely correlated to the lack of conviction. The only recognized trafficker so far has been a Nigerian woman, but as most of the traffickers are Turkish or Turkish Cypriot men, these profiles remain unknown. They were never portrayed by Turkish Cypriot English-speaking newspapers, which is very likely to misinform the perception of the Turkish Cypriot audience regarding who is responsible for this crime.

- Systemic Causes Representation

When covering the systemic factors that enable sex trafficking in the north of Cyprus, the Kibris Postasi adopted different stances over the years. In 2022 and 2023, when the newspaper started to write for the first time about human trafficking, the journalists didn't really conduct any investigation. Three articles mentioned human trafficking networks in Northern Cyprus, but two of them were just summaries of the 2021 and 2023 editions of the Global Organized Crime Index. They did detail accurately the trafficking industry in Cyprus and how the networks were operating in the north of Cyprus: "(...) *Northern Cyprus is a significant hub within the growing human trafficking market, particularly related to human trafficking networks heading to Europe. (...) sexual exploitation becomes more widespread during the tourism season, with victims being coerced into sexual acts in bars, massage parlors, hotels, private apartments, and commercial sex establishments. Young women are recruited for sex work through the misuse of short-term tourist visas"* (Kibris Postasi, 2023 September 29). *"[Victims of] labor trafficking are reported to be employed by employment agencies, usually with shortterm work permits, but when this leave period expires, victims are threatened, their salaries and documents are withheld, and they are subjected to debt-based pressure"* (Kibris Postasi, 2022 February 08). However, the analysis of the issue didn't go any further than repeating what bigger international organizations had already said about the situation in Northern Cyprus, and the lack of human stories and professional opinions made this coverage too shallow.

In 2024, after the fake diploma scandal, the topic of human trafficking in Cyprus started to get a bit more attention: it had been discovered that some universities had delivered fake or undeserved diplomas, and even some Parliament Members were involved and had paid for a diploma they didn't deserve. This shed light on the (un)legitimacy of some universities located in the north of the island, which then started to bring to the table the known-but-silenced topic of African students being trafficked through illegal universities that were used as *« gateways for human trafficking »* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 March 28).

As the fake diploma scandal gained importance, many Turkish Cypriot politicians and workers from civil society started to speak up about the correlation between fake universities, human trafficking, and the corruption within the government that was allowing the human trafficking industry to happen. Human perspectives from experts in the anti-trafficking field were brought up by the newspaper, and the interviewees underlined the systemic factors for the trafficking networks to function and explained that the current political organization of Northern Cyprus is structured upon human trafficking. Aslı Murat, the Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee of the BAR Association, was invited on a podcast held by Kibris Postasi TV,

declared *"there are individuals brought to the country with student visas involved in human trafficking and trade"* and expressed her concern over the police for not being transparent enough with the press (Kibris Postasi, 2024 March 20). Burak Maviş, the General Secretary of the TKÖS (Cyprus Turkish Teachers' Union), called out the higher education system that *"treats education as a commodity and students as customers, leading to corruption, plagiarism, and the issuance of unearned diplomas"*. He stated that *"some universities turn a blind eye to human trafficking for creating illegal labor"* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 February 12). Zeki Çeler, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (TDP) stressed the importance of dialogue between the GC and TC communities and holds the government accountable by claiming that *"If we claim that there is a state here, we must act like one*" (Kibris Postasi, 2024, October 02). Selma Eylem, president of the Cyprus Turkish Secondary Education Teachers' Union (KTOEÖS), called the current system as *"based on human trafficking (...) there is widespread fraud, looting, corruption, nepotism, and moral decay, (...) those who created and benefited from this system must be held accountable",* establishing a very clear relation between the current government and the trafficking networks (Kibris Postasi, August 27).

The director of the Kibris Postasi Ulaş Barış himself spoke up about the human trafficking scheme happening through universities, explaining that they were not making enough income, which led them to seek out new markets by recruiting international students: "*Opportunists step in and set up a human trafficking scheme! This is where the African market has ended up!"* He stated that it wasn't a matter of the north not being capable of managing its universities, but rather an issue of not being able to, as a consequence of its international status as an occupied territory: *"A state that manages itself and stands on its own feet becomes free and independent. A state like the TRNC, which is even considered a subordinate authority in decisions by the European Court of Human Rights, cannot afford such a luxury"* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 March 28). On top of this, he also mentioned racism as another one of the factors that enable trafficking to happen so much in Northern Cyprus: by reinforcing racist stereotypes are harmful, the true nature of the sex trafficking networks remains disguised, which enables it by supporting hate against minorities, making them even more vulnerable and isolated. *"Xenophobia exists in the north of Cyprus! (...) There are tens of thousands brought from third world countries under the guise of students, so that certain individuals can profit. There are human trafficking mechanisms disguised as higher education institutions. (...) Racism, xenophobia, and hate speech are issues we must approach with zero tolerance"* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 June 2021)

Beyond universities, most of the sex trafficking in the north is happening in the nightclubs. However, since 2022, only one article has been published about it, recently, when Anastasia Melega was found dead at the nightclub Prenses, where she was working. It was revealed in the article that Anastasia has been deceived: *"Melega was brought to North Cyprus with the promise of a high-paying managerial position, but her passport was confiscated, and she was allegedly forced into prostitution"* (Kibris Postasi, 2025 March 13). This is another extremely common trafficking scheme; however, the Kibris Postasi covered this news only because the London-based newspaper Daily News had already made the story known, and TC newspapers couldn't hide it anymore.

• Self- Reflection, Accountability and Policymaking

As the Kibris Postasi gave a voice to Turkish Cypriot professionals of the anti-trafficking field, I noticed a strong criticism of the way the TC government handles the issue of human trafficking.

As there is a deep correlation between illegal universities and human trafficking networks, and a huge lack of action and transparency from the police, it got underlined by the newspaper that the situation wouldn't improve without a radical change in the way the TC government operates. Maviş questioned how the higher education staff could stop trafficking from happening *"when even its own members' diplomas are subject to legal challenges"* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 February 12).

To make up for the use of the gap between the RoC and the north by traffickers, a cofederation between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities was often mentioned as a solution pushed by the TC community, as it appeared clearly that the current and unstable TC government, supporting Turkish nationalism, did not care about the safety and the independence of the TC population, and allowed trafficking to happen on a daily basis thanks to the rampant corruption. For the TC interviewees, the current status of Northern Cyprus as an occupied territory has to end, and cooperation between the north and the south could fix many issues. The KTOEÖS, the Cyprus Turkish Secondary Education Teachers' Union, has been organizing protests and meetings about the status of the TRNC against the two-state solution and aim to protect the Turkish Cypriots' sovereignty rights, the territorial integrity of Cyprus and a united federation: *"This resolution, which disregards the will of Turkish Cypriots, international law, and agreements, is neither valid nor acceptable(...) High-level politicians, capital, and their collaborating mafia, who benefit from this status quo, strive to maintain the status quo and keep northern Cyprus outside of international law, turning it into a swamp of*

bribery, corruption, looting, plundering, human trafficking, and money laundering" (Kibris Postasi, August 27). There seemed to be a shared perspective within the Turkish Cypriot community about the heavy consequences of the Turkish occupation of the north of Cyprus, provoking an increase in corruption and trafficking, which could be solved by a federal framework. While reading these articles, I was reminded that the Turkish invasion of Northern Cyprus in 1974 had caused and is still causing a lot of harm to the Turkish Cypriot community, which is underlined by Turkish Cypriots who analyse the structure of the sex trafficking industry as deeply interconnected with the current political state of Northern Cyprus as illegal.

By the middle of 2024, the Kibris Postasi was giving an interview to the Human Rights Committee of the Bar Association, allowing them to highlight the involvement of many parties in the ongoing human rights violations and the lack of a legal response to tackle sex trafficking: *"It was criminalized in 2020. However, despite the severity of the issue, necessary steps to prevent human trafficking have not been taken to date (...) Another aspect of this problem is the lack of punishment for those who operate illegally (...)* We *demand that all individuals and entities that prevent access to basic human rights, engage in labor exploitation and human trafficking, or facilitate and turn a blind eye to such acts, be subjected to criminal proceedings without delay"* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 August 28). As part of the solution to end trafficking, better enforcement of the law is needed.

The Kibris Postasi has been interviewing Turkish Cypriot experts as well as Turkish politicians, and I quickly noticed that opinions from Turkish Cypriot political actors on the matter strongly differ from the Turkish nationalistic narrative. As the Turkish Cypriot community was more likely to hold their government accountable, to denounce the illegal status of the north of Cyprus as a factor of the massive trafficking industry, and to support a co-federal framework, Turkish nationalists would blame it on the Republic of Cyprus for not cooperating with them and using the EU support as a leverage against the *"Turkish states"*. The Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu blamed the current instability in the TRNC on the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus and stated that the option of a federation couldn't be considered anymore due to the lack of cooperation from the Greek Cypriots, who *"have never wanted a partnership with the Turkish Cypriots, especially when the 1960 Republic was established".* He expressed that *"the problems are not of [the Turkish Cypriots] making, but the result of actions taken against them, and that as long as Greek Cypriots continue to view the Cyprus issue through the lens of 1974, no meaningful negotiations or solutions can be expected"* (Kibris Postasi, 2024 November 27). After the independence of Cyprus in 1960 from British colonization, the rejection of the Turkish Cypriots by the Greek Cypriots was obvious, and the attempts to make

Turkish Cypriots a minority instead of equal political partners were one of the factors that triggered the Turkish invasion of 1974, under the excuse of protecting the rights of the TC community.

However, 50 years after, the social and political situation of the island is different, and things have to be reconsidered: the major difference between the expectations of the Turkish Cypriots and the Turks about the future of the TRNC reveals the oppressive dimension of the Turkish presence in Cyprus. The Secretary-General of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), Asım Akansoy, reacted to the fake diploma scandal in a way that suggested that he cared for the reputation of Turkish Cypriot universities more than the safety of international students: *"Akansoy emphasized that the fake diploma scandal has damaged the reputation of these institutions and shaken confidence in Northern Cyprus' education sector".* Akansoy reacted to an article published by The Financial Times that detailed the sex trafficking industry happening through TC universities, but instead of analysing the factors that enabled these networks, he just saw the Financial Times' article as a strategy to destabilize the TRNC: *"It doesn't take a genius to see that this article was published to raise concerns about the reputation of our universities and Northern Cyprus".*

4.1.3. Comparison of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot Media Representation

To sum up, I could say that both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot newspapers were reporting the sex trafficking industry in Cyprus in an incomplete and unbalanced way.

Greek Cypriot newspapers did portray the victims of trafficking, and their experiences were well documented, but there was a tendency to homogenize them, which created a very stereotypical portrait of the trapped and vulnerable African student, overlooking the diversity of the victims and staying silent about any local involvement. There was little to no description of the traffickers unless it was a foreigner or a Turkish Cypriot individual/university/club. Regarding the Turkish Cypriot coverage, I noticed that the portrayal of the victims and the traffickers was non-existent, which is a huge issue, as it erased the human dimension of the sex trafficking industry. Moreover, the simple word "sex trafficking" was not present in many articles, which tended to diminish the horror of this crime and reinforced general ignorance about the topic.

However, I found the Kibris Postasi to do an accurate job at portraying the systemic factors that enable trafficking networks and their operating mode. I was expecting it to blame it on the Republic of Cyprus, which was indeed done by a couple of Turkish nationalistic politicians,

but the majority of the Turkish Cypriot activists held their government accountable for the lack of framework and measures to tackle human trafficking, acknowledging that the illegal status of the TRCN and the weaknesses of the current political situation was enabling trafficking to happen, and even considering the trafficking industry as part of their current system. They called their leaders out on the shortcomings of their policies, they refused a two-state solution, and they advocated for a co-federal framework as a solution for better functioning. Given the political landscape of the island, the recent conflictual past and on-going conflict, I expected the analysis of the trafficking industry to be distorted by a political agenda against the Republic of Cyprus, but turned out the Turkish Cypriot community blamed their own government, the division of the island and the no-cooperation between the north and the south more than anything else. Turkish Cypriot newspapers were willing to propagate the message that the current political instability and the rampant racism were factors that massively enablede sex trafficking to happen, which goes against the Turkish nationalist narrative supporting a two-state solution and a definitive separation of the island. Meanwhile, Greek Cypriot newspapers, while they addressed some of these systemic factors, criminalized a lot of the North of Cyprus and didn't really hold their own government responsible. The shortcoming of their regulations was analysed only if a bigger organization had already brought it up, and the whole blame was put on the TRNC, when I was able to evaluate that every side of the Green Line has its fair share of responsibility.

4.2. Interviews with front-line workers and experts in the field of anti-trafficking

To better understand how accurately Greek and Turkish Cypriot newspapers portray the issue of sex trafficking in Cyprus, I interviewed some Greek and Turkish Cypriot experts from the field of anti-trafficking, and they gave me their opinions based on their experience as front-line workers. Many topics were covered, mainly focusing on the rhetorical devices used by the newspapers to portray the trafficking industry, and the potential influence that the political landscape of the island, divided by a conflict that has never been settled, could have had on this portrayal.

4.2.1. Interviews with Greek Cypriot front-line workers

When questioned about their opinion on the quality of the media coverage, most of my interviewees had a similar reaction: they called out the huge lack of accuracy in the description of the victims and the traffickers.

• Gendered Representations of Victims in Media

One of them recalled a documentary released a few years ago (and since taken down) presenting trafficked women who were crossing the Green Line to seek asylum in the South as *"taking advantage of their employers"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025), when they were obviously exploited and trying to escape. This was responsible for a scandal, and ethics complaints had been made: *"There were two major issues in that report, which I think illustrate the state of the media in Cyprus. The one issue was the complete lack of gender perspective (...) we're talking about vulnerable migrant women who find themselves in very difficult situations given the way that these contracts work: proving that they are going through either abusive or unethical situations is very difficult for them, especially if they don't speak the language (...) And the second problem is the question of the buffer zone and the border that is not a border but a ceasefire line. The EU sees this as a border between EU and non-EU countries (...) For example, [the journalists] talked about the fact that these women come to Cyprus to get a European visa, which of course doesn't exist".* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025).

This gave me a good understanding of what is missing from the media portrayal: the gender perspective and the distinction from migration flows. As most sex trafficking victims are women, it makes absolute sense to integrate a gender perspective in the investigation of the crime; otherwise, the audience cannot fully understand the victims and how the networks function. And if journalists keep mixing up migration and trafficking, the audience might get confused about the true nature of the crime of trafficking, which is to take advantage of migration flows. Without these two perspectives, it is very quick to see the crime of trafficking through a state-centred perspective that would consider trafficked women as a danger for the safety of the state and criminalize them instead of acknowledging trafficking networks: *"They chose an approach that criminalized women that were actually vulnerable, so that sort of reinforces the lack of knowledge that maybe the public generally has regarding the situation of vulnerable migrant women".* The lack of education among journalists is mentioned by many of my interviewees: *"there's a great need for the media to be more informed and to be more educated about it".* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025).

In the way newspapers portray victims, there is a need for a more accurate description, which must be done by humanizing the victims. As I previously mentioned when analysing the victim-centred narrative, victims are always described as powerless and vulnerable, which is partially true, but there is a lot more to talk about. First, instead of talking for these women, newspapers should give them the opportunity to speak up for themselves: *"We need to give a*

voice to the women to talk about the problem, to explain with their experience, to explain the abuse". And in a second time, descriptions of trafficking victims should include what happened for the victims after the case and integrate stories of survivors, as the women are not reduced in their existence to be victims of exploitation only: *"we need to give space to show how these women survive, how they make it possible to come out of that web of exploitation and build a life of their own (...) this type of portrayal needs to be double-sided. On the one hand, show the problem, but on the other hand, don't victimize, don't allow the portrayal to become a complete image of victimization (...) [The media] describe the issue a lot, but not so much the solution. So maybe focusing on the solution as well"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025).

The language newspapers used to report trafficking is considered alarmist, as it puts the blame on victims, instead of questioning who are the traffickers, and describe the victims as a danger for the Republic of Cyprus and its population: *"oftentimes there is this implication that the real victim is not them, but it's us, the rest of society, and the problems that these women are creating for our society (...) that we are overpopulated by foreign women who actually take advantage of us. I haven't seen any positive portrayals of survivor stories of victims of trafficking"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025), which consequently reinforces racist and misogynist stereotypes and does not contribute to a better understanding by the audience of trafficking networks. "*When there is some discussion about trafficking, it's always through stereotypes. And oftentimes it's always through the idea that, well, if these women are into prostitution, it's because they chose it"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). Moreover, cultural norms tend to create a taboo around sexual crimes, which makes it difficult to discuss or to represent them in the media. On top of that, there are trafficking networks that are not portrayed at all by the media. I saw previously that the lover boy approach, the university traps and the nightclubs were described as trafficking scheme, but one of my interviewees talked about other networks: in some African countries, students are sent to Cyprus by their church. *"From Nigeria and Cameroon, I think it's so common, I hear the same thing: their pastors send them to Cyprus"* (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025), states a worker at a refugee camp who tried asking the victims if the church, back home, knew what was happening in Cyprus*, "you know, the church did not send me to study. They sent me to be trafficked"* (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025), That was unknown to me, and also mind-blowing that not a single article published over the past four years had mentioned the involvement of the Church in trafficking

schemes. It might be related to a strong religious culture that doesn't leave room to question the church over sexual exploitation.

• The Role of Political Division in Media Portrayals

The social and political context of Cyprus plays a major role in this inaccurate portrayal of sex trafficking, and the Cyprus problem is often used as a political bias to scare the Greek Cypriot population from victims of trafficking by portraying them as tools sent by the Turkish government to destabilize the RoC: *"The border in Cyprus is used as a metaphor, as that membrane that is completely uncontrolled by us and it's instead controlled by Turkey to shove into the south anything that they don't want. So it's both a mean for the enemy to send us migrants, illegal migrants, and it's also a way for migrants from here to go to the north because they're trying to escape everything, all the goods that we have offered to them (...) the border in Cyprus is blamed for everything that is wrong with society and it's allegorically used to blame for this situation as well"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). The narrative was framed with the intention of showcasing how nice Cypriots are for letting victims in the South, and how bad and dangerous migrant people are, which leads to the confusion of the audience, who mix trafficking with migration. "*Connecting the issue of trafficking with the Cyprus problem is a narrative technique that allows journalists to mix everything up so that the people don't understand that this is an issue that has its own dynamics, and it can exist in every context. We need to stop using the Cyprus problem as an alibi for not dealing with social issues"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). Greek Cypriot interviewees showed a strong self-accountability by holding their journalists responsible for an inaccurate portrayal of sex trafficking in Cyprus because of their lack of knowledge on the topic and a political agenda pushed in all circumstances. There was a clear analysis here on how the divided political landscape in Cyprus impacts the way the media cover crimes by systematically describing them in close correlation with the Green Line instead of portraying them as crimes by themselves that can happen in all countries and are made possible due to a set of systemic factors. *"In conflict situations, you can find more concentration of these issues exactly because there is a lack of knowledge and willingness to blame everything on the conflict"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025).

One of my interviewees underlined the political dimension of covering sex trafficking and how journalists who covered the crime were likely to do it because of an agenda more than anything else. *"It's a taboo subject (...) I don't think they go in-depth into the issues or explain how it*

exactly explains, unless it's a politically induced article (...). It's only if there is a use that's when they will share it. And it's not a subject that they really want to promote. Maybe it's against the narrative, I don't know. But yeah, I don't think it's accurate and not as frequent as it should be" (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025). That was something that I already noticed after analysing the articles published by GC newspapers: there was a massive criminalization of the north, but very little self-reflection. Self-accountability almost only happened after another organization has called Cyprus out, which aligned with the opinions of my interviewees about GC newspapers pushing a political agenda more than analysing the shortcomings of the government when tackling trafficking. There was an important pattern to be noticed: the political use of the portrayal of sex trafficking. *"It depends on when a media outlet decides to make a story for this subject. It might be before voting on a law. It might be before of elections. It might be, you know, like they choose when to promote something (...) I don't think it focuses on the individual; it focuses on the narrative that the media outlet wants to share"* (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025), on its limits when tackling trafficking. The alarmist narrative, the rampant racism, the criminalization of the victims, and the state-centred perspectives have been noticed; and the political motivations behind this portrayal explain the choice of these narratives.

However, this grim picture of the media coverage that I encountered with most of my interviewees wasn't shared with everybody. A member of the Anti-trafficking police unit stated that the job done by the media was overall satisfying. *"We have a very good communication with the mass media (...) three times, journalists provided us with information about trafficking and helped us to investigate very serious cases"* (Interviewee C, Anti-Trafficking Police Department, 2025). She explained that the relations between journalists and the police were beneficial and could even lead to solving cases and deepening investigations, thanks to the information communicated by the journalists to the police. She also mentioned that there were boundaries between them, and not all information found by the police about cases was disclosed to the media. *"For some cases, we don't want to open up all the details as the case can be dangerous, and they respect it. We explain to them that we don't want to display some details to the media"* (Interviewee C, Anti-Trafficking Police Department, 2025). She described a trusted relationship between them, which I was likely to believe as I could see the Home of journalists facing the headquarters of the police. *"They cover in a good way all forms of exploitation, human trafficking in general, they are very interested in the work of our office"* the policewoman insisted. *"Usually, they describe it in a good way, specifically how we handle the victims, how the victims trust us. It's very important that they focus on the handling of the*

police, they disclose information about the victims (...) respective to the task that the authorities are doing, and of course, in the meantime respect the rights of the victim, of course" (Interviewee C, Anti-Trafficking Police Department, 2025). Here, there was a positive description of the way Greek Cypriot newspapers portrayed sex trafficking in Cyprus, which contrasted with everything else I had heard during my research, but was nonetheless worth mentioning: there was still an emphasis on what is important that the media do, which is to describe the victims in a human, gentle way, and to be respectful of the rights of the victims. Not all my interviewees agreed on how relevant the media is at doing it, but they all mention it as an extremely important part of the portrayal of sex trafficking.

4.2.2. Interviews with Turkish Cypriot front-line workers

I also interviewed Turkish Cypriot researchers specialized in the field of anti-trafficking, collected their experience and thoughts about the current state of trafficking in Cyprus, and compared it to the mainstream narratives previously mentioned. The two experts willing to express themselves on the topic worked at the Refugee Rights Association and were conducting a project comparing the different initiatives set up in the RoC and the north to tackle sex trafficking in order to improve bi-communal communication and the legislation in the north.

• Gendered Representations of Victims in Media

Regarding the media coverage of sex trafficking in Cyprus by Turkish Cypriot media, my two interviewees did think that the work done by TC newspapers was *"not bad. It's not enough, but it's not bad at the same time"* ((Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). They noticed that the coverage was more focused on the prostitution happening in brothels and nightclubs, which was not enough, as there were other kinds of networks operating, especially through domestic work and forced labour, which had not been mentioned in any of the articles that I have read so far: *"[some] are exploited through domestic work (...) we hear that there is withdrawal of payments as well or the insurance is not paid at all and mainly it's even more difficult to identify because you are locked in someone's house so no one actually knows what happens in that house"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025).

There is a need to give more visibility to victims, to portray them in a more human way: *"the aftermath of what happens after the trafficking case is found out is not shown at all. What happens to survivors is never depicted in the media (...) if you're from the general public, you have no idea because we don't know if these people have been deported"* (Interviewees E and

F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). There was nothing shown about the victims, sometimes their nationalities and that was it. No age, no name, nothing about the conditions they had to endure, and nothing about the lives after the case occurred: *"these are humans, and they are actually experiencing very violent threats and physical harm. Maybe if this was shown more, maybe people would be a bit more sensitive"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). Their health was left out: *"They have an agreement with the government hospital and every two weeks they go to health checkups for STDs. If they have like say, hepatitis or HIV, [the hospital] doesn't give any medical treatment or anything else to these women, who get deported back to their countries without any medical treatment"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). Not only was their health disregarded, but the traffickers had an agreement with government hospitals, and the women who got an STD from being sex trafficked got immediately deported.

"*The general public is very desensitized towards the issue (...) It's just the normal part of our daily life here in Cyprus, and people are just normalizing it way too much (...) There are even justifications"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). Here, they referred to a conference held a couple of years ago about brothels in Northern Cyprus: male speakers refused to shut them down and declared that the soldiers would keep having sex anyway, so in order to preserve Turkish Cypriot women from being raped, it was better to use foreign women for sexual exploitation. This was an interesting statement as it brought out two very important social factors enabling sex trafficking: misogyny, through the lack of consideration for female health and consent, and racism, which showed through the hierarchy between women. Simply put, women would be raped anyway, so it was better to keep it happening to non-Turkish Cypriot women and behind closed doors, which protected the purity of TC women. *"There's a statement that Turkish women are superior and cannot work in these nightclubs, so we can see the racial attitude in there (...) There is always the racist undertone over there (...) it sort of settles some stereotypes into the structure (...). Turkish Cypriot women are supposed to be pure. So they're not supposed to have sex, and that's why men have to go and get their needs out of the way"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025).

An example of this purity culture is the case of Anastasie Melega, a Moldovan woman who was found dead in a Turkish Cypriot nightclub, the Prenses. Human Rights NGOs from the RoC and the north called for an investigation to be done by the police, who called it a suicide. We know her name, only because a British newspaper reported the story, and afterwards, the Turkish Cypriot newspapers did not have any choice but to talk about it, as the story had already

been aired. We have details about her: she was a young mom, she was Moldovan, and she had been coerced into sex work when she originally thought she was coming to Cyprus for a manager job. Some said she killed herself as she couldn't handle being sexually exploited, and as usual, there was a lot of victim-blaming: *"It was very upsetting to see some comments of people saying how is she supposed to be a mother if she's doing work like this, or how is she supposed to be a good wife? Actually, after she lost her life, we haven't heard anything from her family, and I found this very interesting as well (...) in here you are not accepted but back in your family as well, maybe you are not welcomed anymore"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). The victim-blaming dynamic is rampant in the TRNC, and I can understand how much it enables the traffickers to keep perpetrating their crime: mixing racism and misogyny, blaming the victim will always be the easy way out and the best excuse to not have to look at what is actually happening. The example of Anastasia Melega is interesting because I got to know more about how the sex trafficking industry works in Cyprus, based on deception and coercion, rather than in the 10 previous articles published by the Kibris Postasi about trafficking. Here, journalists took the time to investigate who the person trafficked was and how she ended up in that situation, which shows us clearly how to proceed in order to educate the audience about sex trafficking: by taking the time to detail how it works and portraying victims accurately.

Lastly, the researchers took the time to tell me about other victims, maybe the most ignored of all: the male friends who were coerced into losing their virginity to prostitutes at the age of 14 or 15 years old. *"They are taken by their uncle or their friends here to have their first experience so many actually Turkish Cypriot local boys have their first experiences in the nightclubs and I think that's very traumatizing for them (...) it is child abuse: these boys are still children under the age of 18 they cannot legally consent and then they are being forced into having sex with the woman they don't know and there is just an uncle waiting outside for them to finish their job (...) I know one case that the guy later realized that he is gay, but he was forced to have his first experience there"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). That testimony was interesting, as it was the evidence that the patriarchy doesn't harm only women but also some men, which was absolutely not talked about as a result of the misogynistic mindset that allows women to be trafficked, but also young boys to be abused. There is nothing in the Turkish Cypriot Literature about that; it is one of these commonly acknowledged but least reported abuses.

• The Role of Political Division in Media Portrayals

Regarding the impact that the very unique political landscape could have had on the media reporting of the trafficking industry in Cyprus, researchers both noticed that the division of the island was barely mentioned: *"But in the northern part, the media doesn't cover at all the division of the island and how this affects trafficking (...)I don't think we have blamed the Republic, but we don't cover how the division of the island affects either"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). It is known that victims of trafficking flee the north and seek help in the Republic of Cyprus, but the Greek Cypriot authorities are too overwhelmed to properly measure the number of victims, and are not able to find the traffickers in the north due to the lack of data and communication between the two sides*: "And I don't think our media covers this at all, which is a very important statistic that shows for how much human trafficking happens in the north and how much it affects the situation in the Republic as well"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). So, according to my interviewees, there is not enough analysis by TC media on how the political state of the island increases sex trafficking, which might be in correlation with the fact that questioning the division of the island means questioning the current Turkish Cypriot government and the current status of the TRNC, which is something that Turkish nationalist politicians want to avoid.

Moreover, newspapers didn't cover corruption accurately enough as a systemic factor. I mentioned already the involvement of the police and the government hospitals, but it doesn't stop there: *"We don't have the best Ministry of Labor that tracks the visas of these people as well, I don't think that there is a mechanism that actually recognizes how many people are here with visas"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). This contributes highly to the misuse of visas by traffickers to exploit foreigners. There is *"no accountability from the government",* and the trafficking industry keeps extending to all the spheres of society: *"we know that there are agreements between, let's say, the hairdressers, beauty salons, laser hair treatment salons, and nail salons. They have agreements between themselves, so every month they take girls to beautify themselves, to appeal to the customers. Everybody benefits from the sex trafficking industry, basically. It's a big profit"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). I am now fully understanding how rampant the trafficking industry is in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and how little do media portrays it and the massive involvement from almost all society members.

Deportation is an issue that was brought up many times during the interview: as most of the victims are trafficked women on a visa, they are very likely to get deported back to their home

country if they try to speak up about the mistreatments they are enduring, if they try to escape, or if they get STDs. This underlines the complicity of both the police and the government with the trafficking industry: they do not only let it happen, they do not only enable it being too compliant or not setting proper regulation, they actively take part in this crime by holding the passports of the workers and setting up agreement between government hospitals and nightclubs, ensuring that nobody will ever report what the victims are going through: *"we have a 2014 nightclubs law yes and it actually legitimizes the nightclubs with this law and it says that the police is responsible to hold the passports of women this is another issue that like who is the northern part of cyber police to keep the passports of this woman it's very absurd"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). And it doesn't stop there.

This reality alone is not only horrifying but widely unknown. I read every single one of these articles mentioning sex trafficking, and this was never brought up. Some journalists did try to correlate the illegality of the current government of the TRNC with the trafficking networks, but the explanation was never so detailed. And it doesn't stop there: *"I was checking the language as well, and it's mainly neutral. Of course, the comments under the news can be disgusting, but the news itself is a neutral language (...) I don't think there is a newspaper that covers this in a bad or stereotypical way, but either they don't cover it at all or they are sensitive with it and they do cover it openly"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). According to my interviewees, the public opinion is more likely to disregard that topic than newspapers, which reveals the general mindset and perception of the issue of trafficking in the TRNC.

4.2.3. Comparison of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot interviews

While interviewing both Greek and Turkish Cypriot experts in the field of anti-trafficking on their opinions on the accuracy of the media coverage of sex trafficking in Cyprus, I used my multi-theoretical framework combining CDA, content analysis, feminist theory and conflict studies, to analyse similar patterns from both sides.

The description of the victims was considered not enough in both GC and TC media. The absence of survivor voices and the reduction of trafficked women to passive and helpless victims reproduced patriarchal narratives that silence women, denied their agency, and did not share any stories of their lives post-trafficking. There is a cultural hierarchy that protects Cypriot women while normalizing the exploitation of foreign women, at the intersection of patriarchy and racism, that feminist researchers identify as central to trafficking discourse. Plus,

the alarmist rhetoric framed trafficked women as a burden on society. Omitting survivor narratives revealed systematic trends in how trafficking is represented. The media's language constructs trafficked women as 'illegal migrants' rather than victims. This stereotype, on top of being inaccurate, is extremely harmful as it takes the blame away from traffickers while criminalizing women, legitimizing state security concerns over human rights.

Conflict studies highlighted how the Green Line is used by the media to blame everything that is happening, especially Greek Cypriot media that tend to highly criminalize the north instead of self-reflecting on their share of responsibility. This unresolved political divisions shaped mainstream narratives pushed by Cypriot newspapers; here, media representations instrumentalized trafficking to reinforce nationalist narratives, portraying victims as threats sent by the "other side". Rather than analysing trafficking as a transnational crime, the Cyprus Problem took the blame for all criminality happening on the island, and the absence of bi-communal reporting and the lack of acknowledgement of shared responsibility demonstrated that conflict dynamics stop accurate portrayals of trafficking. By linking trafficking to the Cyprus conflict and portraying the Green Line as a border under threat, journalists reinforce nationalistic discourses rather than exposing trafficking as a systemic crime.

4.3. Recommendations: Experts' perspectives on media improvements

After asking my interviewees what the media could change to improve their portrayal of sex trafficking in Cyprus, I listed some recommendations to improve the accuracy of this portrayal.

Among Greek Cypriot front-line workers, the role of the media as part of the solution when tackling trafficking didn't create unanimity. Some woul perceive it as having a huge role, *« they need to be able to talk about these stories, demonstrate the extent of the problem in Cyprus, and do so by showing that this is a real issue, right, with testimonies, with evidence, and with people's stories about this"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025), while some others doubted its efficiency: *"It can reduce the effect maybe. But there is no way it will change it. (...) Where is the free talk? Where is the free talk now of the speech in journalism? The media was much more independent than it is now. Now they are not as independent as before. People do not write whatever they want. They have to be very careful"* (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025). However, they all agreed to mention the lack of education about the topic of sex trafficking as to improve "*there seems*

to be a lack of education among journalists and among other people in the media as to what this issue is about and especially how pervasive it is in Cyprus (...) there's a great need for the media to be more informed and to be more educated about it (...) there are some journalists out there who are very willing to cover these issues, but it's also very under-researched and very under the radar for many people" (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). Because of the lack of education to sex trafficking, the media coverage of this crime was not done accurately: the portraying of the victims revolved around the description of helpless and tricked foreigners, the blame was almost entirely put on the North, and sex trafficking was likely to be mixed up with the issue of human smuggling or migration flows, creating an alarmist state-centred narratives harming victims of trafficking. In order to educate themselves better, journalists need to *"listen to the people who work with, work on the ground on this issue. They should listen to the NGOs. They should understand how big the issue is here in Cyprus and make it also an issue of public debate"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). As an example of how prominent this crime is in Cyprus, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Cyprus in 2010 for failing to protect a woman from trafficking. This has never been mentioned in any of the articles published by Greek Cypriot newspapers, which is a shame, as it underlined the importance of cross-border cooperation in investigating sex trafficking, which is a very important point. Had this condemnation been taken seriously and the recommendation been followed, the issue of trafficking in Cyprus could have been reduced. *"In 2010, Cyprus was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights, which was a case of attempted trafficking. But since then, eventually the Cyprus government acquitted all the policemen who were involved in that case, there haven't been any lessons learned about this issue"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). The lack of consideration tells us a lot about another dimension to improve when fighting sex trafficking: the political will to tackle this crime. It was noticed before that articles were likely to be politically induced when there was, for instance, a new law to be passed, or as a reaction to a report about Cyprus published by a bigger organization. But there isn't any clear will from any politicians to make the fight against trafficking a clear priority in their program: *"I've never seen any candidate for presidential or parliamentary position defend themselves, position themselves in terms of trafficking in Cyprus. Yet, it is an issue in which we have been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). When portraying the victims, there is a need for coverage that doesn't portray them only as helpless

and trafficked but also shows them as able to build a new life for themselves: *"On the one hand, show the problem, but on the other hand, don't victimize, don't allow the portrayal to become a complete image of victimization"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025).

There is a need for a better knowledge of the crime of sex trafficking, so it can finally be seen and analysed for what it is: a crime by itself and not just another dimension of migration. *"The mixing of trafficking with the issue of so-called illegal migration is very problematic"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, interview, 2025). When I asked Turkish Cypriot researchers about the advice they could give to TC media, the answer revolved mainly around a better portrayal of the victims and the trafficking mechanisms by themselves. The safety of the victims should always be put first, as it is cruelly missing in order to portray the victims better, the media should be able to interview them, give them a voice, and a platform to freely express themselves. However, this is at the moment not possible as the victims could be at risk of a re-victimization by revealing their identity: *« we realized that people who actually spoke to the newspaper, got physically harmed (...) we don't have enough protective measures to actually protect these people"* (Interviewees E and F Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). It would be quite unethical to bring light to victims of trafficking and make them visible if that means putting their lives at risk, and every journalist should be aware of this risk when covering this crime in order not to harm anybody *"if we show their faces, if we give out their names, then they have the risk of being re-trafficked. And they are being put as a target for the traffickers to go back and attack them because they are now telling their stories about this person who trafficked them"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). Moreover, the media should be more focused on educating people to recognize signs of trafficking: *"it happens every day in front of our eyes, and we have so many signs to look out for"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). It is even possible that some people might perform human trafficking without knowing it, by detaining passports or going to clubs. Racism is also something to be addressed and prevented, as it creates grounds for trafficking to happen by hierarchizing between the locals and the foreigners, and dehumanizing the foreigners. It is a journalist's duty to raise awareness and help the general audience to get a good understanding of what human trafficking is, starting with themselves. For Greek Cypriot newspapers, there is also a need for a better coverage of the trafficking schemes: many exist that the public is not aware of, as it is never mentioned in the media, such as the involvement of the church in some countries as a

trafficking agent: *"it's important for people to know that even a church might be the one that traffics. How many? How many people know that?"* (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025).

The rejection of cooperation between the two sides of the Green Line was something mentioned by both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot front-line workers. *« If there is no collaboration between the two [police] units of the island, it won't make a difference. Because there is a need for a collaboration between the two just to share information, to understand how the whole process works, and who benefits from it"* (Interviewee A , member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). This lack of collaboration is a consequence of the political state of the island, as the conflict dividing Cyprus has never been settled and peace negotiations have been stopped over the years. The Green Line was described by everybody as a factor increasing sex trafficking, but because of the political agenda from each side of the Line, there is no proper analysis of how the Green Line is a factor, as this would mean self-accountability. The two sides have their share of responsibility, and to reduce trafficking, the most important thing is first to question your side and wonder if/how the current laws/social norms contribute to the trafficking industry. But because of the conflict, each side uses the portrayal of sex trafficking as a way to push their own ideas. The south will criminalize the north instead of questioning how sex trafficking keeps happening in the RoC after the ban of the artist visa, and the Turkish nationalist politicians of the Turkish Cypriot Territories will blame it on the RoC for not recognizing them as a state and making proper law enforcement impossible. There is a need for the two communities to question their own participation in the trafficking industry, to adapt their laws, shelters, and police units, to work on a bi-communal cooperation, and it is the duty of their journalists to report this crime using their critical thinking and analysis instead of pushing a political agenda. TC interviewees underlined how the importance of bi-communal cooperation should be more covered by the media: *"the bicommunal perspective is very important in that sense because we live in a de facto state. We're not very much heard at all times. It's usually the Republic that's heard of more and they have more space to talk. We're not represented internationally. We used to have an MP in the European Parliament. We don't have that anymore. So it's very important to have representation and our colleagues in the republic. They are a good help for us in that sense so we're happy about that (...) the division is feeding the traffic"* (Interviewees E and F, Refugee Rights Association researchers, 2025). Here, there was a heavy emphasis on bicommunal cooperation as one of the main points of the fight against trafficking. Since the Bicommunal Technical Committee is part of the government, it is

embedded within the government action, which makes their role significant. They underlined the importance of the media as a part of the solution to tackle trafficking, as it is difficult for civil society organizations to sustain their efforts because of the lack of funding.

Another issue has been brought up that has to be improved: the systemic violence faced by those who actively fight human trafficking. It was been mentioned that, even if it was never explicit violence or threats, it was sometimes really difficult for activists to speak up against trafficking, as there is little to no support. It is like talking to a wall, which is extremely problematic, as the traffickers benefit from it: it gives them more opportunities to get away with their crime if nobody cares about what they are doing. *"One of them mentioned that it was exhausting for her to do this type of work, especially because she uncovered a trafficking ring in a village where a young mentally disabled girl was trafficked, with the priest of the village being a main actor in this ring. And she said that there is no support, there is no funding, unless you find charity or international groups. (...) . So the first time she was able to talk about her work and give some publicity to her work was through the research project. Otherwise, it wasn't possible to do that. She had no platform"* (Interviewee A, member of the Cyprus Committee of Media Ethics, 2025). This example made it very clear how important it is to create a system that will support activists speaking up against forced prostitution and investigating sex trafficking. This platform is now missing, and there is no political will from Greek Cypriot MPs to create one, which is something to be improved as quickly as possible, considering its massive importance. Another one of my interviewees mentions, *"I cannot be an activist. I cannot go to the protests. (...) I have to think about what is better for my job, you know, to be able to help or not. I cannot show my face, you know, like outside in places where I would like to say I'm against, you know, government policy or against something, but I cannot. And this is the same for journalists"* (Interviewee B, social adviser at the Pournara camp, 2025). There is an issue regarding systemic violence against activists that limits them and even puts them at risk when they try to speak up against the trafficking industry, and the media can help reduce this systemic violence by bringing light to it and calling it out in the newspapers.

V. Conclusions

After eight months of researching on the topic of media reporting and human trafficking in Cyprus, uncovering a hidden truth and investigating against the deeply rooted norm of remaining silent, this thesis is reaching its conclusion. Using content analysis, agenda-setting, and critical discourse analysis theories, and through the lens of Structural Violence, Protracted Social Conflict, and Intersectional Feminist theory, this study explored how accurate has been the media coverage of the trafficking industry in Cyprus between 2021 and 2025 by Greek and Turkish Cypriot English-speaking newspapers. It examined how media coverage constructs narratives around victims, traffickers, systemic causes, and accountability, and how the political and social norms of this island, cut in two by an unsettled conflict, influenced this portrayal.

Findings revealed that the portrayal was overall detailed but unbalanced, as newspapers from both sides of the Green Line acknowledged trafficking but failed to properly portray and address it. Narratives were often shaped more by state interests and political narratives than the realities of the victims or the mechanics of trafficking networks.

Newspapers showed little willingness to properly name sex trafficking as a crime by itself, as shown by the very little number of headlines actually mentioning “sex trafficking”, instead of another correlated crime. Sex trafficking was not the main focus but was rather framed as a byproduct of corruption or governance crisis, which indicated a reluctance to name sex trafficking directly, downplaying it as a distinct crime with unique causes and consequences.

The representation of victims and traffickers done by Greek Cypriot newspapers tended to emphasize victims as helpless foreign women, minors, or disabled persons, often linked to migration. While this human dimension is important, the narratives often reproduced stereotypes of passive, helpless victims while neglecting survivor agency and resilience. Traffickers were largely underreported and frequently identified as foreigners, though some Cypriot traffickers appeared in court cases. Language softened the reality of sexual exploitation, and contradictions were left unchallenged. Victim-blaming rhetoric occasionally surfaced, particularly when legal institutions framed exploitation ambiguously. Such framing not only risked criminalizing victims but also reinforced a state-centred narrative of protection, where the Republic of Cyprus appeared as a border-guarding entity rather than a flawed state struggling with its own complicity.

The portrayal done by Turkish Cypriot newspapers first engaged in victim-blaming, portraying international students as abusing the system rather than as trafficked persons. Later, victims remained depersonalized, described only as “international,” “African,” or “Asian,” with only individual stories, the one of Anastasia Melega’s death in 2025, which was covered only after UK media exposure. Traffickers were almost invisible, and Turkish or Turkish Cypriot perpetrators were never mentioned, which erased responsibility and distorts public perception. This pattern revealed a selective and externally driven agenda, where the issue of trafficking was recognized only when tied to scandals that threaten political legitimacy.

Through the lens of structural violence, I saw how the unresolved conflict and the division of Cyprus permeated media narratives. The coverage of systemic causes by Greek Cypriot newspapers recognized Cyprus as a “destination country” for trafficking, shaped by geography, migration flows, and the political division of the island. The north was portrayed as a haven for criminals, and a lawless space enabling trafficking. This framing externalized blame while silencing critical reflection on shortcomings within the Republic of Cyprus. GC newspapers described trafficking mechanisms such as visa misuse, the “lover boy” recruitment, fake universities and nightclubs where women were forced into prostitution. But despite these factors being covered, reporting often blurred distinctions between smuggling and trafficking, risking the criminalization of victims. Racism, ignorance, and the lack of public awareness were also highlighted as enabling conditions. Early reporting by Turkish Cypriot newspapers simply reproduced international reports without deeper analysis. From 2024, the fake diploma scandal prompted broader debates: universities were exposed as gateways for trafficking, enabled by corruption, racism, and the north’s contested political status. Experts, teachers’ unions, and civil society actors openly linked trafficking to systemic issues such as governance failures, xenophobia, and the north’s lack of international recognition. Some voices explicitly described the north’s political order as built on trafficking and corruption. However, when Turkish Cypriot politicians spoke up on the topic, it was often to hide the responsibility of the Turkish interference and put the blame on the RoC. The political difference influenced narratives in ways that impeded an accurate portrayal and understanding of sex trafficking. Each side used trafficking as a rhetorical tool to promote political perspectives, rather than as a human rights issue requiring cross-border accountability. This reinforced the importance of conflict theory in explaining how unresolved disputes impact media coverage, resulting in competing versions of truth that benefit national interests rather than victims.

Integrating an intersectional feminist perspective allowed me to uncover another fundamental flaw in media portrayals: the lack of gendered analysis. While women make up the majority of

sex trafficking victims, they are frequently portrayed as passive objects of pity or danger. Few articles placed trafficking within the larger frameworks of patriarchy, misogyny, and systematic gender inequality, and traffickers remained unnamed. Interviewees highlighted the abuse of domestic workers and the forcing of young boys into brothel initiation rites, which were missing from media narratives. This is another important piece of information hidden behind the unspoken rule of not speaking up: these omissions showed how patriarchal norms influenced reporting, hiding painful truths about complicity in Cypriot culture, and reinforcing stereotypes rather than challenging them. Women were visible only as victims and men invisible as perpetrators.

The findings of this study underscore the need for more responsible, informed, and critical journalism in Cyprus. Journalists on both sides often lack sufficient education on trafficking, leading to oversimplifications, conflations, or harmful framings. Reporting is reactive (a reaction to scandals and international reports) rather than proactive and investigative. The absence of survivor voices, the erasure of traffickers' identities, and the prioritization of political agendas over human rights reflect broader shortcomings in Cypriot media culture.

Recommendations emerging from this study emphasize three priorities: education, victimhood and bicommunal cooperation. First, journalist training on trafficking, gender-based violence, and human rights should be reinforced in order to make sure that reporting avoids stereotypes and recognizes the complexity of the crime. Second, survivor voices should be amplified, with safeguards to protect their safety and dignity: their testimonies are essential for breaking the silence and reshaping public understanding. Third, bi-communal cooperation in both law enforcement and media reporting must be strengthened. Trafficking networks operate across the Green Line; therefore, their coverage must transcend political boundaries if it is to be effective.

Sex trafficking in Cyprus is at the same time rampant and under-acknowledged. Media coverage recognizes its existence but fails to accurately grasp its depth, complexity, or human toll. Greek Cypriot newspapers emphasize victims but lack self-accountability; Turkish Cypriot newspapers highlight systemic corruption but dehumanize victims and hide traffickers. None sustain accurate victim-centred narratives, but instead give room to shaped political agendas, stereotypes, and gaps in knowledge. This thesis reveals that the invisibility of sex trafficking in Cypriot media is not accidental but structural. It reflects the intersection of conflict, patriarchy, racism, and political expediency. By portraying the invisible, this research has shown that media are not neutral conveyors of facts but active participants in shaping how

societies understand and respond to trafficking. For Cyprus, overcoming this challenge requires not only better journalism but also political will, feminist analysis, and cross-border solidarity. Only then can the hidden realities of trafficking be brought into the light and confronted as the human rights crisis that they are.

About the use of AI:

In this study, I used AI as a tool to re-formulate some parts. It was never used to generate or plagiarize content, as the findings of this thesis are based on the research I did during from my internship.

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Annexes:

Interview Guide:

1/ Can you briefly introduce yourself and your role in anti-trafficking efforts?

Perception of media coverage

2/ Have you seen or read any media coverage about sex trafficking in Cyprus? If so, how accurate do you feel these portrayals are?

3/ Do you think that the media portrays trafficking victims in a way that reflects your experience? What aspects of victims' lives or stories do you think are missing from media coverage?

4/ How do you feel about the language used by the media when describing victims or traffickers? Do you think media narratives contribute to public understanding or reinforce stereotypes about trafficking?

4/ Do you think the media provides a platform for survivors to share their voices in a meaningful way? Do you feel that media narratives empower survivors, or do they focus too much on victimization?

Socio-political dynamics

5/ In your opinion, does the political landscape in Cyprus affect the way media outlets cover the issue of trafficking? Do you think that the media highlights accurately the systemic causes, political and structural factors?

6/ From your perspective, does the media hold traffickers and systemic enablers (e.g., corrupt officials, weak laws) accountable? Is there any self reflection/ self accountability about the process of fighting sex trafficking ?

Do you think af any other victim/perpetrator profiles or trafficking mechanisms that are not being portrayed in the Cypriot media ?

Recommendations

7/ What advice would you give to journalists or media outlets covering trafficking stories? Are there examples of good or bad media coverage that stand out to you?

8/ What do you think the public needs to know about trafficking that they don’t learn from the media?

9/ What role do you think the media should play in advocating for change? How could media reporting be part of the solution to ending trafficking?

Consent Form:

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of a study aimed at critically analyzing the coverage of Sex trafficking by English-speaking Cypriot newspapers. Please read the following information carefully and clarify any questions with the researchers. Please sign and return this consent form.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the portrayal of Sex Trafficking by Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot newspapers to understand how this issue is framed and perceived in Cypriot society, and if Cypriot newspapers play a role in influencing policy-making and educating their audience against the mechanisms of Sex Trafficking. The study will compare the narratives pushed by the newspapers with the experience of experts, front-line workers, and researchers. This discussion aims at analyzing how accurately the mediatic coverage is done. Your experience is important as the information you provide will help us identify gaps in mainstream narratives and understand what improvements are needed.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. The interview will last about 90 minutes, and you will be asked questions related to antitrafficking mechanisms, your experiences, and any recommendations you may have. You have the right to stop the interview at any time, or to skip any questions that you don't want to answer.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The collection and processing of this personal data ensures no sharing with unauthorized third parties. You maintain the right to access, correct, or delete their data.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all stages of the research process. Your answers will be safely stored.

Please be advised that, with your consent, the discussion will be recorded in audio format only to be transcribed, and the content of the transcript file will be completely anonymized.

Moreover, all data, including audio files and transcripts, will be permanently deleted within 6 months after the completion of the study.

Consent

By signing this form, you are giving consent to participate in this study. You acknowledge that you:

- have read the above information about the research study and understand its aims, objectives
- understand that your participation in the focus group is fully voluntary and retain the right to terminate your participation at any point.
- are fully aware that you will remain anonymous throughout the analysis and data reporting
- agree to have the focus group recorded in audio format so it can be transcribed afterward.
- understand that the audio file will be stored securely, that confidentiality and anonymity will be kept at all times, and that research ethics will be abided by.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or wish to withdraw your consent at any time, please contact Nolwenn Martins at +33617101892

Consent Statement: I have read and understood the above information. I agree to participate in this interview.

Participant's Name: _____ **Signature:** _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interview A:

Nolwenn: Okay, thank you very much. I'm all set. I hope you're well. Thank you so much for your time. Thank you so much for accepting this interview.
A: It's very interesting. Let's start.
N: So, just to introduce quickly the point of my study: I'm doing this thesis about the way Cypriot media portrays sex trafficking. And the whole point of my thesis is to see if it's accurate or not. I picked a few Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot media that publish articles in English. I have the Cyprus Mail, for the Greek Cypriot media for instance, and I have Kipris Postasi for the Turkish Cypriot Greek speaking media. I'm doing a content analysis of the way they describe the issue of sex trafficking. And then I'm interviewing some frontline workers in NGOs specialized in sex trafficking, as well as some journalists or some professionals related to the field of journalism. And I'm trying to see if, according to these professionals, the narrative that is described by the media is accurate or not. Each interview is extremely important because it gives me the knowledge that I need to determine if it's accurate or not, which is why I'm extremely happy that you agreed to meet up and to do this interview. First question. Are you ready to start?
A: Yes, I'm ready to start. The one thing I wanted to mention is me and my colleague Alexiya Banayodu at the University of Cyprus as UNESCO chairs, and we are co-organizing an event on trafficking. I think they have a project and they're also inviting a survivor, a former trafficked person to speak on that event. I think we're going to try and find a venue for them at the University of Cyprus. I think they have been doing some work. They are at the front line of dealing with this issue, you know, the practicalities. What I'm going to talk about is mostly from my impressions, because I haven't done research, on the cases that come to the Committee on Ethics and Journalism that are related to that issue, right?

N: Yeah, exactly. That event is going to be very interesting, yes. Shall we start? Perfect. First question, can you briefly introduce yourself and if you are involved in any antitrafficking mechanism, what is your role in this effort?
A: My name is ********** and I'm an associate professor in sociology of education at the University of Cyprus. I am also the coordinator of the gender studies program and the UNESCO co-chair on gender equality. I have some experience researching this issue on trafficking from a previous EU project called Solidus. It was part of Horizon 2020. It ran from 2015 to 2018. And during that project, we chose a couple of NGOs which were

dedicated to anti-trafficking. And we chose those NGOs as examples of successful work in anti-trafficking. We had to choose various other organizations in other areas, anti-racism and social inclusion and so forth. But I focus specifically on the question of trafficking because I think it's very important in Cyprus and it's hidden in Cyprus. I think from that perspective, I find that this is a big social phenomenon that is both under-researched and under-discussed in the public media, in media in general, and in public conversations.

N: Yeah. Okay. And have you seen or read any media coverage about sex trafficking in Cyprus?

A: Yes. Overall, I think that there have been some efforts to bring up this issue, but there are two problems in Cyprus. I'm going to explain them by an example of an issue, an ethics complaint that came to the committee recently in 2024. And the complaint was about, I think it was Alpha, I'm not sure, I think it was Alpha TV, which broadcasted a report on the socalled on migrant women who come to Cyprus and then take advantage of their employers and they run away through the buffer zone. Okay, so this, there was a complaint that came in and we discussed this issue and we asked the processes that we ask the opinion of the station, of the medium that is publishing or broadcasting this issue, that we make a decision on whether it violated ethics, ethical guidelines. There were two major issues in that report, which I think illustrate the state of the media in Cyprus.

The one issue was the complete lack of gender perspective. There were no analysis and no thinking behind the fact that we're talking about vulnerable migrant women who find themselves in very difficult situations given the way that these contracts work. Because as you know, women who come here as domestic workers, they are tied to their employer. They are not free to move to another job unless they are released. And proving that they are going through either abusive or unethical situations is very difficult for them, especially if they don't speak the language.

And the second problem that is compounding all of this is the question of the buffer zone and the border that is not a border and the border that is a ceasefire line. But at the same time, the EU sees this as a hard border, as a border between EU and non-EU countries. And what the report said, I mean, we condemned the report because it was very false. For example, they talked about the fact that they said that these women come to Cyprus to get a European visa, which of course doesn't exist. And to me, it's despicable that any type of journalist would say anything like that. There is no such thing as a European visa. Everybody knows that. You don't have to do research on that. And then they kept saying that these are exploitative

situations, that these women, they showed some women talking in a language that of course we didn't understand.

And they said that they were making fun of us, of the fact that we're taking advantage. They are taking advantage of the old people that they're caring for. I think that whenever we talk about these issues, we need to take into account the problematic visa issue for workers in Cyprus, the lack of gender perspective, and the pervasive racism that oftentimes influences the way that you understand this phenomenon.

Yeah. They chose an approach that criminalized women that were actually vulnerable, so that sort of reinforces the lack of knowledge that maybe the public generally has regarding the situation of vulnerable migrant women.

N: So you feel like the portrayal that is done by media covering the issue of migration or human trafficking is only accurate?

A: It is not accurate and it lacks information. And there is also a lack of distinction between the various forms of trafficking. It could be that in the mind of many, trafficking is only one type, sex trafficking, and not also trafficking in labor, for example, which I think again is very pervasive in Cyprus. And there seems to be a lack of education among journalists and among other people in the media as to what this issue is about and especially how pervasive it is in Cyprus. I mean, there was the case of Rantseva in 2010, I think, Cyprus, was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights, which was a case of attempted trafficking. But since then, because we eventually the Cyprus government acquitted all the policemen who were involved in that case, there haven't been any lessons learned about this issue. And I think there's a great need for the media to be more informed and to be more educated about it. **N**: What aspect of the lives of the victims or their story do you think are missing from the media coverage?

A: Two things. And what we tried to do in the project that I mentioned, the project called Solidus, was that we needed to work on two different directions. That's always our perspective. And I say always because I work with that group many times. And our perspective is that we need to expose the problem. So we need to allow, we need to give a voice to the women to talk about the problem, to explain with the experience, to explain the abuse. But there's also another side. We need to give space to show how these women survive, how they make it possible to come out of that web of exploitation and build a life of their own. And the reasons we chose the organizations for the project was because they eventually helped many of these women to train themselves in a new occupation, to find

ways to make income, and to build new networks of relationships. I think this type of portrayal needs to be double-sided. On the one hand, show the problem, but on the other hand, don't victimize, don't allow the portrayal to become a complete image of victimization. I think that's very problematic from a sociological point of view. It's true that when the media describe it, they are very focused on victimization and not so much on survival stories of what is... They describe a lot the issue, but not so much the solution. So maybe focusing on the solution as well.

N: When it comes to if you ever read newspapers or read an article that are describing the issue of sex trafficking, what do you think, how do you feel about the language used by the media when they describe the victims or the traffickers?

A: I'm trying to think of an example. The way they put it, the theoretical devices that they use to describe it, the rhetorics. I think, I mean, in the case of the reportage that I mentioned that was on TV, oftentimes the language is very alarmist. The language is in terms of this is a huge problem for us, right? And I think that oftentimes there is this implication that the real victim is not them, but it's us, the rest of society, and the problems that these women are creating for our society, right? Other times, I think I've seen some other reports, but that was a long time ago, from what I remember, that they use the language of absolute victimization. And sometimes they like to use the images of some women, like look at this beautiful woman who was trafficked and suffered and so forth, without really using their voices, without really demonstrating that these women also have agency and they have the ability to come out of this situation and find a new life for themselves.

N: Okay. Do you think that the narrative that is being pushed by the media and the way they describe it, do you think it generally contributes to a better public understanding? Or do you think that it might reinforce stereotypes about trafficking rather than an accurate perspective?

A: Oh, it definitely reinforces stereotypes. As I said, first of all, the information is incorrect. And many times it is not out there, like the situation with Rantseva. Many people don't know that. Many people don't know that Cyprus was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights. I say this to my students and they have no idea. And so there is a lack of information and even when there is some discussion about trafficking, it's always through stereotypes. And oftentimes it's always through the idea that, well, if these women are into prostitution, it's because they chose it. And there's no clear distinction between trafficking and prostitution.

N: Do you think that the media provides a platform for survivors to share their voices? Do you think that the media narratives empower the survivors or not enough?

A: From what I see, no. What sells more is the alarmist type of narratives that they want to pursue to show that we are overpopulated by foreign women who actually take advantage of us. I haven't seen any positive portrayals of survivor stories of victims of trafficking. **N**: Do you think that's something the media should focus on to empower survivors by developing some more positive narratives?

A: Yes, I think there are examples. I know that in terms of migrants' lives in Cyprus, there are some efforts to show how migrants live and thrive in Cyprus and have their own business and so forth. But I haven't seen that type of willingness for issues related to trafficking. I might be wrong. I think there are some journalists out there who are very willing to cover these issues, but it's also very under-researched and very under the radar for many people.

N: In terms of social-political dynamics and the way they influence the media, do you think that the political landscape in Cyprus might affect the way media outlets cover the issue of trafficking?

A: I believe so. As I said, the issue of the border in Cyprus is a big problem in the way that it informs what journalists are going to talk about. The border in Cyprus is used as a metaphor, as that membrane that is completely uncontrolled by us and it's instead controlled by Turkey to shove into the south anything that they don't want. So it's both a means for the enemy to send us migrants, illegal migrants, and it's also a way for migrants from here to go to the north because they're trying to escape everything, all the goods that we have offered to them. I think that it works always as a final destination in some narratives. The border in Cyprus is blamed for everything that is wrong with society, and it's allegorically used to blame for this situation as well.

N: And do you think that in the way the media describe the issue of sex trafficking, do you think that they highlight the systemic causes, the political factors, the structural factors, eventually the influence that societal norms have, or do you think they don't do it enough? **A**: They don't. No. As I mentioned earlier, there is lack of analysis that is related to gender, especially. And in order to understand trafficking, you need to have a gender perspective, especially when it comes to sex trafficking. But I think that that is very theoretical for them. And always the narrative is in terms of their intentions to exploit people, you know, the natives, the Cypriots and so forth.

N: Do you think that when the way, like the way the media describe the issue of sex trafficking, do you feel like it's often mixed up with the issue of immigration and not necessarily treated as sex trafficking as an issue itself?

A: Yes. First of all, even if they do talk about so trafficking is not always related to immigration, but mostly it is, right? That could be people who are trafficked who are also part of the community. Migration makes a person much more vulnerable to trafficking, both in terms of knowledge and in terms of status in a country. So when they talk, if a situation comes like the example I described before, that there are a lot of women who flee through the north and they're actually being trafficked. My problem, and I insisted on putting that in our decision, my problem was that instead of understanding that phenomenon, because it is happening, a lot of women, domestic workers, flee through the north and they think they're going to find a better job somewhere in Europe, in the rest of Europe. And what happens is that they're being trafficked. So instead of using that example to explain to people what trafficking is and how it happens and make them more alert, they use it as a story that is about how good people we are and how bad people migrants are. So that was the final effect of that story. And I was absolutely horrified when I heard it. And I think the mixing of trafficking with the issue of so-called illegal migration is very problematic. I know from stories of domestic workers, of friends who left and then they came back or they called them and they said, I made a mistake. I'm in big trouble now. It's very bad. It's a very big issue. And they're being tripped and they're in vulnerable positions here and people don't see that and they instead use it to create another narrative.

N: Yeah, so in the way the media describe it, do you think that there is any self-reflection or self-accountability regarding their own government, regarding their professional about the process of fighting sex trafficking?

A: No, I don't think so. I think it may only come whenever you point out to them that that was not a good article or a good report. But I think that there is a great need for education in general of journalists around this issue. And as I said, there are many lost opportunities for us to do this type of training. Okay, there were not so many opportunities. Right, and even the cases where we could have done our homework, like in the case of Rantseva, we didn't, which was a case of attempted trafficking. We didn't do that and instead we acquitted all the policemen who were involved in that.

N: So do you think from your perspective that the media holds trafficker and systemic enablers accountable or not enough? And what do you think, what kind of systemic enablers could be... If the media wanted to have a more accurate description of sex trafficking, what do you think they should focus on?

A: They should listen to the people who work with, work on the ground on this issue. They should listen to the NGOs. They should understand how big the issue is here in Cyprus and make it also an issue of public debate. What enrages me every time we have elections is that they sit around sometimes in total, complete manels, only men asking questions and answering questions. And this issue never, ever comes up. This is nothing, I've never seen any candidate for presidential or parliamentary position defend themselves, position themselves in terms of trafficking in Cyprus. Yet, it is an issue in which we have been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights. We need to take it seriously. It's a very important issue. It's a very big problem. I remember also in 2009, I think, or maybe 2008, it could have been the time when Hillary Clinton was a candidate for president. So that was probably 2008. And she had an article in The New Yorker about trafficking. I was subscribed to The New Yorker then, and she opens the story with a story of escape of a woman in Cyprus, in a dungeon somewhere in Cyprus, where she contacted an organization, an international organization. She somehow found the contact and they were able to smuggle her and free her from her captors. And to me, that was a big shock to read about trafficking in Cyprus in such an international medium at a time when our own journalists have no idea about what is going on. And they don't care. And they never ask elected officials or people who put up themselves to be elected any questions on that issue. And I think that's a big problem. Yeah, okay. So better for journalists should focus on educating themselves better and relying on NGO workers in order to develop a more nuanced perspective.

N: As a person involved in anti-trafficking mechanism, have you ever faced any form of unsafety, pressure, intimidation for covering the issue of sex trafficking?

A: No, not personally. But I know from the NGO that we studied a few years ago that it wasn't easy work, it was very difficult work, and it was work that they was very exhausting for them. A lot of them, I remember actually one of them who mentioned that it was exhausting for her to do this type of work, especially because she uncovered a trafficking ring in a village where a young mentally disabled girl was trafficked with the priest of the village being a main actor in this ring. And she said that there is no support, there is no funding unless you find charity or international groups. And there is also the difficulty in putting this work out there. So the first time she was able to talk about her work and give some publicity to her work was through the research project. Otherwise, it wasn't possible to do that. She had no platform, basically.

N: Have you ever thought, what advice would you give to journalists or media outlets that are covering sex trafficking?

A: I think they need to read more about the issue. We have very good sources. And I think even for not just for trafficking, the phenomenon of trafficking, but also how to cover that in the media, I think you can find sources and they need to educate themselves more on the issue.

N: Okay, from my own research, after spending a lot of time reading articles that have been published both in the Republic of Cyprus and in the North, I was able to draft, I would say, a main narrative. In the South, the issue is mostly presented as African students being imported, let's say, in the North, and then the North being a mafia state that allows traffickers to take advantage of these foreign students. And there is a huge victimization of the victims that are described as African students almost all the time. And there is a huge criminalization of the north. And in the way newspapers from the north of Cyprus describe it, they mention a lot foreign African students, mostly from Cameroon or from Nigeria, and they blame it heavily on the South. They blame it a lot on the South by mention it: how could we ever have any form of law enforcement if even the South doesn't recognize us as a country? I was able to figure these two main narratives that it's always the only type of victim that is described are these foreign African students. And every time the North blames the South and the South blames the North. What do you think? What elements need to be brought out? What do you think the publics need to know more about trafficking that they don't learn from the media, that they don't learn from these mainstream narratives?

A: I think that connecting the issue of trafficking with the Cyprus problem is a narrative technique that allows journalists to mix everything up so that the people don't understand that this is an issue that has its own dynamics, and it can exist in every context, right? In a context where there is no conflict. I've been saying this for a lot of years. We need to stop using the Cyprus problem as an alibi for not dealing with social issues. And this is what our governments have been doing for many years, right? Even in the 80s, when we were going to talk about the issue of decriminalizing homosexuality, the issue was like, oh, no, no, no, we're not dealing with this now. We have the issue of the Turkish invader, you know, the Turkish occupying force. That's the big problem. Now we moved on to blaming the Turkish army for everything that is happening. But I think that there needs to be an understanding that these are different issues. It can exist everywhere. However, in conflict situations, you can find more concentration of these issues exactly because there is lack of knowledge and willingness to blame everything on the conflict.

N: What role do you think the media should play in advocating for change? How do you think the media reporting could be part of the solution to end trafficking?

A: I think they have a huge role. They need to be able to talk about these stories, demonstrate the extent of the problem in Cyprus, and do so by showing that this is a real issue, right, with testimonies, with evidence, and with people's stories about this. There are many films that they could use also, right? I mean, they can use many different ways to bring awareness about this issue, but it's not happening.

N: And with your colleagues, journalists, have you noticed sometimes some of the behavior that most likely they are willing to cover the issue even if they don't do it in an accurate way? Or generally, in the field of journalism, do you think journalists are generally interested in covering this issue or not already?

A: I'm not sure because I'm not a journalist and I don't know. I mean, I am in that committee as a representative of the public. I don't represent journalists. I think there are other people who represent journalists. Yeah, I don't know how to answer that question.

N: Perfect. And I think I'm done with all of my questions. We've covered a lot in the way the media fails to describe the issue accurately and what they could do to improve the way they cover sex trafficking. Is there anything generally that you would like to mention and that I haven't covered with my questions?

A: No, I think your research is very interesting. I think discovering the narrative patterns of this reporting is a very good step in changing the narrative and in providing alternative narratives. Congratulations, this is a very, very good project. This is one of the issues that were, this is one of the first issues that we started studying at MICS, even in the early 2000s. The problem has become bigger and more complicated ever since. But yeah, I'm very happy you're researching this and all the best. And let us know about the results.

N: I will. I will send you my final project.

A: Oh, fantastic. Thank you.

N: Thank you for taking the time to answer all of these questions and all of your very, very interesting perspectives and inputs.

Interview B

N: We are very grateful for you taking part in this work and of course you're free to skip any questions or stop the interview at any time you feel, in case you don't want to answer some questions, let's start by briefly introducing yourself and your role in anti-trafficking efforts.

B: I work for CRC, and I am based in POURNARA as a social advisor. Here, my responsibility when we talk about the specific subject is understanding through a vulnerability interview. If a person might have indicators of trafficking. And then I will refer them to the authorities, which is the police welfare, asylum service. But yeah, for them to come to an interview, first of all, they have to be identified or see their identification in earlier stages by the police or asylum service, or EUAA officers. Yes, in brief, this is mainly what I do with trafficking potential victims of trafficking and all of them.
And most of them are from the occupied area where they arrive. All of them are from the occupied area that arrives here. So I don't work with any other group of potential victims of sexual trafficking.

N: OK. And to see that we understood correctly, so you don't do any identification in order to see if you some other officer have a has identify them as a potential trafficking victims?

B: Yeah, but it's an initial screening. It's not necessarily like it is; it doesn't always have to be correct. So maybe it's something they said was an indicator. Most of the time, they are spot on, but yeah, there are instances where they might have some indicators, but when you have a proper interview and it's an assessment interview, you don't see everything. So yeah, it depends. Sometimes it works, sometimes they don't actually identify properly.

N: Okay, thank you. My research focuses a bit more on the way Cypriot media covers the issue of sex trafficking within Cyprus. So basically, I've been focusing on English-speaking newspapers such as, you know, K News, Cypress Mail. And so I've been trying to understand what kind of narrative is described or supported by the media. And then I'm conducting interviews with frontliners who specialize in the fight against sex trafficking. And my goal through these interviews is to understand if the media accurately describes the current portrayals of sex trafficking or not. So my first question is, have you seen or written any

media coverage about sex trafficking in Cyprus, in the newspapers, and if so, how do you think it is?

B: I think it's not common. Actually, I read the newspapers every day. I've been doing this for years, so I don't know, maybe once every few months, you might see a piece on trafficking in Cyprus. I am not sure about the media on TV because I don't watch TV, and I know they do some programs. Sometimes there are some journalists who occasionally do on this subject, but on the media outlets, I don't think it's so common to find them every few months and I don't think that the information they provide a lot of times is as accurate. But I think it's also because of depending on the individual, because in Cyprus, if you're trafficked, if you're trafficking foreigners, it's not as important as your traffic. That's how it looks in the media. And it's not only about sexual trafficking in general. Even labor trafficking. I think it's the same thing. It's not there in the Cypriot society; they don't see it. They don't want to see it. They don't want to discuss such things. I think this is quite common. It's also cultural, because even my family, like when they will never ask me about these types of problems about trafficking. They would ask me about wars, about the refugees, but talking about sexual trafficking. It's a taboo subject, I would say, still. And the information of the media, I think it's very superficial what they offer. I don't think they go in-depth into issues or explain exactly how it happens. Unless it's a politically induced like article. So if the government or a politician or a political party wants to state an opinion, they might actually then provide something which is accurate and informative, but it's only when they have a use for it. So yeah, that's how I see the media around this subject. It's only if there is a use that's when they will share it. And it's not a subject that they really want to promote. Maybe it's against the narrative, I don't know. But yeah, I don't think it's accurate and not as frequent as it should. That's why, before I mentioned that, I really think it's very important to raise awareness and maybe even from schools about this, because I don't know many people who have any idea about this, what happens exactly in Cyprus, very few people, and only people who are actually in this and trying to assist. I hope I answered.

N: Very well. Very well. Thank you very much. What aspects of the victims' lives or stories do you think are missing from media coverage?

B: How do they end up here, and who is the customer? Like, even the way they come here or I like sometimes it's so traumatic, you know, like some women are drugged for years, you know, like in these things. Like, imagine being drugged, I don't know for years, and not understanding what's happening. You don't even know, like your trauma is blurry. Everything is blurry, like the whole two years of your life being blurry. Or the abuse they have. Or the marks they have. You know this. You know how violent this life is to them? I don't think you will see these portrayed in the media, ever. Because I think that's the human nature of the issue, and usually they will talk about it around the legal framework or the humanitarian, let's say, how to help now, but they will not speak about it in depth, how this happens, how these businesses work. Because it's it's a business and it's allowed to excel.

N: And how do you feel when you see articles that describe the issue of sex trafficking? How do you think of the language that they use to describe the victims of the traffickers? Do you think it helps to achieve a better public understanding, or do you think that it just reinforces stereotypes?

B: Yeah, for sure, for sure. In Cyprus, we're reinforced stereotypes. I think it's quite common here. Again, it depends. I think it depends on when a media outlet decides to make a story about this subject. It might be before voting on a law. It might be before the elections. It might be, you know, like they choose when to promote something. And there is a reason behind it. And it's not only with trafficking, I think it's with a lot of things in Cyprus, how they promote specific subjects. And yeah, usually it's focused for me, it's something about the law. Something will change, something that maybe happened like a specific case, which maybe it's too. It's too good for the media outlets to share, and they know it will sell. But no, I don't think they offer so much information about what they do.

N: Yeah. And do you think that the media provides a platform for survivors to share their voices in a meaningful way? Do you think that the media narratives and power survivors?

B: No, no, no, not at all. I don't think it focuses on the individual; it focuses on the narrative, and the media outlet wants to share, depending on the media outlet. So it's always on the

media outlets, yeah, I think it's sad, but that's the reality. And especially how now it's being framed in anti-migration anti-refugee narratives.

B: Yes, yes. You know it's funny because the media, the outlet, will say to you, Oh, we are full of migrants and blah, blah, blah, blah blah. There are too many; they get everything. And then in the newspaper of the government, you see, Oh yeah, we have to bring 2 1/2 thousand like Egyptians to work in the farms.

N: And also the joint press release we wrote a lot of the NGOS that we are in this informal anti trafficking network. When the woman committed suicide, and also a second case that came up a few days later in the north. So I mean, we called for an independent investigation. How much of this was from the media? We did get some coverage. But what will happen? We don't know.

B: So it depends, like it depends on the matter. There aren't many people who read so much. Most people, let's say in the Cypriot society, will watch the news. What is the global news, the local news? It's only that one hour at night or maybe 10 minutes in the afternoon, depending on the individual. So this is where you get the information.

N: And so do you think that the political landscape in Cyprus affects the way media outlets cover the issue of trafficking?

B: It depends on the narrative, like if the government wants or the media that then the information comes out. It always depends on what the end goal is. What do they wish? I don't think it's centred around the individual or the actual problem; it’s centred around the needs of a government, or a political party, or the media, whatever it is.
N: Yeah. And so you need you think that the media is failing at accurately highlighting the system it causes and the structural factors of the sex trafficking industry?

B: Yes, yes. Yeah, it's failing for sure.

N : What do you think the media should focus on when describing or portraying sex trafficking?

B: The amount of money that comes with it, the social and psychological effect that it has. The understanding of the customers. That's why I believe in education, because if you know these things from a young age, then it's much more different to go and do certain things. If you understand, if you know of it. But I don't think people have any knowledge or understanding. So from the moment, if you do not know or understand you can't do anything, you know, people can convince you of anything.

N: Yeah. When doing your job or being part of an entire trafficking mechanism, have you ever faced pressure or intimidation for covering the issue of sex trafficking? Or have you ever witnessed someone being a victim of violence?

B: A victim of violence. I've seen it because of my job. I've dealt with cases that are quite violent. It's common in front of me to see sexual harassment or anything like that. I don't think so. When I suggest things, I do have authorities coming to me and telling me we don't agree with what I suggested and but I will not change it. Thankfully, I have a very good collaboration with my colleagues in my organisation. So they will back me up. And I refuse to do things if I don't agree. But it's not the same for everyone. Not everyone works for an NGO that can back them up. A lot of people might follow what the authorities say because they're afraid for their jobs, or they learn to be soldiers, like following orders. I don't follow orders blindly when it comes to human health, but I've seen it.
N: OK. And what do you think it's a systemic issue, this kind of violence, this kind of pressure or intimidation against someone who would speak up regarding sex trafficking? Do you think it's a systemic issue, or has it just happened because this person was here at that moment and they had this idea?

B: I think it depends on the period of time. Sometimes it can be systemic, sometimes it can be something you know. I thought that the authority figure wanted to implement. It might not be

systemic. It might end up being systemic. So yeah, I guess it depends. Sometimes it is, sometimes it's not. If there is a new policy that the government or the authorities want to implement, then everyone will follow it. It might not be an official one. It might start as unofficial, and if it's successful in the way they perceive it, they will make it official. So it depends.

N: What advice would you give to journalists or media outlets that are covering trafficking stories, or are there any examples of very good or very bad media coverage that stand out to you?

B: I don't know if there's anything the media in Cyprus is lacking. I haven't read from other countries to be fair. I haven't focused on that. I've focused on Cyprus. I know that it's very similar to every country in the world because we did some training and we know certain things, but how they are perceived in other countries, I'm not sure. Maybe some other countries have better policies than us or the media outlets are a bit better at describing the problem. I would say focus not only on the individual but also on the whole process from the beginning, how it works, and which actors are the ones that might be responsible, because we are talking about institutions like a church that sends people. So, even this, I would say that you know, it's important for people to know that even a church might be the one that traffics you. How many people know that? So yeah, maybe that will create an issue. Maybe they will react, I don't know. The lack of awareness, I think, if you are able to show information that people didn't think about, it will affect their behavior, or like change their perception in this matter. I think that it's important to change someone's perception of the subject.
N: Yeah, 'cause so far I would say that from what I've noticed in the media there is that one main narrative, at least from the media and the Republic of Cyprus that you know, all the victims of sex trafficking are being imported in the north and they're all African students that are being trafficked for universities and through a misuse of the student visa. According to your experience, do you think that other narratives, other mechanisms, other types of victims exist, and are not described or portrayed by the media?

B: Of course, like there is obviously the trafficking in the North, which mostly comes from African countries, but there is trafficking in the Republic as well. It was like non-stop, and the government did not recognise that until 2008. Yeah, like the government, until one point they were saying no, we don't have trafficking here. The woman came of their own will. No, I don't think people understand, but if you go on a walk in these pubs in Nicosia, you will see it like it's there in front of our eyes. So yeah, and these women are trafficked in the Republic. They come from land like our buffers. They don't come; they don't come illegally. There are platforms online. I think I've learned this recently already somewhere. I'm not sure where, but I know there are platforms online: they come as a waitress, and then they are not a waitress, obviously they come and they lock them. They pick them up, and then they force them to go to these pubs and find customers. So who knows about this? How many people actually know? They think it's only from the occupied area.

N: And overall, do you think that media reporting could be a part of the solution to end trafficking?

B: We are talking about billions of euros or dollars. I don't know if it's enough, no. The world doesn't work like that. Yeah, I don't think it can change. It can reduce the effect, maybe. But there is no way it will change it. I don't think so.

N: Maybe a role in educating. For a pressure point, maybe. Because that's the role of the media, actually, to be investigative, to be critical, to push for things, be the voice of those who don't have access to the public sphere.

B: Yeah, yeah. Education. But where is the free talk? Where is the free talk now of the speech in journalism? Not only in Cyprus, but across the world now. Yeah, it's changed so much like we maybe maybe 50, 20 years ago. The media was much more independent than now. Now they are not as independent as before. People do not write whatever they want. They have to be very careful. People lose their jobs, people are people are being watched by authorities for no reason. And we know very little of it. I think there is a lot of fear in expressing. And even as we work in NGOs, we have to be extra careful when we speak. Because I need to protect

my job, I need to protect my ability to do my job. So I cannot be an activist. I cannot go to the protests, in the streets, to say, you know, what is this? What are we living? Because if someone sees me, it will go against my job. People will fight me.

I have to think about what is better for my job, you know, be able to help or not. I cannot show my face, you know, like outside in places when I would like to say I'm against government policy or against something, I cannot. And this is the same for journalists. So yeah, we live in a world where things are much more difficult, I would say.

N: I'm done with all of my questions. Thank you very much for your answers. It was extremely interesting. Especially the involvement of the church. I think it has been months since I've been reviewing every single article that has been published on the topic, and the involvement of the church has never been mentioned. This is very shocking.

Interview C

C: The office of Anti-Trafficking in Human Being was established in 2004, and since 2015 it's a specialized unit for investigation of trafficking cases, with the contribution of other police departments. The unit is staffed by 11 well-trained and qualified members, and they undertake all cases of THB. Regarding trafficking here in Cyprus, we have this specific legislation, which was amended in 2014, and according to the legislation we set up the National Referral Mechanism, the National Action Plan, and of course we have a Multi-Disciplinary Coordinating Group for issues regarding THB. As an office, we have lots of responsibilities, the most important is the recognition of victims of trafficking. We are responsible for identifying them based on specific protocols with specific indicators for each form of exploitation. The majority of our cases, here in Cyprus, is labor and sexual exploitation and forced criminality. We have cases of begging, forced marriages, all these issues that we

undertake as an office. For the first time, we had a conviction regarding 2 cases of begging within the framework of exploitation, and for the first time, we have the conviction of a client who received sexual services from a victim of trafficking, here in Cyprus. We have a good experience regarding this case, and this we why we have a close cooperation with Europole and european police academies. We take part in training with police officers from other countries to split our expertise in this field. Now, regarding the cases, we have lots of cases of sexual and labor exploitation. Among others, we are responsible for investigations in THB within Cyprus, and we organise training sessions with stakeholders. For example, yesterday we organized a training for officers of asylum offices in order to explain them the legal framework of TBH and the framework of asylum seekers. Also indicators of how we identify victims of trafficking, how we investigate cases of trafficking, it was very useful for all of us, and 30 officers of asylum took part in the training. We also receive daily information about trafficking, this is why we have the hotline 1947, which is a hotline where everybody can anonymously provide information about trafficking 24/7. Also in the website of the police station we have a link where, again, anyone can anonymously provide us information regarding victims or traffickers. We receive information, and based on the information, we evaluate it and we organise operations throughout Cyprus with the cooperation of our police departments, divisional police, labor inspection officers, and social welfare services. We have a good cooperation, when we contract operations and we found potential victims, we arrange to transfer them to a shelter if needed. We have a close cooperation with NGO as well, as they are running a shelter which is very useful for us. And we have shelters under the responsibility of the SWS. Now, when we have cases that involve the occupied area and we need information, through the bilateral community, we have cooperation, we can ask the other side for information, which is useful. Recently, we had one case with a Nigerian trafficker, who sexually exploitated a victim from Nigeria as well, so we had a cooperation to ask for information from the other side. Usually, we also have cooperation through the channels of Europol with other countries. Due to the nature of this offense, both national and transnational, we have cooperation with other countries in order to investigate, or if we need contributions from other countries, when we investigate here in Cyprus. For example, since 2020, we have investigated a huge case of sham marriages here in Cyprus, and we had cooperation with other countries, the UK, Romania, and Germany, under the umbrella of Europole to investigate, and we have a conviction regarding this case. Recently, the UK extradited a person we issued a European and international warrant of arrest.

N: Thank you very much for this very detailed presentation! Could you tell me more about the strengths and the weaknesses of this existing referral process ?

C: According to the national referral mechanism, there is a specific procedure. Every NGO or anyone who has information provides this information to the welfare services, which then passes it on to us. This is the normal procedure. But if we have an emergency, everybody can forward it to us immediately, anything regarding trafficking, if it's urgent or a serious case when the life of someone is in danger, we handle it immediately.

N: Okay, and do you recall some weaknesses for that process?

C: So far, no. As in 2020, we changed our procedure, and we enhanced 2 specific factors. We paid more attention to the multi-disciplinary approach, so we enhanced our cooperation with other stakeholders, and we enhanced a victim-based approach, so we are closer to the victims.

N: So the main challenge was to connect with the victims, and you made the environment victim-friendly in order to get their trust.

C: Yes. Of course, the training of our staff is very important, and to be aware of what is happening abroad, as everything happening abroad comes to Cyprus as well, we have to be aware of the new forms of exploitation, the new uses of the internet. It is very important to be aware of how people are exploited abroad: some cases are similar, but of course not all of them. The use of the Internet has made our work more difficult.

N: Because everything has switched to online advertisement

C
: Yes ! And that is a problem that other countries, of course, are also facing, and during our training with other european countries, we have a feeling and we are quite sure that everyone faces the same challenge.

N : And among the actions taken to discourage demand for trafficking, what have you set up?

C : We changed our legislation, we penalized using services from a victim. It is a new article. We had in 2023 our first conviction for a client who received sexual services from a victim. It was amazing because it was the first conviction, only on a national level. This was the most important step.

N : Thank you. And do you have in mind any prevention strategies that have been effective in reducing trafficking, especially among non-European victims?

C : Regarding victims? Third-country citizens?

N : Yeah

C : I don't have anything specific in mind regarding this.

N : No worries! Do you have any tools and strategies to keep victims informed about their rights, their status?

C : Yes, of course. This is mandatory according to the legislation, and this is what we have done since the very first meeting with the victims. We inform them about their rights, which NGO can support them, advise them about issues regarding compensation and so on, and of course, it's important for them to know the procedure, when we arrest the suspect, and how the case goes. They need to be aware of all of these procedures, and they want it, which is why we have close cooperation with the victims as well.

N : Okay, so you specified that you have been successful in setting up a gender-based approach.

C : Of course ! This is how we enhanced our taff, via the training that we organize annually , to improve our abilities, how to assess the needs of the victims, because it is very important. We also organize training for all of our stakeholders, government, and all sectors, in order for all of us to be trained under the same umbrella, to address issues the same way.

N : Ok, perfect. I would like to dive deeper into the topic of bilateral cooperation. Do you cooperate with the TC police for cases of THB.

C

: No, of course, du to the political issues, we have no cooperation with the other side. The only cooperation we have is via the bilateral technical committee, when we need something, we send them a letter and they answer us. That's only for some specific issues, but yes, they cooperate with us. It is very important, in order to tackle the issue of trafficking, to have good legislation. If you have good legislation, you can arrange everything based on it: training, which is an important factor as all stakeholders need to be trained and to know what is happening in that sector, as forms of exploitation change from time to time. I mean, here, sexual exploitation, 15 years ago, was completely different from what we have now. Now they have the lover boy method, we have less violence, it is very rare now. It is important for all the sectors involved in this to know about it. So it's important. A good cooperation between governmental and nongovernmental sectors is important regarding this issue. Also it is very important for people who are sensitized to this, who like to support others and serve in this kind of office.

N : How often do you organize trainings for police officers ?

C : Very often! As I explained to you, for our first line officers who provide us with the national referral mechanism, we organise annually trainings, but in the mentime, we take part in trainings abroad, from other organisations like Europole or other international organisations that set up this kind of trainings. We also take part in support trainings regarding sexual exploitation and labor exploitation. So we are very involved in training.

N : Okay! So, the point of this assessment study that we are doing with my organization is to compare the anti-trafficking mechanisms that have been set up in the North and the South of the island, and to see if the North could take example on the south. So according to your experience, how could the bilateral cooperation be improve and how could the north get on the level of the south when it comes to fighting sex trafficking ?

C : I don't know what they have in the north, but I can inform you about what is important. As I told you, having very strong legislation is very important, training of people who serve, and of course, cooperation at a national and international level. To gain experience from abroad, and best practices from other organizations, which is very useful to improve your procedures, your abilities to tackle this kind of offenses.

N : Have you seen any situations where legal barriers stopped survivors of trafficking from receiving full protection, justice, residence permits… Have you met a situation where the legal

C
framework was not suitable for trafficking suvivors who couldn't receive the support they were entitled to ?

: No !

N : You would say that usually the legal framework supports the victims?

C : Yes of course! it covers all the needs of the victims, the legislation is very strong and covers all fields, issues regarding trafficking, offenses, training, multi-disciplinary council, they cover all fields. But in 2020 we tried to improve our procedure, this is why we signed a momentum with specific sectors, welfare services, and labor office in order to improve our cooperation. When we feel that there is a gap, we try to improve it.

N : Ok, and what can you tell me about the residence permits, when a TC victim has been identified, but he/she is illegal?

C : No problem! If we have a person recognized as a VOT, it doesn't matter for us ; we go on, even if he commits offenses due to the victimization. We go on with the procedure, this is also part of the legislation, we do not proceed with the victims before the trial. We had 2 cases with illegal, one with forced labor, and one drug-related, as the victim was found in possession of drugs, but we didn't proceed with her before the trial.

N : Do you have in mind best practices from other countries/regions that you would like to be integrated in the Cyprus framework?

C: Regarding Internet, the recruitment of victims via Internet is very important and we are trying to find a way to adapt it here in Cyprus as well. We implement in our training …. Regarding social intelligence, how we can find information via the internet. So we have a training regarding this, but we try to see how the other countries adapt to the situation, what programs they use, so we can adapt it here in Cyprus.

N : Okay, so now, the main focus is how to deal with the involvement of the internet ?

C : Yes,

N : What structural or policy adaptation could be made to improve the cross-community collaboration ?

C : Well, I don't want to be involved in this kind of answer. I can tell you what the best practices are for us, but it's difficult to say what the other side must do.

C

N: Okay! Is there anything else that you would like to add that I haven't covered?

: Umh, I think we covered a lot of things! I explained to you how we are working, what is important to us. I don't say that we are perfect, we also have the chance to improve ourselves, and this is what we do every day, by improving our staff abilities to be more effective, and to support as much as it is possible, in a better way.

N: I would like to get a bit more into the details of the topic of the way Cypriot media cover the issue of trafficking. This is what I'm writing my master thesis about, I'm basically analyzing the way media analyze this issue of sex trafficking, and then Im interviewing front-line workers …

C : We have a very good communication with the mass media. It's something strange if we compare it with the rest of the police. The media like the way we work and they cover in a very gentle and sensitive way all issues regarding trafficking. They believe in our work, they are close to us, and three times, journalists provided us with information about trafficking and helped us to investigate very serious cases. This means that they trust us and our procedure. If you follow up on articles on the internet or in the media in general, you will see that they are very gentle when covering this issue. Some cases, we don't want to open up all the details as the case can be dangerous, and they respect it. We explain them that we don't want to display some details.

N: So you would say that the media coverage of trafficking in Cyprus is accurate?

C : Yes ! They cover in a good way all forms of exploitation, human trafficking in general, they are very interested by the work of our office.

N : Do you think that they are good at describing the victims' lives etc ?

C : I think yes. Sometimes they want to point out the difficult situation of the victims, but usually they describe it in a good way, specifically how we handle the victims, how the victims trust us. It's very important that they focus on the handling of the police, they disclose information about the victims. They are very careful on that.

N : I've noticed by reading the newspaper, the English-speaking newspapers, such as the Cyprus Mail, that most of the time, the narrative about sex trafficking, because I'm focusing on sex trafficking, was the African students that are being imported in the North. And then they are being sexually exploited there. According to your experience, have you seen other patterns in sex trafficking that are not necessarily covered by the media?

C: Yeah. See, regarding Africans, it's a little bit sensitive, this issue, because daily we receive referral regarding potential victim of trafficking. When we receive the referral, a referral for us is for a potential victim, not a victim, because if we have to say that this person is a victim, this must be that we recognize as a victim this person as a victim. I mean, we have the indicators that are. allow us to recognize this person as a victim. Otherwise, if they provide us with information regarding someone, so this person, for us, it's a potential victim. Of course, we have to exercise any cases that they forward to us. This is what will happen in this case with Africans. But in order to recognize them as a victim, it's a little bit difficult issue because we need more evidence regarding the exploitation. So if they mention to us something regarding the other side, the other part, the occupied area, it's difficult to clarify if this event happened or not happened. So it's very difficult for us to proceed the case before the court. We have without enough evidence regarding this. So this is why we have to be very careful when we investigate this information with Africans. And most of the time when the media covers sex trafficking happening in Cyprus, they cover what is going on in the north.

N: Would you say that there is also sex trafficking happening in the south in cases that the media don't necessarily cover?

C: No, they cover the case of sexual exploitation. Yeah, the Cyprus Republic, of course. This is the case that we see daily. And they have information about our case from the press office of the police. It's right here.

N: And what are the main cases of sex trafficking that are happening in the south?

C: The main case, what do you mean?

N: The most recurrent pattern.

C: OK, it's the using of lover-boy methods. Nowadays, in cases of sexual exploitation, they use as a means a deception, not violence, as it used to be before. They use the case of a loverboy. It's difficult with the Internet now and all these issues, it's difficult to close, to lock anybody in the house, to take her stuff, I mean passport, identity, mobile. It's a little bit difficult. So they find this way in order to exploit girls.

N: And from your perspective, when the Cypriot media covers the issue of sex trafficking in Cyprus, are they doing a good job at reflecting on if the government has responsibility in the way it's handled, or if there are gaps in the framework, so when it comes to self-reflection?

C: I think they are comforting in a good way. Because what I mean is... Yes, they are honest. But we handle it very good, I think, from our part as an office. Every case we handle it very good. But we are responsible to proceed the case before the court. After that, the law office or the prosecutor are responsible for the case.

N: Okay, and have you ever faced pressure or intimidation for fighting sex trafficking? Or have you ever witnessed someone being victim of intimidation, threats?

C: No, of course, because it's a crime, this. Sometimes when we investigate cases, someone tries to persuade the victim not to testify. In the north, from what I know from my Turkish Cypriot colleagues, I mean it's a totally different political landscape of course, but sometimes when you have researchers that are trying to get the police to investigate or the authorities to investigate, sometimes this person receive pressure. In the south sometimes, they press on the witness not to testify before the court, and in this case we open a case against this with the person that try to persuade victim not to testify before the court.

N: What advice would you give to journalists or media outlets that are covering trafficking?

C: They have to cover this issue very gently, because it's a violation of human rights, so we have to be very gentle when we cover this issue. Very gently. I mean, respective to the task that the authorities are doing, and of course in the meantime respect the rights of the victim, of course.

N: Do you think that there is something about the trafficking that the public needs to know and that isn't so mentioned in the media?

C: No, I don't think. Everything here.

Interview D

D: I am a psychology psychotherapist. I work at Spavo and recently I started representing the organization at the Multidisciplinary Coordination Group Against Human Trafficking. Sophie's house was assigned by the Social Welfare Services: here we host women, but we deal in general with vulnerability. And we host minor women and young women with their children

N: I'm doing this research about the role of the media and mostly the way Cypriot media, so Greek Cypriot ones and Turkish Cypriot ones cover and portray the issue of sex trafficking. We think Cyprus. And I wanted to ask you a few questions about your experience and your opinion on the media coverage. So first, I wanted to start by asking you if you have ever seen or read any media coverage about sex trafficking in Cyprus.

D: Yes. What my thought about this is, I don't know if they are actually covering all the stories, or some stories because, okay, I'm not all the time in front of the television watching news, but I watch news. But sometimes they are not being broadcasted on the news, but you can find it on the internet. I see what you mean. So, articles are being written around these issues but never broadcasted on the daily news. I don't watch all the time television, but I watch every night. I think the number is a bit different from what you read on your, on the website, the reports they make, and with what they actually say on the news. So this is what I think that it's not the actual number, okay, it can never be the actual number, but I mean, I think they're not being broadcasted on the cases.

N: Okay, and a few times they broadcast the cases of when newspapers write articles about it. What do you think of the way they portray victims and traffickers? Does it reflect your experience?

D: I don't know what I think sometimes is that they usually mention more information for the traffickers than the victims. And what I am thinking is, what happens with the victim? Okay, they cannot give information, a lot of information about the victim. Yes, we understand this, but they say about the trafficker, I don't know, he's under arrest. Yes, the victim, where is the victim? They don't say anything. The story basically, what is the condition? It's like the victim is absent from the newspaper. Yes, it says, I don't know, the victim is an African woman. They could be informative as well, like saying, oh, the victim has been, you know. They're safe. They have been reported, they're safe now, or their story, or, I don't know, yeah. Yes, and there is no follow-up, okay? This is usually the problem for everything with the media. I mean, there is no follow-up, except if it's a high-profile story. I feel there is no follow-up. So, for example,

we have a story about a case of trafficking and he's under arrest and the victim, it's African. That's what they say. Okay, so one week after, can you give me more information? I mean, I mean, what happened? I feel there is no follow-up. I don't know what happens.

N: Yeah.

D: So it was a successful story. Somebody went to jail and that's how our legal framework system worked. I mean, what's happening? And also when they discuss the story, there is no, what they usually do in several series on Netflix, if you watch. So for example, they say a story about a victim. Yes. And, but they don't say, if you are a victim as well, call somewhere. I mean, imagine having a victim watching TV and she's a victim of trafficking, or she was a victim of trafficking, and she hears a story. You just leave it there. So they don't pick up the responsibility or the opportunity to raise awareness about available. Like, you know, when, when we go on websites and we search about mental illness and they say, if you, if you have suicidal thoughts, please call this helpline. Why don't they do it? That's what I was thinking. Especially for these, if you are thinking of harming yourself or someone, if you know someone else, they usually have this line. I don't know how possible these are, but these are what I'm thinking when I'm watching the news and they mentioned such stories.

N: Yeah. Okay. And do you think there are some aspects of victims' lives or stories that are missing from the media coverage, according to the victims that you, your experience and the profile of the victims that you work with? What do you think is missing from the media? Sometimes there is this narrative that is being supported by the media that much likely when they portray the victim, they portray African students that were trafficking the knowledge. According to your experience and the different profiles that you've seen and worked with, do you think that there are other aspects of the situations that are missing from this media coverage?

D: Um, I don't know. Um, I mean, I think it's missing them. How to say it? The actual person. It's a person. You know what I mean? It's not just a story. It's a person. So I never saw a survivor of, uh, trafficking to speak on the news, for example. Um, so they don't, they don't share their voice actually. So it's just a story, whatever. She's a woman and she's, uh, I don't know why we always have to know where she's from. I don't care. Obviously where she's, I mean, that's not the point. Maybe statistically they're vulnerable or yes, but I don't actually care where she's from. I have to care about the person. So we don't hear their voice. We don't know what happens to them. So we don't, we don't actually spread awareness, and we don't encourage other victims to talk. We just say that the police arrested the trafficker. That's it.

N: So do you think that at the end, the media narrative, do they contribute to public understanding, or do they reinforce stereotypes about trafficking?

D: I think you already gave the answer. I think what I want to say is that they should be trained. And they should have manuals. What is appropriate language. And if they cannot handle a story or a victim or a situation because it's not their job. It's logical. Maybe they should bring their specialists to talk about this topic. Where they should go to find new subjects that are experts. It could be an organization assisting survivors or it could be survivors themselves who may be an expert now. It doesn't even pass by their mind that there might be a survivor that might actually help other women or be an expert. They don't have to be the experts. Nobody expects a journalist to be an expert. It's not their job to be the main subject of the news. But maybe now you're interviewing us and show ourselves, both of us.

N: Regarding the social and the political dynamics of the islands, do you think that the political landscape in Cyprus must see the separation of the islands and most of the time there is no cooperation between the North and the South? Do you think that it impacts the way media outlets cover the issue of competing?

D: Perhaps yes. Because there are political issues here. Again, we are not looking at the person. Sometimes we are looking about the political things.

N: And do you think that the media is doing a good job at highlighting it and being critical and having some reflection on how the government isn't necessarily doing the right thing or on how the no cooperation between the North and the South makes it even worse?

D: Ah, so if they put some pressure, let's say to the politicians. Do you think they do that? No, no. We just say the story. We have this, we found this trafficker and he's under arrest and the victim is from that country or the victim died. That's it. Then it's the next story. Yeah, so it's like no investigation, no emotional tone around this. It's just the reporting, no critical analysis. Yes.

N: What advice would you give to journalists or media outlets covering trafficking stories?

D: I think they should be more human, at least to have the more emotional aspect, but this can only happen if they start describing victims or survivors, telling their stories. They have to open this story. They have to start raising awareness, not just saying the news, the story. We pass from a mere reporting of the case to actually analyzing what happens on the grassroots, right?

N: And what do you think that the police need to know about trafficking, but maybe they don't learn from the media?

D: Eh, the story of the victim. Trafficking is not as simple as it's been presented. I am not even sure that everyone knows what trafficking is actually.

N: Thank you. I'm all good for my questions. Thank you very much.

Interviews E and F

E: We are part of an EU founded project called United Action Against Human Trafficking. This is a 30-month project, and we are like at the end of it, and the most important work we do with this project is I think we have the inter-communal anti- trafficking network. We have established this network in the beginning of the project, and it has CSOs from the Republic and from the Northern part and it sustains dialogue among the CSOs and action when needed. I am the project coordinator.

F: I am the communications officer in the project assistant of the same project. I think I also want to add that one of the most exciting and long-awaited outcomes of this project will be the research that we are currently starting out with MIGS. It is supposed to compare the full human trafficking mechanisms in the south of the North of Cyprus to see what we can implement potentially in the north and bring out the report to perhaps lobby towards it in the North of Cyprus to see what the Republic has already done and perhaps to implement it in the north. So that's great.

Nolwenn: Have you seen already any media coverage about sex trafficking in Cyprus? And if so, how accurate do you think these trials are?

E & F: I think I had a look on it as well before I came here and I think that coverage is not bad. It's not enough but it's not bad at the same time as well. The Parliament has very empowered female employees that do mention these things. I think the only thing that made me realize while looking is that the media mainly covers the brothers, the nightclubs. So it's more about focus on the sex trafficking and the prostitution part of it. But of course, we have labor trafficking happening here as well and also students experiencing trafficking as well. So maybe these are a bit less mentioned in the news compared to the cabarets, the nightclubs, and

the prostitution. But I think it's mainly fair and I was checking the language as well that it's mainly neutral. The comments under the news can be disgusting, but the news itself is a neutral language. I think I was specifically doing media monitoring for Anastasia's case and it's very obvious to me that all the MPs, all the government authorities are aware of the human trafficking problem. They know it's human trafficking, especially what's going on in the brothers and the sex work in the island. But I think, as you said, there are a few MPs that are very strong and very well spoken about this issue. But it's very limited and only they're a person, only the words are not enough. So I think the news is a different thing. All the journalists are aware of the news agencies, are aware of how it's going to be based but then again I think the government is the vessel of the issue and as you said the comments underneath the news and the general population of this missile is what sort of triggers the response that goes into it. Okay, so it says the news is more like the general perception of the issue. The papers they are pouring in when they choose to do it and they are prostitutes, so they deserve whatever happens kind of wording. I think the general public is very desensitized towards the issue. We don't see it as an issue, but we just see, I mean the general public, they just see it as a thing that's been going on. It's just the normal part of our daily life here in Cyprus and people are just normalizing it way too much. The general perception is that it's not an issue anymore. They knew what to expect so now they can't complain. There are even justifications. I'm not sure which year this was but it's like maybe 10 years ago. Who was it saying if we shut down the brothers, who the army would fuck?

N: Yes, I remember reading something about them. Yes. There was a conference, and they were like female doctors that walked out when they heard that.

E & F: Yeah, they were like if we shut down the brothers, the military is going to rape our women so that way it's foreigners. So they are even justified in this way that they are protecting the purity of the local secret room in a way.

N: So, do you think that the media can always chat with teams in a way that reflects your experience?

E & F: I think not exactly. As I mentioned previously as well, the media mainly covers the nightclubs, whatever you want to call them. And especially when we hear things on labor trafficking or with the students' experiences, I don't think it is covered. Also, I don't think we

do underline the people who causes the trafficking. There is a Saleh agency that we know that this is an agency that finds international labour, brings international labour, or that employs people here. And this agency is actually doing contracts that are made up contracts, receiving money prior to people to sign the contracts, etc. So we know that few trafficking cases have been related with this agency.

N: Why are we not making this visible in the media that this agency is not trustworthy?

E & F: In these cases, I think it's not enough. We have to make this kind of stuff more visible also. As I mentioned, labor trafficking, there was the citrus workers from Syprovex that experienced very harsh conditions. And I think only Osgurg Kazate mainly, let's say, Osgurg Kazate covered this. And apart from this, it wasn't really on the other news channels as well. When it comes to brothels, I think people are a bit more aware and sensitive because it has been a very long time since the beginning that the brothels and nightclubs are different. But other types of trafficking are not very well known and covered in media. I think also the aftermath of what happens after the trafficking case is found out is not shown at all. What happens to survivors is never depicted in the media. We only see a read of the cases of how and what conditions have been trafficked. In the citrus case for example we saw where they lived, we saw like there was this massive coverage of visiting their accommodations and seeing under what conditions they lived in seeing what conditions they worked on and then we have no clue as to what happened to them after. We only hear through our contacts with human rights platform but otherwise if you're from the general public you have no idea because we don't know if these people have been deported we don't know if these people have got other jobs here or in sex trafficking let's say we never hear and let's say not even the news coverage of this woman who tried to commit suicide yesterday but she's well even in that case we won't know through media if she survived what happens to her after how long she's been here what was her conditions I don't think there is enough research either to give us those answers but then again we never know what happens and I think it would be good lobbying towards the government as well if this was openly discussed that we don't have a shelter that we don't have enough people who have been criminalized for doing human trafficking.
I don't think traffickers are being held accountable for their actions enough, so the general public is not taking any action towards it. We've been having protests for this other topic, for days now, for weeks now. I think if this was brought to attention of the people, I think I'm hoping that people would say more towards this issue. And I think the violence within the

cabaret, especially, is not covered because from the reports or from the researchers, we hear that there is a lot of threats and violence and it's also for labor trafficking, actually. But it is not covered really well that these are human, and they are actually experiencing very violent threats and physical harm. Maybe if this was shown more also, maybe people would be a bit more sensitive. And I meant to mention cabaret, these are very young women and girls that we hear that sometimes even there is underage girls working there, or they are like 22 or 23 years old. And I think even going back to the basics and just saying that the woman who are working, who are trafficked for sex, they don't consent to all of their customers. So even just putting that out there means a lot because people are just assuming that that's their job and they have to do things, but consent is very important there as well, which is not talked about enough.

N: Do you think of any other aspect of the victims' lives or stories that are missing from media coverage?

E & F: Definitely. Even when this kind of stuff happens, let's say, they suicide or they go back to their houses, et cetera. We don't know what happens, especially with health also.They have an agreement with the government hospital and every two weeks they go to check-ups, health check-ups for STDs. If they have like say hepatitis or HIV, they are immediately delivered, like they don't give any medical treatment or anything else to these women and let's say they got the HIV here, they get deported back to their countries without any medical treatment. So we don't know what happens to these women like and it is known that mainly they come from the poor background, from poor countries, so we don't know if they have access to medical treatment, if they can heal from or get the needed medicine for these STDs or maybe they lose their lives in the long run. So we don't know actually what happens, like they experience some traumatic experiences, but I think even after they live here, the experiences still continue, and they experience some lifetime effects of it.
And I think it's also safe to say that the way the news cover these stories, again what we usually see is the sex work here, so what's usually depicted in the media is sex work, so that's what we see the most to generalize these information on, not because we only talk about sex trafficking but just to clarify that it's what we see most often. I think what lacks is the humanizing aspects of the person in the story, so they only give you the statistics, like they only write the age that it's a woman and that they're doing sex work and nothing else, which almost shows the woman as a sex robot here and it doesn't show anything else to humanize the person.

With Anastasia's case I found that there is a few news, usually foreign news like from the UK, that was strongly mentioning that she was a married woman with children and that's all we see about her life, that's all we hear about her life. It's almost as if she's nothing, she's just a person that committed suicide without any other consequences without any other aftermath of the story, and then when we see the let's say the UK news she's a mother; it actually drove attention of people because everyone was like oh she was a mother, she has a kid of like 3-4 years old so it of course we shouldn't define her from being a mother, but then for the general public I think it drove a bit more empathy yes but then again it was very upsetting to see some comments of people saying oh how is this how is she supposed to be a mother she's doing work like this or how is she supposed to be a good wife and there these conditions anyway and it's always it just shows that we have a long way to go to get to a good point with these sort of things.

We were also checking her Facebook page, and I have seen some comments like may God forgive her, like seeing the trial because from there I understand that for her community probably what she did here was something to be explained to her. Actually, after she lost her life we haven't heard anything from her family, and I found this very interesting as well. Her husband, her mom, her father, like whoever we found out. no one actually contacted us or tried to learn more about this so I was thinking maybe it is something that they are ashamed as well and um I think this doesn't help either yeah because we blame them for being not the right type of woman as well but their families are not very open-minded or like understanding to their condition as well. I can see the feeling of feeling stuck there that in here you are not accepted but back in your family as well maybe you are not welcomed anymore and I mean even if this sex work is something that the woman for this job because it's not acceptable for me or you to do this.

By the way we have a 2014 nightclubs law yes and it actually legitimizes the nightclubs with this law, and it says that the police is responsible to hold the passports of women. This is another issue that like who is the northern part of the police to keep the passports of this woman it's very absurd and also it says there's a statement that a separate woman, and like Turkish Cypriot women cannot work in these nightclubs, so we can see the race attitude in there as well so me, or another Turkish Cypriot girl cannot work there because we are too valuable to work for these place. But people who are not from us who are not a part of us can do this because it's necessary yes the purity again of our culture and so we can see the toxic masculinity yes in there as well.

N: In terms of the way the media describe this issue how do you feel about the language that is used by the media when describing the victims or the traffickers in the way the media purchase a mainstream narrative do you think these narratives contribute to a better public understanding or do you think that they reinforce harmful stereotypes ?

E & F: I think that's an interesting question I don't think it helps to better emphasize the importance of the issue I'm not sure how bad it makes it if it has a negative connotation towards it so beverage in this place can you remind us the last part of the question do you think the media narratives contribute to a better public understanding or do you think it reinforce his stereotypes like for instance when I read the English speaking Turkish newspaper which is basically the Kibris Postasi, which is the only one that I found I see that there is a huge emphasis on the Nigerian students that come in the north and then they get trapped in this fake universities and then they get sex-explicated.

N: Do you think there are other profiles or the type of victims that are being exploited? Do you think it's accurate or do you think there are lots of things missing? Do you think even when they describe these Nigerian students, do you think they do it in an accurate way? Or according to your experience, are there other parts missing that should be interesting for the public to know?

E & F: I think when it comes to labour trafficking, sex trafficking, again I will mention Osgur Gazete is very good with the language and with the details as well and the owner of it, she is a very brave girl that she doesn't hesitate to actually show what's happening in the real, the violence part of it as well, the exploitation. But I think not every newspaper is like this. Most newspapers actually don't even cover these topics. I don't think there is a newspaper that covers this in a bad or stereotypical way, but either they don't cover it at all or they are sensitive with it and they do cover it openly. I think that's how it is. But again, even if the language of the news is neutral, I think there is the part of the society that still kind of attacks to these people from the comments saying like they deserve it, they shouldn't be this stupid to sign these contracts. There is always the racist undertone over there. I'm thinking, you know how, there was this time specifically, maybe about ten years ago especially that drug trafficking was a big problem and you would see in the news that it was specifically when this was depicted in the news it was usually through the media of foreign students doing the traffic like doing the drug business and then people has this notion now that everyone every student who comes here is

sort of related with drugs in some sort of way. So if you I hear this more often than I would like to hear but let's see if you see some foreign like African person driving an expensive car I know that people assume it's through drugs and we know that so many people were trafficked into this like transit of passing the drugs through somewhere over. I think it sort of settles some stereotypes into the structure.

N: Do you think there are other profile of victims other than the African students, or the Eastern European women have you through your work have you noticed other type of victims?

E & F: I think with labor trafficking the Bangladeshi and Pakistani laborers who work in construction or citrus or agriculture or maybe treatment of women who work in domestic labor. People who work for domestic labor could be trafficked into sex vacation, sex trafficking. Domestic work usually. They are exploited through domestic work. Taking care of the elders or house cleanings etc. Few cases that you are a domestic worker they say oh you will be taking care of this elderly lady let's say, and they put you in the house with her and they don't give you any off days so you have to work seven days every hour 24-7 and so sometimes we hear that the passports are taken because they don't want the lady to live or let's say you are there to take care of the elderly but they force you to do the other work as well so you all of a sudden become responsible from the cleaning of the house the cooking and everything as well not just taking care of the elderly and sometimes we hear that there is withdrawal of payments as well or the insurance is not paid at all and mainly it's even more difficult to identify because you are locked in someone's house so no one actually knows what happens in that house.

N: Do you think the media provides a platform for survivors to share their voices in a meaningful way? Do you think that the media narratives generally empower survivors and if not, why?

E & F: No, but I think the reason for that can be reasonable in the sense that making these people visible is putting them at risk. Because we don't have any mechanisms to protect them. If we make these people visible, like if we show their faces, if we give out their names, then they have the risk of being re-trafficked. And they are being put as a target for the traffickers to go back and attack them because they are now telling their stories about this person who trafficked them. I'm not sure if it's safe to do that with the media. Maybe telling their stories through an anonymous perspective could be helpful for people to be aware of this issue, but

actually giving out names and giving out identities is not safe. Okay. I think it depends on the, because we don't have the protection measurements and we don't have the asylum around here, so people cannot seek asylum either if they are not employees or student, through student permits. Apart from this, they cannot really seek asylum, so most people who actually experience this as well, they know that they will not be protected properly. There is no shelter, there is no specific policy to protect them, et cetera. So anyway, because of the tragic events as well, what we hear mainly in the trafficking cases, they want to go back to their houses, to home countries anyway. So I think it's really difficult for us to reach to a survivor as well, to mention their story, et cetera, because anyway, after the tragic events they experience, they are mainly left back to their home countries. They don't really stay here, or we don't really have the measurements to let them stay here and provide protection to them. And yeah, but through EU funded projects, actually a few of these things happened that Refugee Rights Association and I think Human Rights platform previously made a video clip as well that they have shared the survivor narratives. And actually under this project, we have a similar video campaign that we will be doing as well. So maybe not through media, but through projects maybe. there's a bit more hearing of the survival narratives.

But then again, it's sad to just have a funded initiative under an NGO or a CSO doing this, other than the general mainstream media or a government body not having enough measurements. It's just for our project and then human rights platform and then there isn't much, many other mechanisms at all to help human trafficking or human research. Even the law we have in 2020, law is mainly the prevention of human trafficking and it criminalizes the ones who perform trafficking, but we don't have a law for protection of the victims. And even under that law that we have, the one law that we have, only one person has been prosecuted from human trafficking so far in five years. It's not even in the whole city. So, and that was a foreigner person again. Was it an African person? So again, that has a race. Someone who is a Cypriot and doing trafficking. Has never been prosecuted. So that tells us something as well.

N: Regarding the socio-political dynamics, in your opinion, do you think that the political landscape in Cyprus, mostly the green line, affect the media, affect the way media outlets cover the issue of trafficking? Do you think that the media highlight accurately the systemic causes or the political and structural factors?

E & F: I don't think at all, to be honest. I don't think the division of the island is at all mentioned in any of the news. Maybe, I don't know, like you would know better from your interviews,

but maybe in the republic it is more mentioned, I could say. But in the northern part, the media doesn't cover at all the division of the island and how this affects trafficking. We specifically hear from our colleagues working in the republic as well quite often that most of the cases they get regarding trafficking in the republic is through people who cross through the north and are usually trafficked in the north. And then again, because the measurement in the republic is not enough to actually research and find the traffickers in the north, the... extend as to how many people are considered as survivors of human trafficking is also limited. We hear this every day, we know that so many of the victims who, the survivors who actually managed to go to the Republic are usually yes, no. And it's never, the Republic doesn't recognize them because they say I don't recognize the northern part of Cyprus anyway, so whatever they experience there I wouldn't know this. Yes, they don't have enough measurements to actually research and find those traffickers. And I don't think our media covers this at all, which is a very important statistic that shows for how much human trafficking happens in the north and how much it affects the situation in the Republic as well.

N: And the Turkish secret media doesn't call them at all?

E & F: Not at all.

N: Okay, for instance in the Greek secret media I could notice a lot that they do mention sex trafficking and they mention it only when it happens in the north, and they blame it on the north for being in the north. Have you noticed a similar pattern going on in the north, that it was mostly about blaming the south and not necessarily self-reflecting on the north? When it comes to human trafficking at least?

E & F: No. The media is not really crossing from Republic to north, so I think we are not in a position to blame anyone. And we have enough cases here to focus on that. I don't think we have blamed the Republic, but we don't cover how the division of the island affects either. I think it's also easy for the Republic to target the north when it comes to this because they don't have cabarets anymore. They don't have the nightclubs anymore. What happens is usually in the background, in the back room, so we don't see that. Yeah, in the apartments, or... Yes, so we know it happens, but we can actually pinpoint and say, oh look, this happened because it's not legal. So what happens is in the background, and then what we see here in the north is actually legalized and it happens every day in front of our eyes. It's much easier to target that

in your news instead of just going back and doing all the research to find those back rooms and then pinpoint those in the news. Yeah, no one really actually follows up on it either, like, in 2007, I think, their artist visa was shut down, and they were like, everyone was kind of like, okay, the visa is shut, so the trafficking is over, but it is known actually that it happens in private apartments now or in hotels, but no one actually maybe follow up on them enough, yeah.

N: Okay, and so in the Turkish secret media, you think there is not really any coverage of the factors that structure the sex trafficking industry? Do you think they are doing a good job at explaining what loopholes can be exploited, what grey area in the law can be exploited, how maybe the lack of self-reflection from the government can explain this industry?

E & F: What happens in the Parliament speeches is legitimized by the Government itself because police taking the passport the government receives tax from these nightclubs. And then again, it's in the law. We have a nightclub law anyway This is always mentioned that the government itself is legitimizing this exploitation But I think for the other Parts of late trafficking like labor trafficking the trafficking of students etcetera or even domestic servitude Especially domestic we never hear about that We just know it through the because we see people around us who have like Foreigner caretakers in their homes. We hear through them, and we don't know exactly, we don't hear of human trafficking around us but we see through the cases that we hear from let's say from our colleagues from human rights platform. But it's never in the news and everyone knows this is happening. Such as my grandmother has a caretaker as well, and she's from Turkmenistan, but it leads very often to exploitation because even if the insurance and the salary isn't paid and the passport was taken, probably no one would know about this. So they are open to exploitation. And also because we don't have the best Ministry of Labor who tracks the visas of these people as well be like I don't think that there is a good mechanism enough that actually recognizes how many people are here with visas and they keep checking up on these people if their visas have expired or if these people are staying here legally etc. So this is completely out of topic but it's one of the things.

N: It's worth mentioning but you never noticed only any self-reflection or self-accountability in the Turkish Republic regarding government members or officials or even in the in terms of the public and the general perception. Have you noticed a lot of self-accountability ?

E & F: I wouldn't say not so much like I think we are like a bunch of people actually talking about trafficking and caring about this but when I even speak to my friends from let's say college or some stuff like maybe not so close friends they are like asking me is there human trafficking like what is it like inside who is experiencing what like they have no idea honestly like a general public is I think not even aware of what's happening. I once gave my ear doctor a whole lecture like he was checking out my ears and I was telling him oh like we have this and this sort of human trafficking he said oh this is very interesting i never knew. There is no accountability from the government but except for not the main party but the opposition MPs in the parliament especially who actually goes on the parliament and says these things. But then again they are just being employed so the main party who can actually do things they're not doing anything. Also maybe we can outline that the municipalities play an important role because our current mayor of Nicosia is a left wing mayor and I'm not sure which year exactly it is but I think it was like five six years ago or even more, I'm not sure honestly, he decided to close all the nightclubs in Nicosia and he managed it so right now in Nicosia we don't have any nightclubs mainly they are in ally care more for close to north um but it's still but on the side and they don't really they are related to but on the time and he does he lists receive a lot of threats but it shows us actually that this is not impossible to shut down the coverage but because there is the network between the police. The government and the coverage owners are not very willing to do this and actually the government profits from this coverage a lot. We know that there are agreements between let's say the hairdressers, the beauty salons, laser hair treatment salons and nail salons. They have agreements between themselves so let's say every month they take girls to beautify themselves, to appeal to the customers. Everybody benefits from the sex trafficking industry basically. It's a big profit for various companies and for the government

N: I didn't think of the beauty salons but yeah... Do you think also there is a religious factor that could add a layer in the taboo? Do you think that the Turkish Cypriot population is maybe religious or Muslim and because of that it would be tabooer to mention everything related to sex trafficking?

E & F: People don't experience their sexualities or talk about sex very openly. That's why it happens in these nightclubs anyway. Because the Turkish Cypriot women are supposed to be pure. So they're not supposed to have sex and that's why men have to go and get their needs out of the way. I think it's a changing for the new generation. But especially in the previous years it was like everyone should keep their virginity. And I know there's very commonly

thinking this kind of people still. So because it's taboo like that and women should have their virginity etc They think this is the solution because men desire sex, and they have to do this and women should keep their virginity. So that's the solution that men go there and have their men good and satisfied they need as well. Also these nightclubs, they have websites like you can search on Google, Princess, Playboy, whatever, and I think it was on the Playboy website that I saw this statement like “Oh come here tonight and let these beautiful ladies to take the stress of the day away from you”. Something like this. So it's like you get stressed as a man and you will be, I don't know, getting rid of your stress over this woman's body is yeah disgusting kind of campaigning and justifying this it's very patriarchal. I think it's important to underline that the other day I was talking this with a friend about the abuse of like male teens as well I would say because I knew this as well that like when I was in ninth grade or 10th grade what is it like we are 14-15 years old, and some of my friends were taken to the nightclubs actually to have their first experience and then answer to their manhood and actually they are taken by their uncle or their friends to here to have their first experience. Many Cypriot Turkey Cypriot local boys have their first experiences in the nightclubs, and I think that's very traumatizing for them. I had a chance to speak to some of my friends when we are we were older like 19/20 and I was asking them like how did it make you feel that your first experience was there and while some of them ignored, some of them actually two of them were very naturally sharing that it was very traumatizing for them because you have one hour and they leave you to the room with one random woman and they tell you okay you have to do your best performance this is your first time. This is child abuse honestly it is you don't even feel anything to that woman you don't know anything about that woman and maybe you are not even ready to have sex but they force you to have sex, and these boys are still children under the age of 18 they cannot legally consent and then they are being forced into having sex with the woman they don't know and they're just an uncle waiting outside for them to finish their job well this child isn't there expecting to have their first sex ever. It's abuse, it's so disgusting so I always try to explain men as well that this patriarchal system is not only exploiting women it's also exploiting young boys and men as well.

It's really devoted in the Turkish society also that you have to go to the club and be a man basically, it was over on bill honestly like i know that some boys are proud of it that they slept with this beautiful lady, whatever, they had their first experience, they are the men now. But of course, then for some of them it's very traumatizing, yeah. Of course. But that's something I really noticed among the male population generally, that whenever they do their first time, it's almost always fucked up, it's almost always with an older lady. And in the other way around

everybody would be able to spot the abuse, but in that way it's normal, because it's a man and a man always wants to fuck, so abuse cannot exist for them, blah blah blah, it's really... I know one case that the guy later realized that he is gay, but he was forced to have his first experience there, so even this kind of stuff, like, we force people to be in straight, having their first experience, being a man, but... Yeah, then he found out that he is not even interested with women, and he was saying it was even more traumatizing that he had this experience, yeah.

N: Moving on to the next question, have you ever faced unsafety, pressure or intimidation for covering the issue of sex trafficking? Or have you ever been witness or victim of any violence or systematic issues against someone that would speak up about trafficking?

E & F: Personally, I haven't experienced any threats or anything myself, but we hear of colleagues who do cover these stories of being threatened by the traffickers or the people who work for traffickers. Especially I know that **** was being threatened when she was covering the journalists from her school, and she was covering the case of citrus workers. It was a big case, and the government was also technically involved in the case, so it was a big abuse in that whole sense. so it was she was trying to be silenced but she was a good okay yeah and I know civil society workers actually received threats as well especially our colleagues from Human Rights Platform, because they have the hotline and they work actively with the big events, so because we are not always active in the field maybe that's why we did and I didn't receive any threats um but yeah I think if you are a bit more visible or like legally active in the field then we know what happens yeah it's a systemic issue

N: What advice would you give to journalists or media outlets that are covering trafficking stories and are there any examples of good or bad media coverage that stand out to you?

E & F: I think that again the citrus workers case was a very important one in very diverse aspects that it made a lot of sound hearings and it drove a lot of attention of people but then at the same time the rush in making this visible can harm people as well. That's what we saw in the citrus workers news as well. Because the Gazete first found out about this, they were in a hurry to interview people and make visible the conditions of these people but of course then we realized that people who actually spoke into the newspaper, they got physically harmed. So if we don't have let's say the enough protective measurements to protect these people, how ethical is it to make them very visible on the media because then we are risking their lives. So

what I would say is that human trafficking is not that simple so I think every journalist has to be aware of this and act in that sense while making it visible on the media is very important then we should always keep in mind that we shouldn't harm and put risk anyone. I think with citrus workers this was very important. I think, especially with the citrus workers, it was almost the first time we had a coverage of this big, like this ground, so it was a bit of a learning curve as to how to handle the news as well.

N: Moving on to the next question what do you think the public needs to know about trafficking that they don't learn from the media?

E & F: It happens every day in front of our eyes and we have so many signs to look out for them. Again it could be happening inside your house you might hire someone to take care of your sick mother and then you take their passport away without thinking that it's human trafficking but actually you're doing trafficking. I don't think people realize that you could be saying to that person that you should be doing housework for me as well because my mother is sick she can't do any of this and then I work so I can't just come in to my mother's house and do these things for her so you should be cleaning and cooking for her like if people should be more aware of what it is and look out if there is anyone around you that's being trafficked or borderline. If you are doing you think some severe traffic are part of trafficking without even realizing it because they don't know what they're doing yeah I think especially with domestic servitude they think that oh this lady will take care of my mom she can do whatever like very nice because they're not aware.

N: Do you think most of the people that go to the sex club do you think they know that the women are being sex trafficked and that they are not consent and or do you think they just assume that they are here because they want to?

E & F: Most people actually think they are there because they want to and they're voluntarily there. And there are people who are aware and who don’t care as well. What we need to give to people is prevention of racism, because let's say if it was me experiencing this, a local Turkish-speaking Cypriot girl with family here and everything, like I think the behaviors and impact would be completely different than a foreign girl or a foreign man experiencing this. So I think what's really behind it is racism, because they are not local, they are not citizens, we don't really care kind of a thing, like there is the “us and the other” mentality. And also we forget they are humans as well, when it's a white person I think people are a bit more sensitive

but when it's the black person or a person from Bangladesh or Pakistan, people are not sensitive at all. What we saw in the citrus, we were talking to local people actually living close by as well and we were saying like did you suspect anything? Did you see anything? And actually one lady told me that oh it's that combination itself is not that bad but because Bangladeshis are dirty like they use it in a dirty way that's why it looks like it's like they are they are themselves are dirty and keeping it in that way so not maintaining it clean or well enough. There is this stereotype that people who comes from Bangladesh or Pakistan are not clean, so I think this mentality push people to treat these people as however they want because it puts us in a bit more privileged place where they are lower than us, so whatever happens to them.

N: And yourself when trying to tackle trafficking, do you usually feel supported by the system or do you feel like you have to work against?

E & F: I don't feel supported at all, and I don't believe that the government or the police is actually trying to do anything even with the latest incident that the suicide hearing of last night. Today I was talking to the police, like so you will investigate this right and he was like yeah yeah of course and I was like okay then we will write a letter to you and ask for more information and he was of course of course you can do it but in a very fast way, you know, when you write the letter to them and ask for more information about the investigation, sometimes they don't even respond or they respond with very vague answers. Yeah, they look down at you. Also, the way they're going to investigate it is not about trafficking because they're not trained for human trafficking, but they're going to investigate the conditions of suicide. So they're going to just say, oh, it was a suicide anyway, we can't do anything because a person has taken their life.

So it's going to be shut up. They're never going to dig in and try to see what could have happened. Which is what we wanted to do with Anastasia's case as well. We asked for deeper research into the subject, but no one did anything. I don't think they care at all. I know that for sure the government and police know more than we know. But they just don't care. And they are part of the system. I just heard a recent thing as well that there is the labor exploitation again in Kyrenia. I don't know fully that the case, but it's a suspect now that it may be trafficking and the owner was threatening people with, oh, I have family in the police. I know a lot of people in the police. So if you don't do what I want, I can deport you, etc. If it's a secret person who is exploiting people as well actually, and they have contacts, then nothing happens.

Honestly, nothing happens, and police is in it as well, protecting the trafficker actually, yeah. Not even thinking it's trafficking again. Clearly it's exploitation, but they don't care.

N: Yeah, and you think it could put someone in danger to make it known that the police is also involved in the sex trafficking industry. If a journalist, for instance, wants to speak up about that, do you think there would be consequences?

E & F: It depends on the journalist. If you have contacts and police, obviously it's Cyprus, everything works a bit with contacts and networks. So if you have, there's the good police and the bad police, if you have the good police next to you, then maybe.

N: What role do you think the media should play in advocating for change? And how could media reporting be part of the solution to end trafficking?

E & F: Awareness raising, really. Awareness raising, imposing empathy. I think more people need to be aware of this, first of all. And firstly, the journalists need to be more aware of this and have good knowledge of what trafficking is. And then actually make a difference. So they might hear about it, but they might not actually have enough research into exactly how to report it.
So I think it's an important thing for them to actually know and then report, which does change the whole language, the whole perception of the reporting area.

N: OK, so you think first journalists need to educate themselves more on the issue of sex trafficking?

E & F: Yes, but without forgetting that everyone also needs to be educated more about human trafficking and then all things like this in general. Let's start with journalists would be good.

N: Is there anything that I haven't mentioned that I would like to that I haven't covered that you'd like to mention?

E & F: I must say the importance of the bicommunal cooperation, to be honest, because in the Anastasia's case as well, what we saw is that the northern part of Cyprus is not always heard or seen because it's not recognized. And that's why I don't feel like what's happening is here is

always heard or seen. But when in Anastasia's case, through our anti trafficking network, we have made a bicommunal press release. And we translated it to Turkish and shared with the newspaper series. And then our colleagues translated it to Greek and shared in the newspapers there. And then we then we realized that it went into the Greece's newspapers and then from there to UK and then from there to Moldova and even China. While we were doing the monitoring, some news in China were covering the case, which was very interesting. And I think, as you said, the bicommunal perspective is very important in that sense because we live in a de facto state. We're not very much always heard. It's usually the Republic that's heard and they have more space to talk. We're not represented internationally. We used to have an MP in the European Parliament. We don't have that anymore. Yeah, we're not represented very widely. So, it's very important to have representation and our colleagues in the Republic, they are a good help for us in that sense so we're happy about that even the UK media talk about British tourists coming to Northern part of Cyprus and want British tourists to be aware of this like what's happening in the northern parts of Cyprus and especially in the nightclubs, because people don't think of the consequences like they're just coming for a trip from the UK they think oh I'm just going to go have fun and they don't think of the consequences, they don't think if that person is being held there with their own will or if it's trafficking etc. They're just on a trip, they don't care what's going on in that country that they're in they just want to trafficking not specifically because I haven't noticed one

N: I think that's one of the biggest issues that I noticed in Cyprus that there is no cooperation between the north and the south when it comes to tackle trafficking

E & F: Under our project now the anti-trafficking network as I mentioned covers that we don't have a bi-communal CSO to do this but we have this network now that's for almost two years the CSO is working together and having a constant active dialogue on what's happening both in the republic and both in the northern parts of Cyprus. I think in the sense it covers an important gap actually but I also want to know that it's difficult to have a bi-communal CSO that operates specifically on this because we don't live under the same conditions and we don't operate under the same conditions this was one of the doubts that we heard from our colleagues in the public when we were first starting out and they were saying we understand. And this is a good thing.
But how is this going to operate if we have all the laws in the north? This is very limited, like how are we going to cooperate? And we just said no through information sharing, through just

empowering each other. This is the start; this is the first step. We are starting out, it's difficult to have an official bi-communal thing, but that's sort of what we expect the bi-communal technical committees to do as well, which I don't think they are focusing on enough when it comes to trafficking.

We have under our project the activity to get in touch with the Bi-communal Technical Committee on Gender and on Crime and Criminal Matters. We had a very responsive meeting, and we have a good relationship now, I think it's safe to say, with the Republic's Criminal and Criminal Matters president of the Bi-communal Technical Committee. But all the other, and the Turkish Supreme Committee, the Gender Committee at all from neither side, we didn't have a good response, like we haven't heard the response. We are the Bi-communal Technical Committee. I think the local government, especially I can talk for the Northern part, that the current government is not anyway left wing, or they are not cooperative with the Bi-communal work, so they are not very willing to actually do Bi-communal cooperation. But the role is very important because the projects or the CSOs sometimes can not be very sustainable if you don't have the funds, but the technical committees and their work can be sustainable to tackle this issue. Even rather than a CSO or an NGO that works bi-communally, actually having a Bicommunal Technical Committee that's a part of the government, it's embedded within the government, the heads of it are appointed by the government. It's very important and I don't think they realize that their role is very significant as well, and they don't do anything to emphasize that within the actual work they do in the field, because we know that the division is feeding the traffic. And that you have the control, not me. You should be taking action towards it, but then again, they are hesitant because it's very political. The cooperation is very political, the interaction is very political, so there is the hesitation. I think, yeah, that's the biggest issue I noticed in Cyprus, just this splitting of the island, this partition, and then the absolute rejection of cooperation. I mean, not absolute, but most of the time there is a rejection. Yeah, I think those were the slightly closing on a negative response, but it's a reality that we see everything.

N: Well, thank you very much for this interview.