

# Specific attention for Latin American victims of sexual exploitation

## Staffing levels and specialisation of frontline services

### RECOMMENDATION 2

Guarantee more local police teams specialised in vice and prostitution in metropolitan areas.



The new European Directive 2024/1712 on human trafficking requires Member States to extend training to a greater number of professionals likely to encounter potential victims of trafficking and to deploy the appropriate expertise and technological capabilities within the units and services concerned. States are also encouraged to set up specialised units within law enforcement agencies and public prosecutors' offices.

In this context, Myria is calling for **increased staffing levels for the police** and the development of more **local police teams specialising** in this field. Within the local police force in Brussels, a THB-Prostitution section is carrying out **proactive work** through virtual patrols and checks, making it an example of good practice.

Myria highlights the need to pay greater attention to the phenomenon of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of Latin Americans when **training police officers**.

It is also necessary to work on the **trust of victims in the authorities** in order to reduce the dark figure of crime. In this respect, the **recruitment of police officers who speak the language of the target group** and have an affinity with the culture of the victims is a way of gaining their trust.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

Provide the police with the necessary investigative tools adapted to the new (digital) context.



Prostitution, and consequently sexual exploitation, is increasingly taking place **in private places** and the related advertising appears mainly **online**. The phenomenon of Latin American sex workers (SW) is no exception.

The police must be given the necessary resources to detect situations of abuse, detect victims, and identify and prosecute perpetrators in these new contexts. Myria recommends **investment in tools to accelerate and facilitate online detection and investigation, and a legal framework to that end**. Specialisation by the police in the use of these investigative tools is essential to address the digital world in which the phenomenon occurs. Although these tools or software may come at a certain price, they would enable savings in terms of staffing and time invested by the police.

## Approach and investigation

### RECOMMENDATION 4

Emphasise the importance of network analysis within the judiciary in order to dismantle the entire network.



In large-scale cases, the magistrate must ask the police to map out all the places of prostitution and the movements of the victims and potential perpetrators using network analysis, in order to highlight all the ramifications. These ramifications can cover the whole of Belgium and sometimes even extend abroad. To achieve this, the various statements, supplemented by other evidence, are of great help.

In large-scale cases, this point is relevant as it may be a question of **prostitution carousels** and the **(inter)national mobility** of Latin American **SWs**. To prevent the displacement of criminal activities and the exploitation of SWs, it is necessary to dismantle the entire criminal network. Through such a network analysis, it is sometimes possible to identify an **underlying structure of the network** that acts as a **central driving force of the criminal system**.

### RECOMMENDATION 5

Strengthen international collaboration in order to dismantle the networks and all their ramifications.



In large-scale cases, international cooperation is essential to dismantle the entire network and all its ramifications. As such, **sharing information internationally** is essential, and **initiating investigations with Joint Investigation Teams** can be relevant in certain cases.

Prostitution carousels enable networks to amass large sums of money, which can be transferred abroad, particularly in the form of investments in foreign companies. To remedy this, international financial cooperation is required. The **CARIN network** is a useful tool for this purpose, and using it can be considered good practice.

It can also be beneficial to **share best practices** that exist **on an international scale**. For instance, the Netherlands launched an innovative multidisciplinary approach based on different perspectives, called *Field Lab*, and applied it to the problem of the vast networks surrounding Latin American SWs.

## RECOMMENDATION 6

Strengthen collaboration with internet platforms to improve the detection of victims, the identification of perpetrators and the collection of evidence.



In general, the Latin American community in Europe, including SW, is very active on social media, internet platforms and instant messaging applications.

Since the adoption of the recent royal decree authorising the advertising of the prostitution of an adult in certain specific cases, the providers of an internet platform whose registered office is established in Belgium or who disseminate advertising for prostitution aimed at an audience specifically in Belgium are required to respect certain **preventive measures** in order to avoid, in particular, the risks of sexual exploitation. They must be able to play a role in identifying problematic situations and cannot turn a blind eye to the risk of their platform being used for criminal purposes. They are therefore required to act promptly whenever they suspect a case of abuse of prostitution or human trafficking or a case is brought to their attention, and to report these cases to the police or the judicial authorities. Online providers must set up a point of contact that can be reached by the authorities and communicate the contact details to the police. They are also required to respond quickly and free of charge to requests made by the police and judicial authorities.

**A certain internet platform used for advertising prostitution is already collaborating with the police**, by reporting problematic situations identified in adverts and relaying reports from clients, which constitutes good practice in this area.

Myria recommends informing all police services of the existence of this **good practice** and **strengthening the collaboration with other internet platforms**.

## RECOMMENDATION 7

Raise awareness among clients about human trafficking and encourage them to report any abuse in order to reduce the demand for human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.



Myria emphasises that **clients** of SWs can also play an important role in the fight against human trafficking online and that they **should be made aware of this through campaigns to report abuse**.

Sex work through sex websites and social media is booming. The police can carry out checks on the internet, but these require significant resources and the task is sometimes complicated by special applications, intended for and available only to clients. The latter can therefore represent significant added value in the fight against human trafficking, as they can identify certain abuses more easily and quickly in places that are difficult or even impossible for the police to access.

Raising awareness among clients of human trafficking and encouraging them to report possible abuses can **reduce the demand** for human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

On the one hand, this approach will make SW clients more aware of the issue of human trafficking, and on the other hand, pimps will avoid the risks associated with employing victims of human trafficking. Nevertheless, following the adoption of the new European directive on trafficking in human beings, Belgium is obliged to criminalise the knowing use of services provided by a victim of trafficking.

This could, in some cases, have a negative effect on the reporting behaviour of clients of SWs and prove counterproductive in the fight against human trafficking. These clients may not wish to run the risk of people in their neighbourhood finding out that they frequent SWs because of an investigation carried out within the framework of a law sanctioning clients, involving hearings and possibly a neighbourhood inquiry. The threshold for reporting abuses therefore risks become higher for clients.

Furthermore, since the adoption of the royal decree on advertising the prostitution of an adult, internet platform providers are required to provide visitors with a visible means of quickly reporting any suspected abuse of prostitution or human trafficking related to the use of the platform, such as an 'alert button'. Such a measure also constitutes a means of encouraging potential clients to report any abuse they may observe.

Giving a trans person the **choice of the gender of the person conducting the body search** is also good practice within the police force.

Myria recommends that these practices be maintained and disseminated within the police force.

Furthermore, raising awareness of the issue among **magistrates, centres and the police** would also result in a **better recording of trans people** in their databases and a **more appropriate way of referring to them** in official reports and court decisions, which would also be useful in establishing an image of the phenomenon.

## Prevention

## Victims

### RECOMMENDATION 8

Raise awareness among all those involved in the multidisciplinary model, such as the police, the judiciary and specialised reception centres for trafficking victims, of the situation of Latin American trans victims in order to draw more attention to the issue and strengthen their trust in the authorities.



### RECOMMENDATION 9

Improve information and awareness-raising among SWs, some of whom may be potential victims of trafficking.



**Only a small number of victims from Latin America wish to enter or remain in the status.** The role of the **organisations** that support SWs, through their **psychosocial and medical support**, is fundamental in reaching this group, whose activities mainly take place in private places.

The **reality** of Latin American **trans people** is still largely **unknown** to the various stakeholders.

Myria found that the **presence of an employee from a specialised reception centre for trafficking victims during a hearing conducted by the police** helped to gain the trust of a Latin American trans victim and obtain their statement.

They can also play an important role in raising awareness among this target group. For instance, **awareness campaigns and discussion groups** are organised with former SWs to inform this group about the existence of exploitative situations and specialised support. The aim is to **raise awareness** among SWs of **exploitative situations** and make them more resilient to them.

Myria encourages such practice and supports the need to disseminate it among grassroots organisations that support sex workers.

Furthermore, Myria also recommends the **presence of centres specialised in the reception of human trafficking victims during planned and large-scale police checks**, as this good practice makes it possible to make potential victims more aware of the risks of exploitation.

## Transversality — general

### RECOMMENDATION 10

Form a complete picture of the phenomenon of SWs originating from Latin America, at national and international level. This can be important when developing specific measures aimed at implementing and stimulating a tailor-made approach at operational level and at different political levels.



At present, relatively little is known about this phenomenon, even though it has been on the increase in recent years. It is therefore necessary to draw up a general picture of the phenomenon that gives an idea of the distribution and nature of the places of prostitution concerned, as well as an overview of national and international movements linked to the various migratory flows and possible human smuggling. **Further study is needed into the nature of the organisation and the activities of the criminal systems**, including the methods of operation, exploitation and recruitment. There should also be a **financial audit** of the various means of payment used between the SWs and their potential exploiters, on the one hand, and the criminal network's means of payment, movements and criminal investments, on the other, with a focus on its money laundering activities in the legal world.

This complex phenomenon can include situations of exploitation of prostitution, human smuggling and human trafficking. At the same time, many Latin American SWs are not victims. Sometimes, these different profiles are present in the same case. The image of the phenomenon must **reflect the overall and interactive perspective of the different profiles of SWs and victims**, by paying particular attention to their reasons for migration. It is also important to examine the **reality of trans people** within this phenomenon. Each profile has specific needs and interests which, in situations of exploitation, can sometimes require a tailor-made approach.

The development and elaboration of such an image of the phenomenon is necessary for a rational policy and the operational measures required in the field, for instance in the context of large-scale control operations.