

UNRAVELLING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

INVERT

The INVERT project is dedicated to combatting the use of legal companies by labour trafficking networks which exploit adult and child victims in Europe. INVERT aims to equip prosecutors, law enforcement agencies (LEAs), and judicial authorities with two user-friendly (company- and victim-focused) risk assessment tools to:

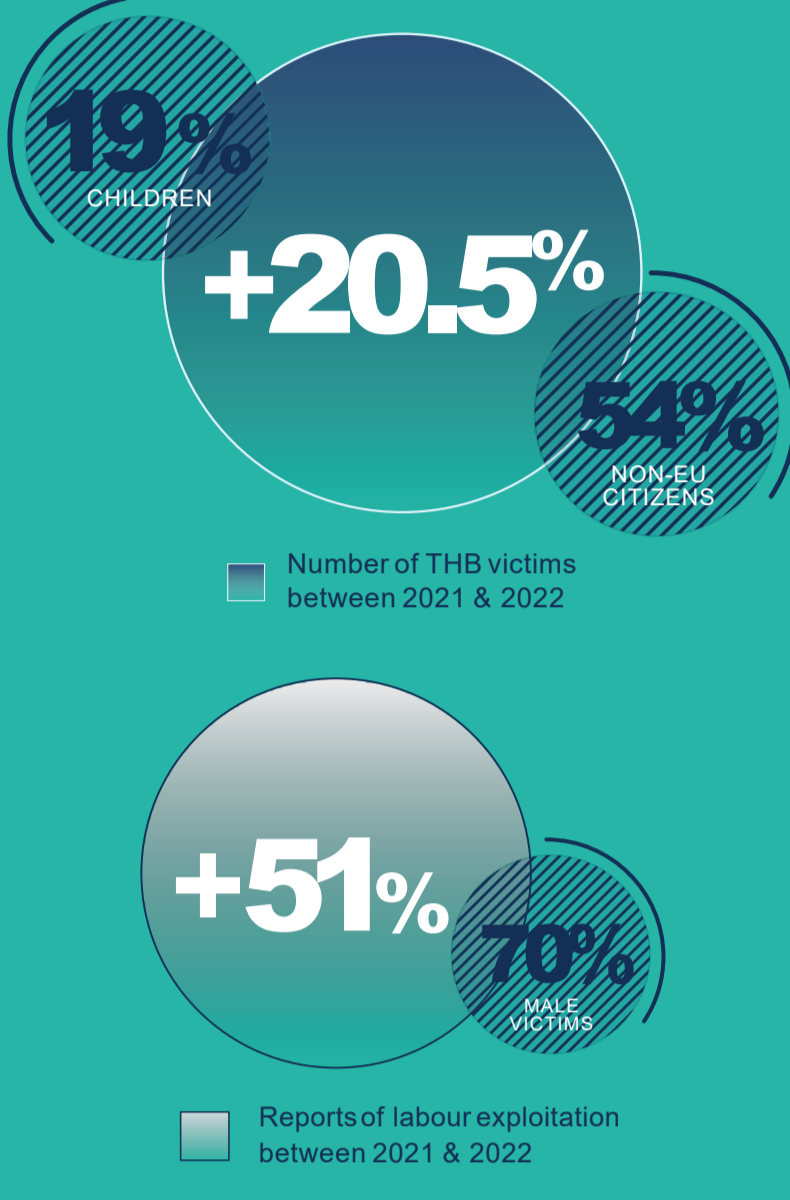


THE PROBLEM OF LABOUR EXPLOITATION

The Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) for labour exploitation is a serious crime – and a grave violation of individual’s fundamental human rights – which leaves its victims to deal with complex layers of trauma. Victims of forced labour are subjected to deceptive recruitment practices, and coercion and threats while trapped in exploitative working conditions. Victims of human trafficking can experience physical isolation, psychological manipulation and interdependence, and mental health problems. In addition to victims’ physical and mental suffering, forced labour practices result in severe economic and social costs, weakening the integrity of labour markets and depriving economies of fair competition.

Human trafficking is a major problem in the EU, with law enforcement authorities registering a significant increase in intra-EU trafficking. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of THB victims identified rose by 20.5%: non-EU citizens accounted for 54% of the cases. Concurrently, reports of labour exploitation surged by 51%: men comprised 70% of the victims. Children made up 19% of all victims trafficked in the EU, highlighting the severity of child trafficking as a form of human exploitation¹.

These figures are also attributed to improvements in victim detection and identification mechanisms.



¹Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (2025, January 20). New Progress Report on combatting Trafficking in Human Beings. Available at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/new-progress-report-combatting-trafficking-human-beings-2025-01-20_en

THE LANDSCAPE OF LABOUR EXPLOITATION: Who Enables, Who Suffers, and Who Fights?

- Those who exploit victims of forced labour often operate under the aegis of legitimate businesses (farms, factories, construction firms, etc.), making the disruption of trafficking networks more complex.
- Many victims, including undocumented migrants, seasonal workers, and other vulnerable groups (homeless individuals, persons with disabilities, children in state institutions, and the elderly), are recruited through informal networks.
- While labour trafficking cases remain underreported, those documented show that traffickers continue to recruit young people from impoverished regions and subject them – without contracts or legal protections – to substandard working conditions.
- Since the INVERT project began, prosecutors and LEAs have been given comprehensive training on the topic of labour exploitation and the opportunity to evaluate INVERT’s two investigative tools, designed to identify legal businesses used for labour exploitation and victims of human trafficking.

Despite improvements to legal frameworks aimed at tackling labour exploitation, traffickers continue to evade authorities by manipulating legal loopholes and relying on informal recruitment networks.

LABOUR EXPLOITATION IN PRACTICE: How and Where It Happens

Many industry sectors are affected, including:



Traffickers usually exert complete control over their victims by means of threats withholding wages, or restricting movement

THE LABOUR EXPLOITATION MODEL

Human trafficking is not a random act of exploitation; it involves a structured model that follows a multi-stage process:



INVERT is committed to disrupting labour exploitation by collaborating strategically during the early stages of trafficking to better help victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

TACKLING LABOUR EXPLOITATION THROUGH DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

Trafficking in human beings is a complex, evolving crime. INVERT applies a scientific, data-driven approach to supporting authorities to address it more effectively by:

- 1** INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS AND EVIDENCE-BASED MODELS;
- 2** AUTOMATING RISK ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE THE DETECTION OF EXPLOITATIVE PRACTICES;
- 3** ENABLING MORE EFFICIENT ALLOCATION OF INVESTIGATIVE RESOURCES;
- 4** STRENGTHENING CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION THROUGH INTEROPERABLE TOOLS AND SHARED INDICATORS.

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