



## Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is a modern form of slavery and has evolved in over a decade into a complex crime that includes sexual and work exploitation, forced begging, illegal adoptions and sham marriages. This may also encompass the extraction of organs or tissues and providing a spouse in the context of forced marriage.

Human Trafficking is thought to be one of the fastest-growing activities of trans-national criminal organizations. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), forced labour alone (one component of human trafficking) generates an estimated \$150 billion in profits per annum as of 2014. Furthermore it is condemned as a violation of human rights by international conventions.

In an effort to support the Cyprus government's actions in combating Human Trafficking, **Zonta Club of Nicosia** was fundraising during the year 2017 through various events to help fight Human Trafficking and create awareness.

The proceeds of these events were presented to the Head of the Office of Combating Human Trafficking of the Cyprus Police, at a ceremony held on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017, during which the audience was informed of the problem in Cyprus and was able to participate at a wide discussion on the subject.



*Trafficking in Persons Report* released in June 2016 states that "refugees and migrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals; religious minorities; people with disabilities; and those who are stateless" are the most at-risk for human trafficking. Governments best protect victims from being exploited when the needs of vulnerable populations are understood.

Cyprus is a destination country for women who are subjected to human trafficking, specifically forced prostitution as well as women and men who are in forced labour. Sex trafficking occurs within venues used by Cyprus' commercial sex industry, including cabarets,

bars, pubs and massage parlours disguised as private apartments located throughout the country. Groups vulnerable to forced labour include domestic workers, asylum seekers, and foreign migrants working in the farming and agricultural sectors.

The Office of Combating Human Trafficking of the Cyprus Police is responsible for gathering, processing, analyzing and utilizing intelligence regarding the trafficking of human beings having direct and continual contact with the victims, until the final court decision is reached. A task that has not been easy as the entire police force has been obliged to evolve, just as the crime has evolved, in order to be able to identify and help victims and send criminals to jail, helping Cyprus rise up the rank of international police forces that are effectively tackling the problem. NGOs report that the police still lack sufficient investigative resources to vigorously combat trafficking throughout the island.

Nevertheless in 2016 The Republic of Cyprus, according to the US State Department report on Human Trafficking, was upgraded to Tier 1 ranking, meaning that the government implements all necessary actions for combating Human Trafficking as these are mentioned in *Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)*. This was undoubtedly a very important success for Cyprus and the result of a huge effort in the combat of Human Trafficking.

However, despite the significant efforts, the Cyprus government has not met the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, as the US State Department's 2017 Trafficking in Persons report, released June 2017, said. According to the report, Cyprus has slipped back to a Tier 2 ranking, after climbing to the top spot last year. The report said that foreign women in the north part of the island, that is not controlled by the official Government of the Republic of Cyprus, "are subjected to forced prostitution in nightclubs".

The government's efforts to engage non-governmental organisations into the national referral mechanism, increase funds to a NGO-run shelter and assist victims, were considered "not serious and sustained" relatively to the previous year's. The government identified fewer sex trafficking victims, failed to consistently provide financial and social support services to trafficking victims and did not effectively address trafficking-related complicity, which local observers report is hampering the government's anti-trafficking efforts.

Cyprus prohibits both sex and labour trafficking through Law 87 (I)/2007, which also contains protection measures for victims. Although the penalties prescribed for sex trafficking range up to 20 years' imprisonment, these penalties are not commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape, for which the maximum sentence is life in prison.

Although Cyprus' anti-trafficking law mandates referral of trafficking victims to the government's social welfare services and to the government shelter, it did not employ procedures for front-line responders to proactively identify potential victims, sustaining a long-standing deficiency. NGOs report that the government's failure to recognize their critical role in protection, negatively impacted on the government's ability to provide meaningful protection to trafficking victims.