

# STOP TRAFFICK!

## TACKLING DEMAND FOR SEXUAL SERVICES OF TRAFFICKED WOMEN AND GIRLS

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*The Immigrant Council of Ireland  
in partnership with:  
Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation  
Klaipeda Social and Psychological Services Centre  
Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies  
Multicultural Women's Association in Finland*



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Tackling demand for sexual services of trafficked  
women and girls



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*In Partnership with*



MONIKA - MULTICULTURAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION



KLAIPĖDA SOCIAL AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SERVICES CENTER



# ***Executive summary***

## ***Brief introduction to the aims and objectives of the research***

This study, funded under the European Commission's Prevention and Fight against Crime (ISEC) initiative, has been carried out as part of the project 'Stop Traffick: Tackling demand for sexual services of trafficked women and girls'. The research will inform strategies to reduce demand for the services of trafficked women and girls in the five participating countries (Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Bulgaria and Lithuania). This evidence base will influence the production of a toolkit of products and activities to:

- Raise awareness among buyers and potential buyers of services delivered by victims of human trafficking in the sex industry
- Reduce the demand for purchase of sexual services

The initiating partner, the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), led this project in collaboration with the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (BGRF), Klaipeda Social and Psychological Service Centre (KSPSC) in Lithuania, the Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (MIGS) in Cyprus and the Multicultural Women's Association of Finland (MONIKA).

This report analyses and assesses efficient approaches to discourage demand for the services provided by victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, based on a greater understanding of experiences, attitudes and motivations of the people who purchase sex. We wanted to gather sufficient knowledge to inform interventions linked with the decision to purchase sex and, in particular, to purchase sex from a vulnerable individual who could be a victim of human trafficking.

The objectives of the research are to:

1. Explore the international legal provisions and the national legal and policy context in the participating countries, taking into account the various obligations that exist to combat human trafficking, with a focus on discouraging the demand that fosters human trafficking.

2. Explore the characteristics of the buyers and their attitudes towards the purchase of sex in general and from victims of trafficking in particular.
3. Explore the awareness level of buyers of sex of the circumstances of the people they are buying, as well as their knowledge and considerations on the issue of human trafficking.
4. Establish the most efficient measures to deter the purchasing of sex from trafficked individuals, as identified by the respondents in the study.
5. Make recommendations on measures to discourage demand for the services of trafficked women and girls that would be relevant and efficient in the participating countries.
6. Inform the production of an effective awareness-raising toolkit.

### ***Brief overview of the methodology***

The report is based on mixed research methods. This approach was required to better understand this private and relatively difficult issue to research, particularly the purchase of sexual services from another individual. The methods include a review of relevant international research, a review of the legal and policy context in the partner countries, an online survey and face-to-face interviews with buyers of sex.

The data collection combined quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 763 respondents who have purchased sex engaged with the study following extensive recruitment and advertising campaigns across the five participating countries. In selecting the appropriate method of research in each national context, the five national research teams opted for either a quantitative or qualitative approach to data collection.

In-depth face-to-face interviews with men who purchase sex were carried out in Bulgaria and Lithuania. Cyprus, Finland and Ireland launched online surveys and advertised them through various internet and social media platforms. Although a wide age range of buyers of sex participated in the online survey and interviews, in Lithuania a younger population was targeted, which is reflected in the data that was collected.

The research comprised:

- Seventy-one in-depth interviews with male buyers in Bulgaria and Lithuania (37 in Bulgaria and 34 in Lithuania)
- Some 2,004 responses to an online survey carried out in Cyprus, Finland and Ireland, of which 1,050 were completed in Cyprus, 544 in Finland and 410 in Ireland. Of these, 426 respondents in Cyprus identified themselves as buyers of sex, 208 respondents in Finland identified themselves as buyers of sex and 58 respondents in Ireland identified themselves as buyers of sex
- In total, 763 buyers of sex participated in the in-depth interviews and online survey in the five project countries (692 in the online survey and 71 in the interviews)

## ***Research findings***

### ***Characteristics of buyers***

The first part of the research identified characteristics of buyers who responded to the online survey in Cyprus, Finland and Ireland, and participated in the in-depth interviews in Bulgaria and Lithuania. The data shows that:

- Buyers were overwhelmingly male
- The majority of buyers were over 25 years of age, except in Lithuania where the majority were under 25
- The majority of buyers were in a relationship, with the exception of Lithuania where the majority were single
- The vast majority of buyers had incomes of more than €20,000
- Buyers predominantly lived in cities

### ***The experience of buyers***

The second part of the research looked at the experiences of buyers when purchasing sex. The findings cover the gender of sellers, first experiences of purchasing sex, the most recent encounter, experiences of purchasing sex abroad and the frequency with which buyers purchase sex. Overall, the findings show that the overwhelming majority of the sellers who were purchased for sex were female. First-time experiences of purchasing sex tended to take place at a relatively young age and in a spontaneous and unplanned way, often with a group of friends and, in some cases, under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Data was also collected on the types of locations that first-time buyers contacted sellers and purchased sex. The research also documents the most recent experiences of purchasing sex and shows that, in most cases, the buyers have different patterns of buying compared to the first encounter. It reveals mixed patterns of indoor, outdoor and online purchasing of sex across the five countries, with buyers in Ireland and Finland making much greater use of the internet to make contact with sellers, compared with the other countries surveyed. In addition, the vast majority of buyers purchased sex in indoor settings. The in-depth interviews also show that purchasing of sex had largely become a planned activity, compared to first-time experiences.

Finally, the survey found that a large proportion of buyers purchased sex abroad, in addition to purchasing sex in their home countries. The popular locations for purchasing sex abroad tended to be in countries where highly visible sex industries exist and/or in locations with close proximity to the buyers' home countries.

### ***Views, attitudes and motivations of buyers***

The third part of the research explored the views, attitudes and motivations of buyers towards the purchasing of sex and the sellers of sex as well as their motivations for purchasing sex. This draws on the findings from the in-depth interviews with buyers in Bulgaria and Lithuania. Buyers interviewed were seen to have a complex view of the act of purchasing sex and those involved in the sale of sex. On the one hand, they overwhelmingly believed that the sale of sex is a transaction between two consenting adults. However, it is not something they would want any close friend or family member to become involved in. Most buyers reported viewing sellers as being different from other women.

Moreover, our research findings show there are a multitude of motivations driving the purchase of sex, many buyers are motivated by 'control' – in particular, the control over a sexual encounter arising from its purchase. Other motivations include having variety, both in terms of the seller and the acts purchased.

### ***Witnessing exploitation and vulnerability***

The fourth part of the research examined the experiences of buyers in witnessing exploitation and vulnerability. Research on buyers' perceptions and understanding of exploitation and their encounters with exploitation shows that it is not uncommon for buyers to encounter sellers they believe are being exploited. In our research, 222 buyers reported that they had encountered sellers they believed were being exploited, representing nearly one-third of buyers who took part in this research. Amongst the buyers responding to the online survey, a significant number of indicators were identified that led the buyer to believe a seller was being exploited.

In the data, a noticeable gap emerged between the number of buyers who reported encountering sellers they believed were being exploited and buyers who considered contacting the authorities to report such fears. Overall, a large proportion of respondents avoided answering the question of whether they had reported suspicions of trafficking to the authorities or they answered that they had not considered reporting suspicions to the police.

### ***Human trafficking***

The findings from the in-depth interviews in Bulgaria and Lithuania suggest that, irrespective of a buyers' knowledge of human trafficking as a crime and as a phenomenon, it is unlikely they will consider the possibility that a seller may be a victim of trafficking when purchasing sex. Similarly, knowledge of existing laws specifically targeting buyers of sexual services from trafficking victims appear to have no impact on buyers' consideration of human trafficking in the act of purchasing of sex.

### ***The role of deterrents to purchasing sex***

Finally, the research examined buyers' views about what would act as efficient deterrents to the purchasing of sex. These views varied from individual to individual and from country to country. However, there are some identifiable trends that are primarily valid for each of the five countries in our study. Apart from fears about their personal safety, which appears very important, other strong deterrents identified by the buyers in all countries were publicity in the local media and/or on the internet, letters of disclosure sent to the family and imprisonment. At the same time, educational classes and community service are deterrents with least significance for buyers.

## ***Conclusions and recommendations***

### **Targeting demand reduction on men**

- Strategies to reduce demand should target the general population of men as the research indicates that buyers of sex are overwhelmingly male, with a diverse range of characteristics.

### **Addressing demand by taking into account buyers' age and other characteristics**

- Evidence that emerged in the data indicates a number of factors that should inform the development of effective campaigns to deter demand, including the age profile, which is primarily among the middle range age group (25-44 years) and the older age group (over 45 years of age).
- It should also take into account the presence and absence of relationships, the relatively high social standing and the middle to high-income levels of buyers, and the high levels of education and employment amongst buyers.
- Awareness-raising and education initiatives, which specifically target younger men and potential future buyers, should be urgently developed as the data indicates that purchasing sex becomes more entrenched over time, with more frequent buyers exhibiting an increased sense of entitlement and desire for control.
- The Lithuanian study also shows that younger buyers may recognise the negative effect for sellers, both in terms of their physical and emotional wellbeing. This finding provides a useful starting point for campaigns aimed at younger people.

### **A focus on male buyers of female sellers**

- Male buyers purchasing sex from female sellers should remain the primary focus of any demand reduction strategies, based on the statistics in this and other research in the past. Specific campaigns targeting the buying of male sellers could be developed to address the minority of buyers who purchase sex from males, provided this does not take away from the resources aimed at the reduction within the prevalent scenario (namely where male buyers purchase from female sellers).

- Gender considerations should be applied to the design of any intervention strategies, taking into account the defined gendered nature of the phenomenon.

### **Addressing demand in relation to the visibility and availability with first-time buyers**

- Strategies addressing demand need to recognise that visibility and availability has a strong influence on the decision to purchase sex for the first time.
- Campaigns also need to address peer influence and the motivations of young men in first buying sex, including the demand for sexual variety, tests of bravery (willing to take risks) and curiosity.
- Demand strategies should address the role of alcohol and the group settings in which young men first purchase sex. The role of alcohol was not found to be a causal factor in the purchase of sex, but it is seen as boosting courage and lessening inhibitions. Therefore, information/awareness raising could effectively target venues selling alcohol.

### **The need to focus demand reduction strategies in diverse locations and to take account of the shift into indoor prostitution and the use of the internet**

- As the findings indicate a major shift into indoor prostitution and the increasing use of the internet, particularly in Finland and Ireland, demand reduction measures should place significant focus on the role of the internet in accessing paid sex. The prevalence of private apartments as a location suggests the need to target the use of private premises for prostitution.
- Despite the move indoors, the findings indicate the need to continue to address on-street buying and demand reduction strategies, as well as the need to target particular venues, such as cabarets and clubs, which are primary locations for accessing paid sex in several countries.

### **The need to address demand reduction as a transnational issue**

- The extent to which buyers purchase sex abroad, where it is perceived as more private and anonymous for the buyer, confirms that demand is an international and transnational issue.
- Measures to address demand should involve cross-border cooperation and coordination at European and global levels.

### **Addressing perceptions of women in prostitution as ‘other’**

- The research demonstrates the need for demand strategies to address sexual objectification and the perception of women in prostitution as different from other women.
- Buyers’ views that they would not want to see a relative or close friend engage in selling sex provides some evidence of recognition in relation to the harm of prostitution, which could be utilised in education campaigns.

### **Witnessing exploitation**

- The research demonstrates that serious exploitation, including exploitation of minors, is witnessed by buyers within the sex industry. Demand reduction strategies need to highlight all forms of exploitation within the sex industry and how the purchase of sex is a causal factor in that exploitation.
- The perception of buyers that the majority of women are consenting, and by implication not exploited, needs to be addressed.
- The fact that many buyers exhibited reluctance to engage with the question in the survey about exploitation or to report exploitation to the authorities raises questions in relation to the efficacy of relying on buyers to report to the authorities. The research does suggest that some buyers will consider reporting, but further research is needed to identify the numbers of buyers who actually report to the authorities as well as strategies to encourage more reporting.

### **The role of laws criminalising the purchase of a victim of trafficking**

- The research reveals that laws criminalising the purchase of a victim of trafficking are not having a deterrent effect on current buyers. The vast majority of buyers in Lithuania and Bulgaria said they did not consider human trafficking when purchasing sex, despite awareness of the law.
- Strategies need to consider the effectiveness in reducing demand of laws solely addressing the purchase of sex from victims of trafficking, in particular those that involve knowledge on the part of the buyer.

### **The role of the media**

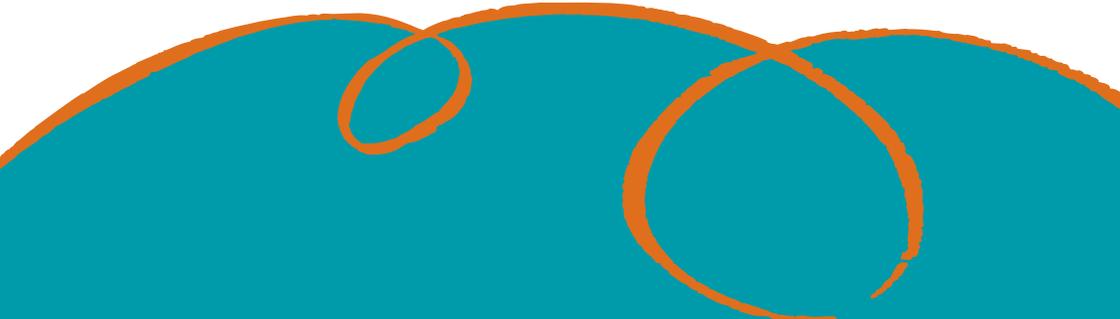
- The role of the media needs to be better utilised as this is the most important source of information for buyers in relation to human trafficking.

### **The implementation of effective deterrents**

- The findings provide strong evidence of the buyers' assessments of what constitute effective deterrents.
- Public exposure in the local media and/or internet, letters of disclosure sent to a buyer's family and imprisonment are all identified by buyers as having a strong deterrent quality.
- Considering that having educational classes has been found to have no deterrent quality by almost all buyers, it is unlikely that an approach based on such classes will help deter demand.
- National strategies should also be informed by the specific deterrents identified in national contexts.







[www.stoptraffick.ie](http://www.stoptraffick.ie)

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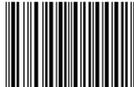
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