

INTRODUCTION

Behind closed doors is the title of Myria's *Trafficking and smuggling of human beings* 2020 annual report. As the Belgian rapporteur on human trafficking, Myria fulfils its legal mandate by compiling an independent and public report. The fight against human trafficking and smuggling is assessed and the phenomenon of trafficking and smuggling in human beings is discussed in detail.

Exactly ten years ago, the annual report's focus was summarised in its subtitle "Combating social fraud to prevent trafficking in human beings". This report was the central part of a triptych aimed at analysing human trafficking in the context of the free movement of persons and services, and the problem of fraudulent schemes. In the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic, this premise is once again proving to be both topical and pressing: when the government tackles social and labour law violations with targeted measures, the fight against human trafficking is an explicit part of the objectives.

Recent observations made abroad, such as those concerning Tönnies in Rheda-Wiedenbrück (Germany), the clothing industry in Leicester (United Kingdom) and seasonal work in Catalonia, revealed living and working conditions that justly raise questions regarding the respect for human dignity. Similar findings were also made in Belgium, although it has yet to be determined whether or not acts of human trafficking are involved.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the title *Behind closed doors* is all the more relevant. The report focuses on the exploitation of domestic workers at a time when domestic staff, who work in exploitative conditions, are more than ever forced to work and live under the same roof as their employer.

There are many situations involving domestic staff working "behind closed doors", where acts of human trafficking are rarely brought to light unless the victims manage to find the right door and let themselves out. The Brussels-based social inspector Bruno Devillé explains the latest findings and the reasons for the lack of evolution in the results of the approach implemented thus far.

At the same time, Myria takes a broader look at the evolution of the phenomenon and the approach to human trafficking in situations of complete or partial lockdown, on the basis of a number of external contributions. The number of reports of victims of human trafficking has already fallen dramatically.

In the contribution by Johan Debuf, chief inspector of police of the Brussels-North zone, he explains what can be deduced from online advertisements for sexual services, at a time when prostitution has also repeatedly gone into lockdown. Even though cases are rarely opened for human trafficking, behind every working prostitute is the potential exploitation of a vulnerable situation.

The government's agreement reflects a certain ambition with regard to the fight against human trafficking both in the field and through the structural funding of specialised centres, or via parliamentary monitoring. Regarding the latter, the mission is as follows: the greatest challenge is undoubtedly to develop an approach that consists of reacting in an appropriate and coherent manner every time a minor is reported as being in a vulnerable situation in the context of human smuggling or trafficking.

I hope you find this report a captivating and enriching read.

Koen Dewulf
Director