

## **Poles' Social Awareness of Trafficking in Human Beings**

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### **Abstract**

This article is devoted to the problem of the awareness of Poles of the issue of human trafficking and forced labor. The results of public opinion polls conducted in Poland during 1998-2020 will be analyzed. Despite the fact that there were several such polls, the literature in Poland lacks any analysis and commentary. On the one hand, we are dealing with extensive empirical material; on the other, some of the studies raise serious doubts as to the methodology used, and third, the interpretation of the results sometimes causes significant controversy. In world literature, the problem of social awareness of human trafficking has also been addressed much less frequently than issues such as the scale of the problem, the efficiency of prosecutions and the situation of victims. The narrative axis of this study is the concept of an active society as presented by A. Etzioni, who claims that the sense of the existence of a community boils down to working out optimal responses to emerging social needs. That is why I ask the question "does Polish society see the problem of human trafficking as important, and has it developed a sense of readiness that guarantees that it will "deal with it" in the best possible way?" In light of the data collected and analyses conducted, my response is definitely negative. An apathetic and passive community turned out to be a "convenient" partner for a country that has never considered human trafficking to be a priority and did not create a system to prevent this crime or efficiently prosecute perpetrators. In the article, I also argue that the low social awareness of citizens has become one of the factors that negatively affected the process of building an effective system for eliminating modern-day slavery in Poland.

**Keywords:** human trafficking, public opinion, social awareness, active society, well-functioning country.

### **Introduction**

This article is devoted to the problem of eliminating human trafficking and forced labor, but viewed from the perspective of social awareness of these phenomena. It focuses on public opinion polls conducted in Poland during 1998-2020. However, the scope of the analysis will be subordinated to the fundamental

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research problem, namely determining the extent to which public awareness is a factor influencing the state's reaction to both of the above-mentioned phenomena, including the effective elimination thereof.

Although it is a truism, it must be constantly repeated that human trafficking and forced labour – sometimes called modern-day slavery<sup>2</sup> – are one of the greatest threats to human civilization. This applies to both the size of these phenomena and the negative effects of slavery upon victims, as well as the harmful effect of various forms of exploitation on the functioning of societies. The seriousness of the problem is confirmed by both the volume of publications on this topic<sup>3</sup> and the level of mobilization of key international institutions,<sup>4</sup> as well as the involvement of the authorities of some countries in the creation of provisions that make up a robust system for eliminating these crimes.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the question is justified as to whether the view regarding the unique social ailment of human trafficking formulated in the international arena is shared by the Polish authorities. But perhaps it is even more important to ask if the majority of Polish society shares it. And the latter matter is what I will be mainly discussing here.

A review of the scientific literature on human trafficking shows that the focus of researchers and analysts is mainly on issues such as defining this problem<sup>6</sup>, estimating the number of victims<sup>7</sup>, efficient prosecution of perpetrators<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This term comes from English, and has two versions: "modern day slavery" and "modern slavery", on this topic, see: D. Hernandez A. Rudolph, *Modern day slavery: What drives human trafficking in Europe?*, *European Journal of Political Economy* 2015, Volume 38, while the main legal instruments on human trafficking in some countries, including the UK and Australia, are called the Modern Slavery Act. This term causes a lot of controversy, mainly due to the question "is what is happening today and what took place in antiquity or in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries the same phenomenon?"

<sup>3</sup> It is sufficient to say that readers can find the largest contemporary review of the literature on the subject in the monumental piece of work published recently by two outstanding experts on the problem, see: *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, J. Winterdyk, J. Jones (eds), Palgrave 2020, Cham.

<sup>4</sup> As an example, I can point out the activity of the La Strada International organization, see: <https://www.lastradainternational.org/> [accessed May 11, 2021] or the statutory activity of a group of experts of the Council of Europe – GRETA, see: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/greta> [accessed May 11, 2021].

<sup>5</sup> In the last 20 years, the United States Congress has issued a dozen or so acts concerning various aspects of human trafficking, see: <https://www.state.gov/international-and-domestic-law/> [accessed May 11, 2021].

<sup>6</sup> See, inter alia: *Defining Human Trafficking and Identifying its Victims*, Venla Roth (ed.), Leiden, Boston 2012, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, and: C.J. Smith, K. Kangaspunta, *Defining human trafficking and its nuances in a cultural context*, [in] *Human Trafficking Exploring the International Nature, Concerns, and Complexities*, John Winterdyk, Benjamin Perrin, Philip Reichel (red), Boca Raton, London, New York 2012 CRC Press.

and the quality of services offered to victims<sup>9</sup>. However, what people know about human trafficking, as well as what they think about this problem, is not delved into or studied too deeply.<sup>10</sup> And this is quite a surprising finding, considering that the level of citizens' awareness is one of the key factors influencing the effectiveness of the social system in solving problems that are important to society or a given community. A good example of how this mechanism works is the climate catastrophe. It is only the mass interest in this problem from citizens, and first and foremost youth, that has caused the authorities in many countries to take any sort of action in this matter.<sup>11</sup> And it is from this very perspective that the article approaches the problem of human trafficking. Two questions are addressed: first, "do members of Polish society know about human trafficking and forced labour, and, if so, to what extent?"; and second, "is public awareness a factor shaping the response of the government and other public entities to these phenomena, and if so, to what extent?" Only selected findings of individual

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<sup>7</sup> See: [https://www.alliance87.org/global\\_estimates\\_of\\_modern\\_slavery-forced\\_labour\\_and\\_forced\\_marriage.pdf](https://www.alliance87.org/global_estimates_of_modern_slavery-forced_labour_and_forced_marriage.pdf) [accessed May 12, 2021].

<sup>8</sup> This may apply to very practical matters, see, inter alia:

<https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/5-building-strong-cases/51-victim-centered-investigations/> [accessed May 12, 2021] as well as more general matters: R. Broad, J. Muraszkiwicz, *The Investigation and Prosecution of Traffickers: Challenges and Opportunities* [in] *Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, J. Winterdyk, J. Jones (eds), The Palgrave 2020, Cham.

<sup>9</sup> In view of the extensive materials on this subject, as an example I will only highlight: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1069352> [accessed May 12, 2021]; Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking, GRETA, Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, December 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Still rare are publications such as the report on studies in Northern Ireland entitled the *Outcome Report Human Trafficking Survey Questionnaire*, see: <https://sigbi.org/northern-ireland/files/2013/08/SI-survey-report-4.pdf> [accessed May 12, 2021], or an article published in a British medical journal: C. Ross, S. Dimitrova, L.M. Howard, M. Dewey, C. Zimmerman, S. Oram, *Human trafficking and health: a cross-sectional survey of NHS professionals' contact with victims of human trafficking*, *British Medical Journal Open* 2015, 5(8), see: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4550705/> [accessed May 13, 2021], or finally the report: *Awareness of human trafficking survey: summary of findings*, which references public opinion polls in Scotland, see: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/awareness-of-human-trafficking-survey-summary-of-findings/> [accessed May 12, 2021].

<sup>11</sup> See, inter alia: K. Tomaszewski, *Rola czynnika ludzkiego w kształtowaniu polityki energetycznej współczesnego państwa*. [The role of the human factor in shaping the energy policy of contemporary states], *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne UAM* 2020, No. 1, and: T.M. Lee, E.M. Markowitz, P.D. Howe, C-Y. Ko, A. Leiserowitz *Predictors of public climate change awareness and risk perception around the world*, *Nature Climate Change* 2015, Volume 5.

studies will be presented here, because a comprehensive presentation of the results of several fairly extensive polls significantly exceeds the length of this article.

### **Analytical model**

Over half a century ago, a well-known American sociologist – Amitai Etzioni – argued that an active society is one that develops bonds leading to joint action in accordance with the recommendations of cybernetics, but also has a specific sense of agency and even power, thanks to which it can be effective in taking on challenges.<sup>12</sup> What stands out from these words is the author's strong conviction about the importance of community and the primacy of society over country. One could say that such an understanding of the idea of society is a specific "ideal type" of this most important, yet also most active, actor in the public arena.<sup>13</sup> Etzioni really did view society in this manner. He perceived it first and foremost as a "living", i.e. active, being, and as a creative being in the sense that the meaning of its actions was an optimal reaction to social needs. As a result, the attitude of this thinker to sociology as a science is quite specific. After all, the above-mentioned strongly cybernetic definition of society was in some sense contradictory to the classical sociological reflection, which at that time focused on the issue of social origin, behavioural patterns, social structures and the functional consequences of an insufficiency thereof. However, Etzioni created a theoretical framework for something that in today's language we would describe as social counseling<sup>14</sup>, and that was a sequence of very practically oriented social efforts to solve important social problems.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, such a "pragmatic" approach to the effectiveness of society, while exceptionally clear and useful, needs to be supplemented with teleological matters. Etzioni does not disregard these. On the contrary, he seems convinced that in social life, the type of need, problem or matter is not insignificant. In his opinion, anything that serves the purpose of democracy is

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<sup>12</sup> A. Etzioni, *The Active Society. A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*. London, Collier-Macmillan; New York, Free Press, 1968.

<sup>13</sup> S.A. Douglas, Review of *The Active Society. A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*, *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 1969, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> A. Etzioni, *Societal Guidance: A Key to Macro-Sociology*, *Acta Sociologica* 1968, Volume 11, Issue 4.

<sup>15</sup> In those days, this was a very innovative approach, see N.R.F Maier, *Problem solving and creativity in individuals and groups* Hardcover, Belmont 1970, Brooks/Cole Publishing; however, it is difficult to imagine contemporary sociology without such reflection, as evidenced by the cognitive attractiveness of even this publication: *Problemy społeczne. Między socjologią demaskatorską a polityką społeczną*. [Social problems. Between exposing sociology and social policy]. Księga Jubileuszowa dla Kazimierza W. Frieskego, Warsaw 2017, Oficyna Wydawnicza.

important, but with democracy being understood quite specifically – pro-socially, not only politically. In accordance with this approach, people should know that democracy is built through everyday active influence on historical processes. It is not about history with a capital "H", which is historical happenings, but rather about the fact that each active unit participates in both meeting and creating social needs. When taking specific actions or decisions, people activate social processes and participate in sending, according to Etzioni, specific social signals that sooner or later return, and to which the same people have to respond.<sup>16</sup> When explaining this interesting and deep thinking, we would say, to paraphrase the well-known adage, that each of us is not only the architect of our own fortune, but also of the fortune of others, and even of all of us. At the risk of over-simplification, let us put it this way: activity is creative, passivity brings nothing new. But even with the greatest social activity of units, as a community we cannot do everything, because this is not realistic, and so we must choose and decide what to prioritize. How active a society is and, in practice, how active part of it and individual members are depends, *inter alia*, on how close specific goals are to their hearts, or rather, how great their need of something is. To speak like Etzioni, how strong is this signal that people create and receive?

If, for example, the local community in "X", after yet another tragic accident, comes to the conclusion that the local road must be widened, a group of people who will take the appropriate actions will arise fairly quickly, and they will find a way to communicate this need to the authorities. What is more, they will fight for the expected result in the form of the necessary reconstruction. Or, if a drug dealer appears in the vicinity of an primary school, the parents' community will not await the dire consequences of this situation, but will quickly find a way to get through to decision makers for them to take appropriate action. These two examples illustrate the mechanism of public action, whose specific driving force is a real and perceptible need felt by an easily identifiable group of individuals. In such a situation, the optimal reaction of the system involves satisfying this need as much as possible (widening the road or arresting the dealer). A feature of these two situations is also the fact that the action that must be taken is within reach of the institution that was approached. Local authorities know how to widen the road and are able to do this, and the police can arrest the drug dealer and know how to do this.

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<sup>16</sup> A. Etzioni, *My brother's keeper: a memoir and a message*, Lanham 2003, Rowman & Littlefield, p. 100 ff.

The situation gets significantly more complicated if the need is just as easy to identify, but it is not clear who the addressee of any claims would be. Let us imagine that in an area increasingly more people are starting to exhibit allergy symptoms. This can be due to many factors, such as smog, the appearance of chemicals in the local river, or the increasing numbers of a highly sensitizing plant. While residents discuss it quite frequently, the formation of an initiative or intervention group is not an easy and quick process, mainly because it is difficult to diagnose the situation, and the list of entities that can or should do something is extensive. Residents take different actions, but failure or anticipated difficulties discourage them from acting. An improvement in the situation, if it occurs, is always through a long-term and frustrating process that should be a dialogue, but in practice is a permanent struggle with the authorities. So Etzioni would say that the signals were strong, but the possibility of responding to them was limited.

However, the matter is even more difficult when a significant part of the community starts to feel negative emotions related to an actual or imagined threat. The above-mentioned climate catastrophe is an obvious example. There is no doubt that the number of people who are afraid that their children or grandchildren will be deprived of fresh water or walking in the woods is growing. It is irrelevant whether in 50 years there really will not be any water or forests will be a distant memory. We note that there are people who think that there are more and more of them, and in fact very few of them know how to confirm whether these fears are real and where to address their concerns or complaints. To illustrate a similar situation, let us imagine a religious community that, through a sense that only it itself knows, begins to receive signals about the growing hostility of the followers of the dominant religion. And again, it does not really matter if such a belief is fuelled artificially, for example, through the local media, or if the decline in the religious majority's liking for the minority is real. People do not know how to confirm what they feel so as not to increase tensions, and thus they do not know who to tell about it. And even more, whom to ask for help. If we were to once again refer to the introductory comments, we would say that this is yet another form of the shortcomings of democracy.

What I am getting to is a statement that in all of these situations, we are dealing with a more or less real social need and with a collective belief about it. Therefore, we have very interesting material for contemplation, inspired by the concept of an active society that solves its own problems. From this perspective, meeting the need outlined in the first of these situations (the road, dealer) may be relatively easy and may boil down to routine actions of a clearly defined entity. It may also require a series of, for example, diagnostic actions and creative activity by numerous local institutions, and perhaps even central ones, as in the second

story. And finally, the discomfort of a religious group can be a real challenge for the entire community and almost all of its public authorities, as in the case of religious tensions.

On the other hand, we may be dealing with a situation that is the opposite in a sense, in which there is an objectively negative phenomenon that has been correctly identified, and it is obvious to all observers that the situation requires immediate remedial actions, but almost no one is taking them. This could be, for example, the increasing phenomenon of early pathological childhood obesity, a wave of suicides by entrepreneurs caused by the economic crisis, or the problem of growing crime typical in this context. The negative consequences of each of these situations may be easy to see and are objectively obvious. And if in addition to this we have data confirming that this is not just an assumption, but an actual social dysfunction, the need for immediate action becomes necessary. But what to do when there is no such action, or it is solely ritualistic, or it exists but faces resistance from interested parties. An example of this is the attempt to introduce healthier food in school cafeterias.

In the light of these deliberations, it is justifiable to formulate a key question for this article: does Polish society perceive the problem of human trafficking as important, and has it developed in itself the type of readiness that will make it "deal with it" as best as possible? Is this a subject of interest to society?

In starting the search for an answer, at the outset I would like to frame a statement that is an obvious truism – that eliminating negative social phenomena is not an easy task. There are several reasons for this. First, because the sources of this or that social pathology are not always obvious, or there are so many that finding a simple remedial formula is impossible. An example of this is drug addiction – a king's ransom for whoever really knows why people take drugs, destroying their life, but is also able to turn this knowledge into effective preventive actions. Second, it is often the case that contrary to appearances, we do not know the exact nature of the phenomenon we are trying to eliminate. And let us again use an example, this time prostitution. Do we really know what it is? There is a widespread view that it is a negative social phenomenon involving "selling one's body" through the provision of sexual services. However, besides such obvious aspects or similar banalities, are we able to say anything meaningful about the actual nature of commercial sex? I think not, since on the one hand we say that ancient prostitution has sacred roots, and on the other that thanks to people who sell this type of service we are able to satisfy the sexual needs of disabled individuals. Looking from a cultural perspective, we see the fairly common phenomenon of the liberalization of morals, including sexual ones, and

the purely legal point of view requires us to note the existence of countries with severe sanctions for such activity. To make matters worse, the literature on the topic features several dozen very different definitions of prostitution, which only deepens the confusion. Is a cohesive picture of such a complicated phenomenon as prostitution possible? It seems not. Third, the effective elimination of negative social phenomena is the sum of various activities taken by numerous social entities, with the state at the head. Nominally, the most important thing is responding effectively to reprehensible behaviour, mainly through some form of disapproval, i.e. punishment. But obviously, that is not enough. Actions are also needed to make some negative phenomena not occur, or reduce the risk of them reappearing. It is also about everything that makes people not want to do certain bad things, or about structuring the social system in such a way that in the symbolic sense, there is no room for them. An example is corruption – people may reject this for fear of severe punishment, or because it does not fit into the canon of honourable behaviour of modern man. Fourth, finally, removing something from social life that we deem as evil is possible only if we manage to achieve relatively widespread acceptance of the legitimacy of the remedial actions taken. If someone would like to create a programme for effective elimination of childhood obesity, they would need to know that the parents stand strongly behind them. And is this the case? The elimination of corruption from social life is only possible when people who see bribers as resourceful, successful people are a minority. If the loved ones of someone who "bought" an earlier operation date in the public health system treat them as a hero and breathe a sigh of relief because "looking after health is our family duty", fighting corruption is difficult. In this specific case, the principles of equality or justice become empty words.

And so, to eliminate something that is socially negative, we must first learn the nature of the evil, determine its origins, and study the profile of the social entities it affects; we must also establish who and by what means is meant to eliminate it, and finally, ensure support from the most important entity – society. And here, let us briefly return to the beginning of our deliberations. From those findings it follows that if the narrow path is a threat to our life, we approach the relevant authorities to widen it, and if we suspect that the local river contains chemical sewage, we try to test it and pass the matter on to institutions that know what to do. Whether they want to and whether they actually will is another matter, but that is not what I am discussing here. In such situations, the chance for success, even potential success, is significant. But how can you guarantee the successful outcome of a campaign to remove sweets from schools, when the first protesters are children, followed by their parents? How can you eliminate drink driving if the participants of a social gathering all think that three shots of vodka



with a big dinner are no problem? How do you get rid of cheating in exams when parents, in the spirit of veterans' experiences, talk about their successes in this field and help children about to sit their high school exams prepare sophisticated cheat sheets? Can you combat alcoholism if a significant percentage of people who drink not only question their addiction, but do so with strong support from their loving family? There is an endless number of possible examples, but this does not really matter, because the underlying thought seems obvious. There are situations in which a burning need stimulates the specific and effective actions of units and social groups. But there are also situations when the exact opposite occurs, and then Becker discusses hidden deviance.<sup>17</sup> This occurs when there is a certain negative phenomenon, but it is not perceived as such, or negative evaluation is simply dislocated. In extreme cases, such a negative phenomenon may not even be noticed.

And this is how we have reached the problem of human trafficking and forced labour. A formulated research problem and the observations and findings made up to this point allow me to form the main hypothesis of this article. It comprises two parts. First, there are reason to believe that the level of awareness of Poles on the issue of human trafficking and forced labour is very low, and their knowledge fragmentary. Second, in failing to notice the seriousness of the problem, Poles do not place any pressure on the authorities to take effective actions to eliminate these phenomena.

If we were to look at the entire matter a little more colloquially, we would say that Poles do not understand the essence of modern slavery and, therefore, are not particularly bothered by the fact that the state authorities only minimally implement international recommendations for eliminating this phenomenon. Another issue arises somewhere in the background of this statement, and can be brought down to the question "is it not that the passivity and lack of involvement of the authorities in effectively combating human trafficking and forced labour exist because the rulers do not feel any pressure from an informed and empathetic society?" This is one of the key questions that keeps arising in discussions about the lack of engagement and passivity of Poland in this matter.

On the other hand, we can assume that Poles do not know much about human trafficking also because the archetypal picture of this phenomenon, in its ancient or modern version, does not fit well into the cognitive schemas of modern man. Such information does not find the right "place" for assimilation in the minds of recipients. And since this is the case, in order to avoid discomfort due to

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<sup>17</sup> H.S. Becker, *Outsiders. Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, London 1963, The Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan, p. 20.

cognitive dissonance, it is natural to dislocate inconvenient facts from one's awareness.

### **Public opinion polls on human trafficking in Poland – preliminary issues**

The history of public opinion polls on human trafficking and forced labour in Poland is not much shorter than the history of the official reaction to these criminal phenomena. A specific turning point in interest in the issue of modern-day slavery was the creation of a local branch of the international NGO La Strada International in Poland in 1996.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after this, the new penal code of 1997 was adopted<sup>19</sup>, in which the legislature, for the first time in Polish history, criminalized human trafficking<sup>20</sup>, stating this to be a crime against the public order (Article 253). With time, this regulation was amended and currently, it is a crime classified as an act against freedom (Article 189(a)). In addition, statutory definitions of human trafficking and slavery appeared in the penal code (Article 115, §§ 22 and 23 respectively).<sup>21</sup>

The notion that the history of the criminalization of human trafficking and the history of public opinion polls on this subject run parallel is confirmed by the dates of research on Poles' opinions on human trafficking.

- The first research of this type was conducted in 1998. It was carried out in February 1998 by the Center for Public Opinion Research (OBOP) at the request of the La Strada Foundation under the striking title "Polacy o

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<sup>18</sup> Z. Lasocik, O handluludźmi w Polsce, czyli o ewolucji zjawiska i budowy systemu jego eliminowania [Human Trafficking in Poland, meaning the evolution of the phenomenon and building a system to combat it], *Archiwum Kryminologii* 2012, Vol. 34, p. 494.

<sup>19</sup> *Dziennik Ustaw* (Polish Journal of Laws) 1997, No. 88, item 553).

<sup>20</sup> However, it must be noted that in the Polish Act on Regulations Introducing the Penal Code of 1969, there was a provision referring to the broadly understood problem of human trafficking and slavery. This was the provision of Article VIII, pursuant to which "whoever causes another person to go into a state of slavery or is involved in the slave trade is subject to imprisonment of not less than three years". The introduction of this provision into national law was necessary for Poland to fulfill international commitments undertaken in 1926-1956. A similar provision can also be found in the Polish Act on Regulations Introducing the Penal Code of June 6, 1997 (Article 8).

<sup>21</sup> Z. Lasocik, O ewolucji przepisów prawakarnogodotyczących handluludźmi w Polsce [About the evolution of the provisions of criminal law on human trafficking in Poland], [in:] *Problemy wymiaru sprawiedliwości karnej*, A. Błachnio-Parzych, J. Jakubowska-Hara, J. Kosonoga, H. Kuczyńska (ed.), Warsaw 2013, Wolters Kluwer business, p. 252 ff.

zjawisku handlu kobietami: wiedza o problemie, metody przeciwdziałania" ("Poles on the phenomenon of trafficking in women: knowledge about the problem, methods of combating").

- After three years – in 2001 – the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) conducted further studies, also at the request of the La Strada Foundation, with a similar title: "Wiedza i opinie o handlu kobietami" ("Knowledge and opinions about trafficking in women").
- In December 2004, at the initiative of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men and the La Strada Foundation, the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) conducted a survey, the results of which were presented in January 2005 in a notice entitled "Polacy o zjawisku handlu kobietami" ("Poles on the phenomenon of trafficking in women").
- On February 18-21, 2010, TNS OBOP, at the request of the British Embassy in Poland, carried out a survey, the results of which were published in a report entitled "Wstępne wyniki badania społecznej świadomości zagrożeń związanych z handlem ludźmi i podejmowaniem pracy zagranicą" ("Preliminary results of research on public awareness of the risks associated with human trafficking and taking up employment abroad").
- After another five years, at the turn of April and May 2015, at the request of the Ministry of the Interior, the public research centre "Realizacja" conducted a study entitled "Społeczna świadomość zagrożeń związanych z handlem ludźmi i podejmowaniem pracy zagranicą" ("Social awareness of threats related to human trafficking and taking up employment abroad").
- In May 2018, at the request of the University of Warsaw (UW) Human Trafficking Studies Center, SW Research carried out a study as part of the international research project *Demand for sexual exploitation in Europe – DESIRE*. To some extent, this research also concerned human trafficking.
- And finally, in December 2020, also at the request of the UW Human Trafficking Studies Centre, the same SW Research carried out a study entitled "Handel ludźmi i praca przymusowa w opinii Polaków" ("Human trafficking and forced labor in the opinion of Poles").

Before discussing these studies, several general matters need to be noted. First, in the period of a little over two decades, public opinion was studied seven times, which means that this occurred approximately once every three years. This is not particularly infrequent, but given the importance of the problem, it also does

not seem to be very often. Second, in the first three studies, the subject of interest of the researchers was the issue of trafficking in women, not human trafficking. This was due to the belief that was dominant at the time – that the only goal of human trafficking is sexual exploitation, and thus victims are usually women. Third, almost all of the studies included a component that we can describe as "readiness for labour migration". On the one hand, it was about determining the attitude of Poles to such trips, but also about studying if and to what extent they were prepared to undertake such a specific activity. Fourth, it is only in the latest research of 2020 that the phenomenon of forced labour as such appeared. Fifth, all of the studies were conducted on samples representative of the Polish population, which increases the attractiveness of the results, but also allows comparisons to be made.

As already mentioned at the outset, my objective is not a detailed presentation of all the findings of these studies, because there are relevant reports available online; I rather present the most-interesting findings, but first and foremost, the findings that are important from the point of view of the research problem and formulated hypotheses. To this end, I have employed the secondary research method<sup>22</sup> to analyze existing data.<sup>23</sup>

### **Public opinion polls on human trafficking in Poland – an overview**

The first public opinion polls of 1998 were carried out by OBOP on a sample of 1,092 people, commissioned by the La Strada Foundation ("Polacy o zjawisku handlu kobietami: wiedza o problemie, metody przeciwdziałania", "Poles on the phenomenon of trafficking in women: awareness of the problem, methods of combating"). As has already been stated, the researchers focused on trafficking in women, the undertaking of work abroad, and the related risk of getting into trouble. Three findings from these studies seem to be the most important.

First, 73% of respondents stated that they would not work abroad without a permit ("undeclared work"). This result is not particularly surprising, because both then and now, "undeclared work" raises fears, and many people do not want to take on such risk. While at the time the reason for this attitude was a fear of

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<sup>22</sup>Systematic scientific investigation in which the researcher depends on data existing in the course of the research process, it involves organizing, collating, aggregating and analyzing these data for research conclusions.

<sup>23</sup>M. Makowska, *Analiza danych zastanych. Przewodnik dla studentów* [Analysis of existing data. Guide for students], Warsaw 2019, Wyd. Scholar.

fraud or abuse, now there is a growing worry about the legal consequences of violating local labour laws.

Second, the researchers asked an important question about whether the respondents had heard of cases of human trafficking (here, trafficking in women). Analyzing the responses, they wrote: "The awareness of the existence of the problem of trafficking in women in Poland is widespread", and they add that 93% of respondents provided an affirmative response to this question. Given the fact that this was the absolute beginning of any interest in the problem of human trafficking, such a result raises significant doubts as to its credibility. The matter seems to be explained when we look at the question. After the principal query: "have you heard about trafficking in women?" there is a clarification in the form of the question: "have you heard about the recruitment and transport of women to work in other countries, while misleading them about the type or conditions of work and pay, and preventing them from changing jobs or returning home?" You do not have to be an expert to know that these situations do not have to have anything to do with human trafficking, but occurred frequently and so the respondents were aware of them as negative behaviours. We must remember that, at the time of the study, Poland had already one previously undergone the systemic transformation and opening of borders, and some Poles were going abroad and falling victim to unfair middle men or employers. The almost negligible value of the finding is confirmed by the fact that almost 80% of respondents stated that they had learned "about trafficking in women" from television. And again, you do not need more than a basic knowledge of history to say that at the time, television did not raise awareness "about trafficking in women" as often as it did about cases of various injustices for migrant workers. This is why we have reason to believe that respondents may have confused these phenomena.

However, the finding of who in the opinion of the respondents should deal with eliminating human trafficking is very interesting and valuable. Given the above-mentioned methodological error involving the incorrect definition of this phenomenon, I am overlooking detailed data and instead focusing on two matters. First, almost two-thirds of respondents were of the opinion that combating this crime should be done by the police. Second – and this finding seems more important – one in three respondents stated that no one should help such women, that "they should look after themselves". This is a very radical and un-empathetic

view, although it does somehow fit the "liberal mythology" of that period and Polish national characteristics.<sup>24</sup>

The second study on a representative sample (964 people) in 2001 was conducted also at the request of the La Strada Foundation, but this time by CBOS. Even more than before, the authors of this survey focused on determining the opinion of Poles on the situation of people working abroad, as well as on foreign women coming to Poland and involved in the sex industry.

Similarly to three years earlier, in this study also approximately two-thirds of respondents would not take the risk of working abroad. Men were much more likely to have this opinion than women (77% compared with 60%). However, this time the researchers did not suggest working without a permit ("undeclared work"), and so a direct comparison of the two results has some associated risk.

When it comes to trafficking in women, in the opinion of the researchers, the awareness of this problem in Poland is still almost universal, because 94% of respondents had heard about cases of trafficking. The only thing is that again the authors applied a definition of trafficking in women that had nothing to do with the legal definition, and strongly referred to the typical misleading of workers and unfair employer practices, this time in the sex business. Similarly to before, this finding and the resulting conclusion also raise serious doubts, including regarding the methodology. What the respondents heard about and what they were referring to was not or did not necessarily have to be human trafficking.

However, from the point of view of the goal of this article, I must note that the presented research results clearly show low empathy of the Polish community towards foreign women involved in prostitution in Poland. While 82% of respondents thought that the relevant authorities should ensure their safety and 70% were of the opinion that they should receive appropriate help, over half were strongly opposed to providing such people with free access to medical services. And so, when we discuss something as illusory as safety or assistance, Poles are likely to be "for", but when a competitor for medical services appears in their mind, that is where their kindness ends. This finding turned out to have serious consequences, because it was used as an argument in discussions about assistance to victims of human trafficking in Poland. Of course, it was used against the broadening of the scope of such help. It was only after six years that a provision

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<sup>24</sup>A few traits of Poles: Poland – it's rather me than us; Poles hardly trust others, they assume "Everyone wants to use me"; Poles think, if it is not bad, it is good; for many Poles money is a taboo subject.

was finally enacted, pursuant to which victims of human trafficking could count on free assistance in the form of so-called crisis intervention (Article 5(a) of the Polish Act on Social Assistance)<sup>25</sup>.

In 2005, a report appeared on further studies on the phenomenon of trafficking in women in Poland. This study was also conducted by CBOS, this time on a sample of 894 people. The authors' intention was to compare the results obtained in this survey with the findings of the first studies in 1998. While the two earlier studies were carried out at the request of the La Strada Foundation, this time, it was a joint initiative of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men and the La Strada Foundation.

The report once again opens with the problem of readiness to undertake paid "undeclared work" abroad. The researchers noted that compared with 1998, the number of people rejecting the option of taking on such a risk decreased by almost 10%. In other words, the number of people prepared to take on such a risk rose. At first glance, such a change seems to be justified by the growing number of cases of individuals who took the risk and were successful, meaning, for example, that they did not encounter any problems with the law. Whether or not it was always a financial success is a completely separate matter.

I am of course most interested in the issue of the awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking. As before, in the case of this survey, "trafficking in women" is still the term used. Already at the beginning of the analysis of the relevant data, the authors of the report clearly state that "the awareness of the existence of the phenomenon of trafficking in women is widespread" (p. 6). This time, the percentage of people making this claim was 95%, an increase of 2%. A comparison of this data with the findings of 1998 is legitimate, because the researchers asked the same question as before. That is why, again, the question features a rather peculiar, or better, "original" definition of trafficking in women. This raises serious methodological and substantive doubts, because since 2000, there has existed a legal definition of human trafficking, as per the Additional Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, known as the Palermo Protocol.<sup>26</sup> Poland ratified this Convention, and the definition entered into the national legal order. In addition, on July 19, 2002, the Council of the European Union adopted the

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<sup>25</sup> *Dziennik Ustaw* (Polish Journal of Laws) 2007 No. 48, item 320.

<sup>26</sup> Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of November 15, 2000, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Polish Journal of Laws) 2005, No. 18, item 160.

Council Framework Decision on combating trafficking in human beings<sup>27</sup>, which also features a legal definition. And since on May 1, 2004, Poland became a full member of the European Union, this definition was also valid in Poland. This reduces the value of the study significantly.

The percentage of people who learned about cases of "trafficking in women" from television was much higher than in the previous study – this time, it was 96%. I must admit that I do not know how it was so high. Already at that time we were intensely involved in the problem of human trafficking and monitoring media messaging as the Human Trafficking Studies Center. I can say categorically that information on this phenomenon appeared on television extremely rarely, almost sporadically. Moreover, it featured in the print media equally infrequently.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the respondents highlighted television as a source of information on workers misled abroad, but this is not the same thing as human trafficking. We will never know what the case really was.

A finding that may be of interest, particularly from the point of view of the objective of this article, is the data on the expectations of respondents in the matter of combating "trafficking in women". To be more precise, I mean who, in the opinion of the respondents, should deal with it. The preferences of participants from the 1998 and 2005 studies did not change in this regard, because they placed the most hope in the police and media. However, what I find particularly interesting is the statement that no one should counteract this phenomenon, and that women should look after themselves. I would like to remind readers that in 1998, 30% of respondents held this view, and in 2005 this percentage was slightly smaller at 25%. You could say that the trend was heading in the right direction.

However, let us look at this result from a completely different perspective. The cited formulation allows us to treat the answers as a type of barometer of Poles' attitudes towards victims of human trafficking (here, of "trafficking in women") and enables us to draw conclusions about the inclination of Poles to help such people. And so the following picture emerges: it is 2005, human trafficking has been criminalised in Poland for eight years, Poland is a Member State of the Council of Europe and of the European Union, the above-mentioned Palermo Protocol is functioning in the UN legal system (having been ratified by Poland in 2003); from May 1, 2004, Poland is bound by the Framework Decision of 2002, and one in four Poles thinks that victims of human trafficking (here, of trafficking

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<sup>27</sup> See: 2002/629/WSiSW

<sup>28</sup> M. Pomarańska-Bielecka, *Obrazhandlukobietami w prasie polskiej* [A picture of trafficking in women in Polish press], [in], *Handel ludźmi, zapobieganie i ściganie*, Z. Lasocik [Human trafficking, prevention and prosecution] (ed.), Warsaw 2006, UW Human Trafficking Studies Center, 3. 339 ff.



in women) do not deserve any support, because they should "look after themselves" (sic!). The fact that in 1998 this percentage was higher is only a meagre consolation. I think that this matter is so important that it should appear in all subsequent public opinion polls on human trafficking. I also think that it is these very results from 1998 and 2005 that for a long time determined the attitude of the authorities of the Republic of Poland to the problem of human trafficking, and particularly their attitude towards victims of this crime. The unaware and not overly empathetic society did not put strong pressure on authorities, and this is what authority likes most.

In February 2010, another study was conducted on the attitude of Poles to human trafficking. This time, it was carried out at the request of the British Embassy in Poland by TNS OBOP on a sample of 1,005 Poles aged over 15. The report on this research was entitled "[Społeczna świadomość zagrożeń związanych z handlem ludźmi i podejmowaniem pracy zagranicą](#)" ("Social awareness of threats related to human trafficking and taking up employment abroad").<sup>29</sup>

This report already mentions human trafficking instead of trafficking in women, but the researchers continue to strongly focus on matters related to employment abroad and the risk associated with this way of earning money. As before, the authors start by making a categorical statement on Poles' knowledge of human trafficking. However, unlike before, they highlight that 93% of Poles "have some sort of mental associations" with this concept. Because this category of "mental associations" is important and raises doubts, I will devote some attention to it. While in the previous studies, the authors proposed their own, very broad definition of "trafficking in women" to the respondents, in this survey, the researchers used the formula "what do you associate with human trafficking?" The very extensive list of multiple-choice answers included "prostitution (taking women to brothels)", "selling people (trafficking in live goods)" and "trafficking in women", as well as "a crime (something illegal)", simply "money (profit, business)" and, finally, "something that should be combated". In short, this included everything that could in any way be associated with human trafficking, but also, for example, with crimes against personal liberty. You do not have to be particularly insightful to associate money with trafficking, and the fact that this was about human trafficking is another matter. As a result of such a formulation of the question, even someone who knew nothing about modern-day slavery when answering the survey could find something that suited them in the extensive range

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<sup>29</sup> See <https://www.gov.pl/web/handel-ludzmi/spoleczna-swiadomosc-zagrozen-zwiazanych-z-handlem-ludzmi-i-podejmowaniem-pracy-za-granica> [accessed May 4, 2021].

of answers. Seven % of respondents could not find anything, and stated "it is difficult to say". However, there was also the category "other", which was selected by 2% of respondents, and these respondents were included in the category of people who have associations with human trafficking, even though it is difficult to say what this would involve. If someone associated this phenomenon with, for example, a chain, and they highlighted this option, can it be said that they know anything about human trafficking?

I do not think anyone can have doubts that a question formulated in this manner was encumbered with a strong methodological error, and that the structure of the list of multiple-choice answers was simply devoid of internal logic. Thus, the diagnostic value of the obtained results is less than minimal. I am omitting the term "trafficking in live goods", the use of which in such an important document, and as late as 2010, must be considered as embarrassing.

The second thread that appeared in these studies, and that is important from the point of view of this article, is the respondents' knowledge of what human trafficking actually is. Two questions were used to measure this knowledge. In the first, the researchers asked "Do the following situations constitute human trafficking?" and they proceeded to list eight behaviours, of which seven are forms of human trafficking (for example, illegal organization of adoption of children, human organ trafficking, forcing someone to provide sexual services and forced begging) and one that does not meet this criterion (forcing people to participate in pornographic videos or photos). I think that the vast majority of behaviours that are "obvious" forms of human trafficking meant that this question was not a valuable test of knowledge. This is confirmed by the very high percentage of selections. In some cases, they oscillated around 90% (adoption, organ trafficking and prostitution) and in others around 70% (begging or committing crimes). The fact that 94% of respondents highlighted illegal adoption is surprising, because this matter raises serious issues in terms of interpretation, and besides, the phenomenon itself is rather rare in Poland.

Based on the data presented, it can be said that in 2010, the majority of Poles had some sort of mental notion of human trafficking, and indicated forms of this phenomenon fairly correctly. However, this clear picture of the situation gets much more complicated in the light of respondents' answers to the question "What in your opinion are the most common forms of exploitation of children under 18 years of age who have fallen victim to human trafficking?" And although the list of multiple-choice answers was almost identical to that described above, the distribution of answers is nothing like that of the previous one. Prostitution as a form of slavery was selected by just under half of the respondents, forced begging (very typical for children) by 16%, and slavery as the most general category was

chosen by one in 12 respondents. This completely different distribution of answers calls into question which picture of the awareness of Poles is the closest to reality? The former or the latter? It cannot be both, because there is no consistency or logical link between the answers provided to these two questions.

Another important question concerned whether in Poland there are cases of human trafficking, to which most respondents (65%) responded in the affirmative, while almost half (44%) indicated that victims of this crime include both Poles and foreigners. In my opinion, the first result raises serious doubts. I believe that it is definitely overstated, and I base my conviction on two premises. First, the survey clearly shows that this question was asked after many other questions, including ones in which respondents discussed their mental associations with human trafficking and declared what in their opinion human trafficking is and what it is not. In this situation, in the consciousness of some of the respondents, a legitimate belief may have been established that if someone keeps asking about such a phenomenon, it must also occur in Poland. In my opinion, this is a serious methodological error that significantly affected the research results. Second, moving forward into the future, I must highlight that in 2020, 30% of respondents provided an affirmative answer to the question asking if the problem of human trafficking exists in Poland, while almost half admitted that they know nothing about the topic. The difference between these findings is fundamental. Is it possible that for 10 years the level of awareness of Poles decreased (regressed) so much? In my opinion, this is out of the question – one should expect a rather significant increase in awareness. Therefore, the following question comes to mind: what is going on? Let us allow ourselves a moment to speculate. I would like to remind you that the time during which these studies were conducted was rich in many events related to legal and organizational changes. They were usually forced by increasing criticism of the government, which did not engage in the fight against human trafficking, as one may expect. The criticism involved, inter alia, low outlays for assistance for victims, as well as a lack of effort by the authorities to properly inform the community about the problem of human trafficking. And it is in this climate that the research results, which show clearly that the awareness of human trafficking among Poles is much higher than expected, were published. Success could be announced, and criticism of the malcontents became unjustifiable. I know that what I am writing looks like I am succumbing to the "conspiracy theory of history", but in this case, my readiness for such thinking is strengthened by the fact that the Ministry of the Interior and Administration was a partner in this project.

Even if the unnaturally high level of awareness of Poles was an artifice, it is still worth evaluating their attitude towards the victims of the crime in question.

Two questions pertained to this problem. The first was formulated as follows: "Many people undertake work abroad. At the same time, these people are misled as to the type or conditions of work and pay, and they are prevented from changing jobs or returning home. In your opinion, are these people who: 1. are victims who should receive help, 2. left of their own volition, so they are not victims and should be able to help themselves, 3. it is difficult to say." The first response was the most popular (84%), and the second one was chosen by 11% of the respondents. The question arises – is this 11% the same people who in the studies of 1998 and 2005 refused victims the right to make their plight known and to assistance? I would like to reiterate that at the time, there were 30% and 25% of respondents respectively. The temptation to respond in the affirmative and with satisfaction note a significant decrease in this percentage is strong; however, these questions are not formulated in the same way, and so a comparison is difficult. In addition, later on in the survey there was a question of who should be dealing with the elimination of human trafficking. Also in this case, the results of this and previous surveys cannot be compared, because here, the researchers asked about who should deal with the three most important aspects of eliminating human trafficking, i.e. the prevention of this crime, the prosecution of the perpetrators and providing assistance to the victims.<sup>30</sup> In all of these dimensions, the respondents most often highlighted the police, followed by the media and, finally, government institutions. The "attractiveness" of the media is quite surprising, especially when it comes to reacting to human trafficking, which in practice means prosecuting perpetrators and helping victims. After all, in both areas the legal or organizational possibilities of the media are less than modest. Television and newspapers are unable to conduct a typical investigation and do not support victims. This finding places another question mark next to the results of the said studies.

Let us note, however, that the list of multiple-choice answers to the said question includes an answer that we are already familiar with: "no one – people should look after themselves", except that no one picked this answer. In all three aspects (prevention, prosecution, protection), the researchers recorded "0". Thus, it is fully justifiable to state that as a result of processes the nature of which we do not know, the number of people who in some way have an unfavourable view of victims of human trafficking dropped quite drastically – to zero. Even if these three zeros are only artifacts, the above-mentioned 11% should be noted as a

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<sup>30</sup> A list of multiple-choice answers formulated in this way is the aftermath of a paradigm popular at the time, known as the "3Ps" (prevention, prosecution, protection). For more on this topic, see, inter alia, United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Resolution A/64/L.64 adopted 30 July 2010, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/687201> [accessed May 21, 2021].

significant change in the attitude of Poles towards victims of trafficking in human beings towards a more empathetic approach.

After another five years (in 2015), the public research centre "Realizacja" conducted a study with the same title as before – "*Społeczna świadomość zagrożeń związanych z handlem ludźmi i podejmowaniem pracy zagranicą 2015*" ("*Social awareness of threats related to human trafficking and taking up employment abroad 2015*"). To differentiate between the two studies, this time the year appears in the title. It was commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior, and the conducted as part of the project *Improving Poland's capacity to prevent trafficking in human beings*, co-financed from Norwegian Funds.

The research is almost identical to the previous one. The researchers asked very similar questions, and the results are also very alike. However, this time the survey was divided into two modules. The first was a standard study conducted throughout Poland, while the second included people aged 18-25 or living in voivod ships with the high unemployment rate (Lubuskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Opolskie). The survey used in the second module contained more questions examining the tendency of young people to take risks related to working abroad. In both cases, the sample was identical – 1,005 people.

Because repeating near-identical research results does not seem overly fruitful, this time it is worth focusing on the messaging language. From this point of view, it would be good to analyze the part of the report entitled "*Summary of main results*". I must, however, highlight, that it is not completely clear to me who the author of this text is. For reasons I will soon discuss, I have reason to believe that this is a type of introductory commentary to the results, coming from the Ministry of the Interior.

The "Summary" opens with two categorical statements: the first is "Poles largely know what the phenomenon of human trafficking is and are able to describe it", and the second is "Knowledge about what human trafficking is widespread." I cannot agree with either. And not even because the scientific findings and intuition suggest different things, but they are also not confirmed in the results presented in the "Summary". Let us analyze several examples.

The part of the report cited here states, for example, that "the majority of Poles know what the phenomenon of human trafficking is and are able to describe it. Contemporary associations, such as prostitution, the sale of humans and trafficking in women, prevail". And although at first glance, such a statement sounds logical, it does not necessarily reflect reality: just because someone associated human trafficking with three different phenomena does not unequivocally mean that they know the nature of this phenomenon and, moreover,

are able to describe it. Further we read that the respondents "do not differentiate the crime of human trafficking from people smuggling", which is, indeed, a fairly common phenomenon, but the fact that this is the case does not mean that respondents are discerning; on the contrary, it must be treated as evidence of their lack of knowledge. In another place, the author of the said text states that "People between 18 and 25 years of age (...) have problems identifying the crime of human trafficking based on the most common indicators." I completely agree with this statement, because Poles indeed do not know these indicators and so have difficulty identifying victims.<sup>31</sup> Hence, how can we reconcile all these findings with the claim that knowledge of human trafficking is widespread and precise? Here, I would like to note the clear contradiction, because understanding this crime means knowing its essence and main indicators. To compare: when I claim that in Poland knowledge on waste segregation is widespread, I cannot at the same time suggest that the citizens do not know that food scraps are "classified" as segregated waste, or "organic" waste.

My critical approach to claiming that Poles' knowledge of human trafficking is widespread is further supported when the author of the "Summary" concludes that "Half of the respondents do not know of any Polish or international institution involved in helping victims of human trafficking." Can these two findings be reconciled? Can we claim that almost all Poles know what human trafficking is, but half do not know who deals with this phenomenon? To again refer to waste segregation, let us say that common knowledge on this topic also means that the residents of Polish cities know who picks up this waste, as well as when and how. Even if someone says that this comparison is not particularly convincing, this does not change the fact that this conclusion also raises serious doubts.

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<sup>31</sup>Since we are discussing identification, I would like to add that law enforcement officers also struggle with this, and that is why special tools have been created in the form of diagnostic questionnaires. At the initiative of the UW Human Trafficking Studies Centre, such a questionnaire was formed in 2006, and government experts, law enforcement officers and NGO activists took part in the drafting process. This. However, despite a successful pilot, this questionnaire was never made an official tool for the work of crime control institutions in Poland. Besides, the problem does not concern only law enforcement agencies or the prosecutor's office, because healthcare centres and care facilities can also play a significant role in the identification of victims. At the time of writing (May 2021), work is ongoing on a pilot project training emergency room staff in identifying victims of human trafficking. This free training was suggested by experts from the UN and US. However, finding a hospital in Poland that would be interested in this training is an optimist's dream.

In another place in the "Summary", its author (authors) state that "A relatively high percentage of Poles personally know of cases of victims of human trafficking." Before proceeding to the crux of the matter, I would like to note an important linguistic issue, namely: is it possible to know cases of victims personally? It is not unreasonable to question where the respondent was asked whether they know "victims of human trafficking" or if they know "cases of victims of human trafficking". These two are not the same thing. But let us leave linguistic matters aside, because in the light of empirical data, the situation becomes more complicated than this unequivocal claim would suggest, mainly because the questions asked of respondents did not include one whose results would justify such an unambiguous statement on the matter. There were various questions, including one that can be considered diagnostic, namely asking whether the respondent knows a person who went to work abroad and was forced to work there in prostitution. It is clear that the outlined state of affairs meets the criteria of human trafficking, except that the average percentage of people who responded in the affirmative to this question was approx. 6%, and in Lubelskie 0% – it is difficult to think of such percentages as "relatively high".

The "Summary" also features the following statement: "Knowledge on human trafficking is increasing, and society is becoming more sensitive to it." I will leave the matter of Poland's societal sensitivity and empathy, particularly among people providing sex services and migrants aside, because the issue of knowledge seems to be key. And here, I would like to make an interesting note, because the author of the "Summary" writes that this is mainly "thanks to the media". Let us focus on the following two statements. First, I invariably do not share the belief of the authors of the "Summary" that Poles have a high level of knowledge about human trafficking. Second, assigning a significant educational role to the media means an admission that government institutions are not performing one of their key tasks – building awareness through informational campaigns and school education. And finally, the "Summary" contains the following assertion: "one in five respondents do not know what can be done to increase the safety of trips for work abroad." Since we are to accept that the knowledge of Poles is common and widespread, it is difficult to accept the fact that 20% of the population have no idea how to even potentially improve their safety abroad.

To conclude, I would like to once again reiterate that the "Summary" of the 2015 studies turned out to be a "text with a thesis", as we say in Polish. primarily because it quite fundamentally differs in nature from the main part of the report, which includes empirical data. On the other hand, "strong" and unambiguous statements that do not line up with facts presented in the report..

This is why it is difficult to resist the impression that the author wanted to present the state of affairs in a much better light than the hard data seem to imply. In short, the "Summary" shows that things are very good, because the sensitive and empathetic Polish society is seeking knowledge on human trafficking and doing everything it can to reduce the risk associated with this crime, as well as limit the number of victims. This should be interpreted as a success by the authorities, which are making every effort to make things as good as possible – or even better – as is seen in the "Summary". The "Summary" appears as a kind of act of political will, from which it is meant to follow that the authorities are satisfied with themselves, instead of a typical summary of the research.

The study conducted in May 2018 was significantly different from the previous ones. You could even say that it only concerned human trafficking to a certain degree, because the researchers focused on prostitution. This was due to the fact that it was part of an international research project entitled *Demand for Sexual Exploitation in Europe – DESIrE*<sup>32</sup>, the aim of which was to determine the relationship between the way in which paid sex is regulated in a specific country and the scale of the phenomenon of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. The study was carried out by SW Research at the request of the UW Human Trafficking Studies Centre on a nationwide representative sample of 641 people.

Given the objective of this article, I will only present data related to the problem of successful elimination of human trafficking. At the outset, we had to determine the knowledge of the respondents regarding forced prostitution. That is why we asked the question "*Do you know that there are people who have been forced to sell sex services against their will?*", to which 86% of respondents answered in the affirmative. I would like to highlight that this question did not test the knowledge of the survey participants on human trafficking, but only whether the social category of a person forced into prostitution even exists. Of course, this number may include victims of human trafficking, but also women who "went on the street" due to poverty, or who were forced to prostitute themselves by their life partner.

Either way, the problem exists, and since it does, it had to be determined who should handle it. In the question *Do you think that state authorities are able to do anything to prevent anyone from being forced to sell sex services against their will?* we wanted to find out the generalized expectations of the respondents

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this topic, see: <https://frc.research.vub.be/en/new-project-desire-demand-for-sexual-exploitation-in-europe> [accessed May 23, 2021]; in Poland this project was carried out under the name *Sexual exploitation in Europe from the perspective of demand*.



towards the state as an active entity in this field. It is clear that Poles expect state authorities to act appropriately. This was expressed by the respondents– the majority (71%) responded in the affirmative to this question. But it is impossible to ignore the fact that almost one in five respondents (18%) answered "I don't know". You could understand that the respondent does not know what actions should be taken by the authorities, but the fact that the authorities should be active at all in this matter seems natural. From this point of view, such a percentage of respondents should be seen as high.

Whether the authorities are able to do anything to prevent sexual exploitation is one thing, but from the point of view of the standards of a modern country, the most important thing is whether, in the opinion of the respondents, state authorities have any responsibilities towards those who are victims of such exploitation. That is why we asked the question *Do you think that state authorities should provide assistance to people selling sex services if they need such help?*, to which 61% of respondents replied in the affirmative, while 23% had no opinion on the matter. Perhaps it can be reasonably argued that, as a matter of principle, respondents were more likely to assign obligations to the state, but when imagining this country assisting someone who provides sex services, this conviction weakens. This is, of course, a very preliminary assumption that should one day be expanded upon.

A control question to the previous one was *Do you think that people who have been forced to sell sex services may ask state authorities for help?* In this case, we wanted to flip the situation and place the person being exploited in the role of the supplicant asking for assistance. The responses were basically similar to the questions discussed above, because 69% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, and one in five did not know the answer. However, it is worth noting that the lowest percentage of affirmative responses concerned the situation in which we asked about the state's obligations in terms of providing help to victims. While these differences are not significant, the level of eight to ten percentage points exceeds the limits of a statistical error, and it would be good to devote more attention to this issue in the future.

The last public opinion poll on human trafficking in Poland was conducted in December 2020. It was once again carried out by SW Research on a representative, nationwide sample of 1,003 people. The study, requested by the Human Trafficking Studies Centre and the Faculty of Political Science and International studies of the University of Warsaw, was part of the research initiative of the Council of the Baltic Sea States entitled *Competence building, Assistance provision and Prosecution of labour exploitation cases in the Baltic*

*Sea Region – CAPE*<sup>33</sup>, which I participated in. The objective of this project was to determine society's actual state of knowledge on human trafficking. In view of the growing number of victims of forced labour, I turned my attention to this crime. It was, first and foremost, about ascertaining what Poles know about it, as well as who, in their opinion, should deal with eliminating modern-day slavery.

From the point of view of this article, the first question was the most important: *Do you think that the phenomenon of human trafficking exists in Poland?* Before I move on to the results, I would like to highlight three positive aspects of this question. First, it is formulated as simply as possible. It is also devoid of any "background noise" in the form of the author's own definitions, which distorted respondent perception in earlier studies. Second, the list of multiple-choice answers includes answer options "yes" and "no", as well as an admission that the respondent knows nothing about the topic. And third, this question was the first to be asked. I would like to highlight the aspect of sequence, as when discussing previous surveys, I suggested that asking questions of such a significant nature during a study was a methodological error. Hence, I assume that the data obtained in December 2020 are reliable and paint a real picture of the situation.

It looks as follows. A little over 30% of respondents admitted that the problem of human trafficking exists in Poland, and almost 23% of those surveyed thought that such a thing does not exist. However, the most interesting category is those who admitted that they know nothing on the topic (almost 47%). And so, one in three Poles know that human trafficking exists, and the rest either thinks the opposite or knows nothing about the issue. It seems appropriate to reiterate that the studies discussed above showed something completely different – that over 90% claimed to be aware of human trafficking. These differences are very significant and, if only for this reason, we cannot be indifferent to them; we need to understand why such differences exist.

Let us start with the simplest. Such divergences may mean that there has been a reversal of the awareness of Polish citizens, and that is why the number of those who know that we are dealing with human trafficking has decreased threefold. Such a statement would be very difficult to defend, because even at the level of common knowledge, the observation seems quite obvious that awareness processes, if not distorted by extraordinary events (such as war or natural disaster), are moving in the opposite direction. This means that as time moves forward, our

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<sup>33</sup> See: <http://www.trafficking.lv/en/competence-building-assistance-provision-and-prosecution-of-labour-exploitation-cases-in-the-baltic-sea-region-cape> [accessed May 21, 2021].

knowledge base increases, not decreases, because we unwittingly learn more and more, not less and less. From this perspective, the hypothesis of Poles regressing "in terms of development" cannot be confirmed.

Since this is the case, we must focus on the question of the value of the data. If the differences in research results are so glaring, some of them must be erroneous. The research carried out by SW Research in December 2020 is a small study that has been discussed and reviewed twice. In addition, the key question was asked correctly, i.e. without any suggestive elaboration or definitions, and was the first to be asked. This means that there must be serious reservations regarding the earlier findings. As I have already demonstrated, the earlier findings regarding Poles' awareness were encumbered with serious methodological errors, and therefore cannot be treated as reliable. The claims made at the time that awareness of human trafficking was universal and deep seem to be rather the pious wishes of the rulers and not facts confirmed by hard data.

In the second question, I decided to ask respondents to describe in their own words what human trafficking is. And again, we did not suggest anything, we did not formulate a foggy and illogical list of multiple-choice answers, and we left the choice of adequate content selection to the respondents. The most common answer (18.4%) was that human trafficking is the illegal sale of people. A little over 12% said that human trafficking is the exploitation of people for prostitution or work in brothels. Almost 12% thought that human trafficking entails the restriction someone's freedom by exploitation and forcing people to work. The other suggestions were less numerous, so I will not outline them here. However, the most important thing seems to be that almost 54% were unable to suggest any definition of human trafficking, even their own. These data correlate completely with the results obtained based on the first question, but also strongly question the findings made in earlier studies.

In the next question, the subject of my interest was the perception of a phenomenon strongly related to, yet separate from, human trafficking – forced labour. After introducing respondents to the problem, we once again asked a relatively simple question, but one of high diagnostic value: *In your opinion, how serious is the problem of forced labour in our country?* The value of the answers merits reporting all of them. One in eight respondents (12.5 %) thought that this problem does not exist in Poland, while 22.7% were of the opinion that while it does occur, it is not overly significant. In total, over one-third (35.2%) had not seen this phenomenon and/or did not notice its seriousness. A little over one in five respondents (20.3%) were of a different opinion – that this problem does appear in Poland and is growing quickly, while 6% thought it very serious. The opinion that forced labour occurs in Poland and is serious was shared by slightly

more than one-quarter of Poles (26.3%). However, the largest category was those who admitted that they know nothing on the topic – 38.5%. I must highlight this group – significantly more than one-third of those surveyed know nothing about forced labour in Poland.

While this may sometimes raise doubts, I will attempt to group the obtained data by combining the first pair of data with the last result, and so let us add 35.2% (who thought that there is no problem) and 38.5% (who know nothing about it). In this way, we can say that three-quarters (73.7%) of Poles know nothing about forced labour in Poland or else do not see it as a serious problem. Looking at these data from another perspective, we can say that one in four Poles (26%) are aware that the phenomenon of forced labour does exist in Poland and that it is not marginal in significance.

While this comment may seem obvious, let us first compare the findings with international data estimates about Poland. The latest findings show that the number of people who fall victim to various forms of slavery in Poland oscillated around 120,000<sup>34</sup>. Even if we assume that this value is exaggerated by, for example, 10% or 20%, there is still no doubt that forced labour occurs in Poland, and that it is not marginal. And in this situation, it seems fully justifiable to state that when it comes to the level of awareness, Polish society is nowhere near ready to address the difficult problem of forced labour. And it is difficult because of whom it usually affects.

And here we move to the next question, the aim of which was to establish who, in the opinion of the respondents, is a victim of forced labour. The difficulty of formulating questions on this topic is that at least three dimensions of the characteristics of such people converge here. On the one hand, it is an ethical dimension that is ascertained by the question of "are they Poles or foreigners?" It is indisputable that, in addition to typical structural slavery, victims of forced labour are usually foreigners. The second question is "are these only poor and uneducated people, or also others?" This is much more complicated, because, for example, the social profile of Poles who were victims of exploitation in Italy<sup>35</sup> was very diverse, even rich. And, finally, third, we must determine whether the problem of forced labor concerns all professions, or only the simplest ones that do not require much education. This is a complex issue, because in principle, victims

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<sup>34</sup> The Global Slavery Index 2018, Walk Free Foundation, p. 94, see: <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/> [accessed May 20, 2021].

<sup>35</sup> Criminal case, III K 21/07 Regional Court in Kraków, see also, for example, *Uwolniono Polaków zmuszanych do niewolniczej pracy we Włoszech* [Poles in forced labor freed in Italy], PAP SA, July 18, 2006, <https://www.pb.pl/uwolniono-polakow-zmuszanych-do-niewolniczej-pracy-we-wloszech-325210> [accessed May 19, 2021].

are people in very low-status occupations, but there have also been cases of, for example, forcing high-level professionals to illegally produce cigarettes.<sup>36</sup>

In the question the results of which I will present, I managed to combine all of these dimensions, although I am aware that extended research, not just quantitative studies, is necessary on the topic; and perhaps first and foremost not quantitative studies. For full transparency, I will just add that the respondent could choose several categories, and that is why the results do not add up to 100.

Over half of those surveyed (52.5%) were of the view that victims of forced labour in Poland can be "both migrants and Poles". If we add to this 8.2% of respondents who thought that only Poles were victims, we get a very surprising result – that in the opinion of 60% of those surveyed, victims of forced labour in Poland are both Poles and foreigners. This result is unexpected because it contradicts the observed facts, which show that the vast majority are foreigners.<sup>37</sup> Poles are indeed exploited in Poland, but it is only marginal – the real problem is the fact that the number of Poles exploited abroad is increasing. On the other hand, the opinion of the respondents is not surprising if we consider the high percentage of people who declared limited knowledge of the phenomenon. And finally, it cannot be ruled out that the respondents treated the term "victim of forced labour" as a collective category that covers various people who may fall victim to various forms of slavery. Clearly, further studies on the topic are needed, including qualitative research.

The second-most-popular choice was the category of victims described as "poor people, irrespective of where they are from" – 44.6% of respondents chose this. The next-most-popular choice (25.5%) was the option in which victims of forced labor are "all workers, depending on the circumstances". Respondents who

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<sup>36</sup>Z. Lasocik, Ł. Wieczorek, Trafficking for Forced Labour in Poland, [in] Trafficking for Forced Labour and Labour Exploitation in Finland, Poland and Estonia, A. Jokinen, N. Ollus, K. Aromaa (eds.), Helsinki 2011, HEUNI, p. 195.

<sup>37</sup>You could say that this is one of the axioms of learning about human trafficking and forced labor. For more on this topic, see: G.G. Lodder, Protection of Migrants Against Labor Exploitation in the Regulation of Migration in the EU, [in] The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking, J. Winterdyk, J. Jones (eds), Palgrave 2020, Cham, p. 1361, as well as: Z. Lasocik, E. Rekosz-Cebula, Ł. Wieczorek, *Handel ludźmi do pracyprzymusowej: mechanizmpowstawaniaiefektywniezapobieganie [Human trafficking for forced labor: the mechanisms of formation and effective prevention]*, Warsaw/Stockholm 2014, Council of the Baltic Sea States, p. 45 ff., or: World Migration Report 2020, see: [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf) [accessed May 23, 2021].

marked this answer seem to be aware of the situation of people forced into labour who may fall into all sorts of dependence, irrespective of their status or qualifications. Over 14% of respondents were of the opinion that only migrants fall victim to forced labour. This seems like a low percentage if we note the fact that, even in popular culture, there is a stereotype of a socially weak migrant who is easy to exploit. One in ten of those surveyed thought that "only manual/low skilled workers, irrespective of whether they are Poles or foreigners, fall victim to forced labour". This view is deeply embedded in the stereotypical idea of a worker, who is under-appreciated almost always and everywhere, and for this reason feels wronged. Here we end up not far from the perception of the wickedness of the employer and workers being exploited.

The survey ended with the question *Who should deal with the problem of forced labour?* The list of multiple-choice answers in this question was constructed in such a way as to be as simple as possible, and thanks to this, interpretation of the results did not present any major difficulties. Similarly to the previous questions, the respondents turned their attention primarily to the state. The dominance of this category (which was chosen by 65.1%) is more than obvious, since 8.4% of respondents chose the next one – local governments. However, we must be aware that the first category covers all state institutions, such as the police, border force, prosecutor's office and labor inspectorate, while "local government" only includes local authorities. Almost 7% of those surveyed were prepared to hand dealing with forced labour over to NGOs. An unpleasant surprise was that Poles rarely see the role of companies in eliminating forced labour, because only 5.4% of respondents chose this answer. And it is companies that bear full responsibility for the fact that people are unfairly recruited, that their vitality is exploited, and their standard of accommodation is so poor.. Even if these companies are not directly exploiting the workers, they must be aware that this is being done by employment agents or companies involved in so-called "employee leasing". There is an open question as to whether the image of business people is so negative that the respondents did not even consider "seeking help" from companies. We also cannot rule out a situation in which the respondent is aware that it is companies who violate the interests of the worker, and that is why they do not indicate them as a potential protector of, or support for, the victims. Either way, the matter is interesting and worth delving into deeper. However, I would like to add that almost 14% of respondents chose the option "I have no opinion on the topic". For a question about opinion, this is quite a high percentage.

Regarding this study, although it is by far the most modest of those outlined earlier, if we take into account the number of questions, it yields, in my opinion, the most-reliable data. They show that the percentage of Poles who are

unaware of human trafficking in Poland is small. The phenomenon of forced labour is equally unknown. However, while we have been discussing human trafficking for many years, forced labour only appeared in Poland in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century<sup>38</sup>, so ignorance of this phenomenon is, in a sense, "justified". The knowledge of Poles of the social profile of possible forced labour victims is also incomplete. Invariably, respondents expect state institutions to eliminate the practice.

### **New perspectives**

The literature on human trafficking and modern-day slavery<sup>39</sup> shows that one can generally differentiate between countries from which the victims originate (countries of origin) and countries to which they are going (destination countries). In principle, countries of origin are poorer and not as well organized, while destination countries are wealthier and modern.<sup>40</sup> There are also transit countries, which victims pass through or stop in for a certain period of time. Such a stay is usually a stage in the transfer of a victim from country to country or an introduction to the exploitation process.

Poland's situation is special, as it appears in all of these roles. It is a country of origin of victims, who are exploited mainly in Eastern European states, a destination country for individuals from neighboring countries and distant Asian

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<sup>38</sup> This is a reasonably well-known case of a Vietnamese national exploited by other Vietnamese in the Świętokrzyskievoivodship. For more on this topic, see, inter alia, Ł. Wieczorek, *Pracaprzymusowa. Zagadnieniaprawneikryminologiczne* [Forced labor. Legal and criminological issues], Warsaw 2017, UW Human Trafficking Studies Centre, p. 393 ff., as well as Z. Lasocik, *Forced labour – well-hidden mechanisms of dependence and enslavement*, *ArchiwumKryminologii* 2021, T. XLIII, No. 1, DOI 10.7420/AK2021.05

<sup>39</sup> See also: US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report, <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/> [20.08.2021] and Reports prepared by Group of Experts of the Council of Europe GRETA; <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/greta> [20.08.2021]. It should be also noted that sometimes people are victims of human trafficking in their home country. Then the country of origin is also the destination country.

<sup>40</sup> See, inter alia: 2016 Global Report, UNODC, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016\\_Global\\_Report\\_on\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Persons.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf) [accessed May 19, 2021]; Promoting Cooperation among Source, Transit and Destination Countries in Response to Human Trafficking, <https://www.unodc.org/centralasia/en/news/promoting-cooperation-among-source-transit-and-destination-countries-in-response-to-human-trafficking.html> [accessed May 19, 2021]; The identification of victims of human trafficking in transit and destination countries in Europe, A practical guideline for frontline workers, 2019, Croatian Red Cross, see: [https://www.trafficking-response.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-identification-of-victims-of-human-trafficking-in-transit-and-destination-countries-in-Europe\\_English.pdf](https://www.trafficking-response.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-identification-of-victims-of-human-trafficking-in-transit-and-destination-countries-in-Europe_English.pdf) [accessed May 19, 2021].

regions, as well as a transit country for victims from the east heading west.<sup>41</sup> This poses a series of difficult challenges for Poland; however, first and foremost, it impacts upon the scope of the responsibilities of the state towards victims, including support for individuals from Poland exploited abroad, as well as help and protection for individuals coming to Poland from abroad and exploited there, and finally identifying those who are only in transit. That issue is beyond the scope of this article, but I would like to strongly highlight that this matter did not appear in any of the research discussed above. It seems that it is necessary to undertake actions aimed at making the general population aware of the seriousness of the situation. It would also be advisable to regularly assess the awareness of Poles on this subject. This is what I will now discuss.

First, the authorities should be interested in what Poles know about the situation of other Poles who take up work abroad and fall into all types of dependencies, sometimes taking the form of slavery. However, it is not enough to regularly ask respondents if they are aware of the risks associated with such a trip – widespread awareness should be built that exploitation occurs and is difficult to prevent, and that everything possible should be done to enable support for anyone who has been in a situation of exploitation. On the other hand, the profile of the studies should drastically change. You cannot ad infinitum ask Poles about threats abroad. We need extensive research with participation from people living abroad about their situation, as well as studies of individuals who are returning to Poland, and who are able to discuss their negative experiences.

Second, that Poland as a destination country has a number of serious consequences. First and foremost, we must realize that an unknown number of foreigners come to Poland – they spend time there, take up work, and are sometimes exploited in that work. We have to acknowledge this fact, "call a spade a spade" and publicly recognize our collective responsibility. After all, at a time when they are subjected to various forms of enslavement, they are under the jurisdiction of the Polish state, physically next to us and falling victim to unscrupulous companies belonging mainly to Poles. In the national and mental aspect, this means that we can no longer only think about ourselves as victims of someone else's wickedness, but that we ourselves as a society enslave and exploit "foreigners". Because this was not sufficiently reflected in the said studies, drastic change is needed in this regard.

This means that, in future, in research into human trafficking and forced labour, as well as in public opinion polls, we must take into account these two,

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<sup>41</sup> The information provided by law enforcement authorities shows that cases of transfer from the south to the north are sporadic.



somewhat overlooked, perspectives. This is a condition for building awareness among citizens and achieving better effectiveness of the system for eliminating these serious acts of criminal exploitation.

## **Conclusion**

Over two decades, several public opinion polls were conducted on human trafficking. In some of them, there was a strong focus on the issue of threats of potential employment abroad. Also present was the problem of victims of modern-day slavery, as well as a whole range of matters related to the "distribution of burdens" when it comes to who is meant to deal with this complicated crime. Several of the studies, particularly those commissioned by the La Strada Foundation. However, conspicuous by its absence from almost all of these studies was the problem of forced labour, which, although present in Poland, is finding it difficult to enter into the consciousness of both citizens and those in power.

A key task that I set myself in this article was to establish whether the members of Polish society are aware of human trafficking and forced labour, and whether the level of this knowledge is adequate to the situation and needs. The selection of empirical material was subordinated to this goal, and that is why I did not discuss all the data obtained, only some.

The most important conclusion that flows from the analyses discussed comes down to the following statement: despite the fact that in Poland there have already been several public opinion polls, we do not really know what the actual level of awareness is regarding human trafficking. As I demonstrated, this level is presented as significantly higher than experience and many years of observation suggest. In addition, in some cases, such a statement contradicted the results obtained in the relevant study. When analyzing the data, I could not resist the impression that I was observing data manipulation for the purpose of stating that awareness is higher than originally thought. In several cases, such a "positive" interpretation of the data was possible, because the design of the survey had methodological errors, which is why the picture presented did not reflect reality. On the other hand, it was sometimes the case that the data did not allow such conclusions to be drawn, and yet despite this, the summary of the research stated that knowledge of the issue is "widespread".

I also ascertained that the conclusions drawn from the data from 1998-2015 significantly contradict those based on the findings of the study from 2020. Not only is it difficult to talk about the "commonness" of knowledge in the

light of the data obtained in the research from 1998-2015, it must in fact be stated that this knowledge is modest and fragmentary.

Given this state of affairs, it is reasonable to ask who sought such a misrepresentation of reality, and why? In my opinion, the answer can be found in the entities participating in the said research – this applies first and foremost to the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the La Strada Foundation. In the article, I noted several times that, as a result of the involvement of public institutions (the Ministry of the Interior) in the research, the results were presented as if a specific position or state of affairs had to be proven; not to mention the fact that in one case, it was difficult to resist the impression that the introduction to the research report (described as the "Summary") was, indeed, drafted at the Ministry of the Interior.

The second question that I tried to answer was: "is citizens' awareness a factor shaping the response of the country and other public entities to these phenomena, and if so, to what extent?" There is no doubt that informed citizens expect more from all actors of public life, including from the state. It is not without reason that totalitarian and authoritarian regimes consistently introduced embargoes on information from the "free world". There are two key mechanisms here. First, the more aware the citizen, the more difficult the job of those in power. A citizen who knows more, understands more and sees themselves as an entity is dangerous to authorities. However, they are useful for society, particularly an active society whose members know how to stand up for themselves, as Etzioni explained. The high level of awareness of young women brought them onto the streets of Polish cities after the so-called Constitutional Tribunal introduced barbaric regulations regarding abortion in 2020. Second, a citizen who knows more and understands more makes life difficult for those in power, because such a citizen requires, and sometimes even demands, more. A good example of how this mechanism works is the climate catastrophe I referred to in the introduction. Only pressure from informed citizens guarantees that the rate of total degradation of the natural environment can be decreased.

In matters of forced labour or human trafficking, this pressure is lacking, because many people find it difficult to accept the reality of these phenomena, irrespective of age, education, legal knowledge and history. Such a low level of awareness seems, on the other hand, to be a negative result of the language we use. In practice, this means that whenever we discuss these phenomena, a violation of the law is always in the background. When describing human trafficking, we focus on one of the key aspects of this behaviour, i.e. we present it as a serious crime attracting severe punishment. Even the simplest questions about human trafficking or forced labour have negative notes and a more or less veiled

criminal element. Yet human trafficking is also a widespread social phenomenon, and labour as such – in this case forced – is deemed to be one of the noblest forms of human activity. Perhaps the language we use to describe this phenomenon needs to change, which would possibly facilitate communication on the topic. I will not delve deeper into this thread, because I have devoted much more attention to it elsewhere.<sup>42</sup>

As a result of these "turbulences" and deficiencies in societal awareness of the subject of human trafficking, the Polish authorities have been "sleeping soundly" since this felony was criminalised in the Polish Penal Code of 1997, because pressure from society is basically non-existent. For a quarter of a century, there has been no manifestation of the formation of a collective awareness of the threat of modern-day slavery. This problem has never appeared in mainstream public debate, has rarely been discussed in the press, and has never been the subject of commentaries by the opinion makers or prominent politicians. You could say that the topic did not exist. It is difficult to think otherwise based on just the activity of several very committed NGOs and a dozen or so experts. The lack of influence of these circles is evidenced by the fact that the authorities remain deaf to calls to increase the scandalously low levels of resources devoted to combating human trafficking in Poland.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, it is not as though the Polish public authorities do nothing. However, left undisturbed by any massive social movement, over the last 25 years successive governments have done only as much as required by Poland's international obligations, including EU law. Their lack of action is explained also by the lack of pressure from foreign institutions. Furthermore, the European Commission (the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator) did not react to Poland's obvious violation of the Directive on human trafficking of 2011.<sup>44</sup> If Poland was

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<sup>42</sup> Z. Lasocik, Forced labour – well-hidden ... op. cit. *passim*.

This fact has been noted in the global report on human trafficking issued by the US State Department and became one of the reasons why Poland was down-graded to the category of countries that do not deal very well with eliminating human trafficking, see: Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2019, p. 383, see: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf> [accessed May 23, 2021].

<sup>44</sup> Such a clear violation was the dismantling in 2019 of the Interministerial Team for Combating and Preventing Human Trafficking, which acted as an institution coordinating the problem of human trafficking in Poland in line with Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA.

criticized by international institutions<sup>45</sup>, the authorities did not care very much about it and even demonstrating hostility to negative GRETA country reports. However, the most important thing to me is the statement that they could afford to disregard the problem in this way, because there was no strong and well-organized lobby of informed citizens who demanded a different attitude. Obviously, one could argue that the authorities themselves should feel obligated. But this is not the case in Poland or regarding human trafficking, which is inherently associated with paid sex and migration. One taboo is worse than the other.

Either way, the conclusion is obvious: the system for eliminating human trafficking and forced labour in Poland is inefficient and weak because the authorities of our country have never prioritized this issue, and this occurred because Poland's weak civil society has never exerted enough pressure on the government to bring about a change in this embarrassing situation.

*September 2021*

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<sup>45</sup> Critical comments were formulated first and foremost by experts of the Council of Europe acting under GRETA, see. footnote 3, and of the US State Department in its annual report on the elimination of human trafficking by individual countries (Trafficking in Persons Report), see: footnote 40.