

*Szandra Windt* ■

Attitudes of law enforcement towards trafficking in human beings in Hungary

Postawy organów ścigania wobec handlu ludźmi na Węgrzech

Abstract: Human trafficking is an umbrella term that covers sexual, labour and other forms of exploitation. The process of exploitation for different purposes involves the user, the victim and the exploiters. In this study, we focus on the actors outside this process, who are nevertheless important in tackling the phenomenon: the police officers, prosecutors and judges who deal with trafficking cases. Hungarian law enforcement officers are not used to investigating their attitudes and formulating their own opinions about particular phenomena. However, being able to provide them with even more effective and appropriate training would be extremely important for the organisation and for the phenomenon itself. We asked permission from leaders of various members of the criminal justice system (police, prosecutor office, judge) to conduct an attitude test among their staff. In this article we present the situation in Hungary of combating human trafficking and we summarise the survey results.

Keywords: trafficking in human beings, police, prosecutor, judge, attitudes, Hungary

Abstrakt: Handel ludźmi to ogólne określenie zjawisk obejmujących wykorzystanie seksualne, wyzysk pracowników i inne formy wyzysku. Proces wyzysku w różnych celach angażuje osobę korzystającą z wyzysku (użytkownika), ofiarę i osobę wyzyskującą. W niniejszym badaniu skupiamy się na podmiotach spoza tego grona, które mimo wszystko odgrywają ważną rolę w walce z tym zjawiskiem: funkcjonariuszach policji, prokuratorach i sędziach zajmujących się sprawami dotyczącymi handlu ludźmi. Węgierscy funkcjonariusze organów ścigania nie są przyzwyczajeni do badania ich postaw i wyrażania własnych opinii na temat poszczególnych zjawisk. Jednakże, możliwość dzielenia się opinią oraz jeszcze bardziej skuteczne i właściwie szkolenie byłyby niezwykle ważne nie tylko z perspektywy organizacji, ale też z perspektywy samego zjawiska. Zwróciliśmy się do kierownictwa różnych instytucji w ramach wymiaru sprawiedliwości (policji, prokuratury, sędziów) z wnioskiem o

udzielenie zgody na przeprowadzenie badania postaw wśród pracowników tych instytucji. W artykule przedstawiamy sytuację w zakresie zwalczania handlu ludźmi na Węgrzech oraz podsumowujemy wyniki ankiety.

Słowa kluczowe: handel ludźmi, policja, prokurator, sędzia, postawy, Węgry

Introduction

Hungary is a small country in the heart of Europe, with a total population of less than ten million. Trafficking in human beings is a widespread phenomenon in Hungary, but research on the subject still faces difficulties, despite the fact that the number of crimes known to authorities has increased significantly since 2019.

Trafficking in human beings is a complex phenomenon and the range of behaviours covered by the concept is manifold, as are the actors involved. The concept of trafficking in human beings covers sexual, labour and other forms of exploitation. The process of exploitation for different purposes involves the user, the victim and the exploiters. In this article we focus on the actors outside this process, who are nevertheless important in tackling the phenomenon: those who can do a great deal to break this cycle, “heal” the victims and punish the perpetrators.

One common view on human trafficking in Hungary is that it is uncommon and not part of the everyday Hungarian reality. Although the crime can clearly originate in our country, respondents believe it is only committed abroad (Sharov 2019). The opposite is true in international public opinion: there are many Hungarian victims (mainly sex workers), and Hungarian criminal circles play a significant role in this crime. According to the estimates in the Global Slavery Index 2018, 36,000 people lived in slavery, and this number nearly doubled in 2023 to 63,000 enslaved people in Hungary (Global Slavery Index 2018; Global Slavery Index 2023). One of the main objectives of awareness-raising training is to make it clear to domestic law enforcement that this crime also takes place within our borders, and that international “emergence” is typically preceded by domestic attempts (Human trafficking training 2020; Huszár, Windt 2020).

Within human trafficking, which refers to the “human market” (and has since become difficult to separate from its original meaning), a distinction is made between exploitation for labour and so-called other purposes, in addition to sexual exploitation. Given the complexity, characteristics and constant changes in the phenomenon, it is of the utmost importance to carry out as much research as possible on trafficking in human beings in order to prevent, detect and combat it. The discourse is often based on stereotypes rather than on reliable empirical research. However, forming opinions based on research data does not only occur in Hungary (Goździak 2014; Weitzer 2014).

Two preconceptions should be mentioned in relation to the “low” prosecution figures. One is the theory of a “culture of impunity” in relation to this phenomenon.

Despite commitments, impunity for perpetrators remains widespread, with only a few victims of trafficking ever receiving justice (OSCE 2020). Another explanation often given for the low number of cases is the “attitude of law enforcement”: an attitude of blaming the victims.

Different research has been conducted on human trafficking in Hungary since 2019. One study was a completely new initiative, intended to explore the perceptions and attitudes of law enforcement officers and to measure their knowledge of the topic. We had opportunities to survey police officers, prosecutors and judges three different times between 2020 and 2022. Below is a brief summary of the studies conducted in 2020 and 2022. These have already been published separately, but comparing them is not a waste of time. Between 2020 and 2022, Hungary was not spared by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also affected the research methodology; the questionnaires were thus typically completed online.

1. Trafficking in Human Beings in Hungary

1.1. Statistics on Human Trafficking

The GRETA expert group of the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United States Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, among others, prepare reports on trafficking in human beings, for which the Hungarian authorities are required to provide data. These organisations formulate opinions and recommendations on the practices in each country. The European Commission’s October 2020 report includes data for 2017–2018: there were 14,145 victims in the 27 EU Member States. In comparison to the high number of victims, the Commission considers that the number of prosecutions and convictions of offenders was low. The top five EU Member States in terms of nationality of victims of trafficking in 2017–2018 in absolute terms were Romania, Hungary, France, the Netherlands and Bulgaria (Third Report 2020: 3).

The European Commission published the fourth progress report in connection with Directive 2011/36/EU at the end of 2022 (Report 2022). The majority of victims in 2019–2020 were registered in France (2,709), the Netherlands (2,318), Italy (2,114), Romania (1,294) and Germany (1,271) (European Commission 2022: 1). In 2019–2020, 53% (7,330) of the registered victims with known citizenship were EU citizens. According to the number of victims in proportion to the population, the most represented EU citizenships were Romania (1 per 16,781), Bulgaria (1 per 25,316) and Hungary (1 per 59,242) (European Commission 2022: 8).

According to these data the Hungarian victims were fewer than ever before. Hungarian human trafficking mainly involves Hungarian nationals, as both victims and offenders. The main purpose is sexual exploitation, but we have to mention

that labour exploitation and forced crime has been on the rise since 2020. Although across the EU approximately 37% of all registered victims were citizens of the country in which the crime was recorded, Hungary has the second highest rates of registering their own citizens (99%) (European Commission 2022: 9, 13). Sexual exploitation was the most frequent form of exploitation recorded for individuals prosecuted in Hungary (100%) (European Commission 2022: 14).

Despite the overall increase, the absolute number of prosecutions and convictions remains low, especially as compared to the number of registered victims and suspects. In 2019–2020, 6,539 prosecutions and 3,019 convictions were recorded within the EU, while in 2021 the estimated number of prosecutions was 4,452 and the estimated number of convictions was 2,507 (Report 2022: 11).

In addition to the European Commission, the US Office on Trafficking in Persons produces an annual report on trafficking in persons for each country, known as the TIP report. Despite the fact that there may be some critical comments on it (regarding its independence and the care and depth of its analysis: Nelken 2010; Wooditch 2011; Hyatt 2022), it is necessary to quote it. Although Hungary is in Tier 2¹ because of its achievements in recent years and has made significant effort, according to the US observers the Hungarian government is not fully meeting the minimum standards for the eradication of trafficking in persons (TIP Report 2023: 83). They also state that there is a need to increase law enforcement and judicial efforts to detect, prosecute and convict perpetrators of trafficking and to impose significant prison sentences. They stress the importance of training law enforcement officials (including prosecutors and judges) on the seriousness of the crime and the irrelevance of any initial consent of the victims in proving the crime (TIP Report 2022: 273–274).

The role of victims is particularly important in trafficking cases. Criminal proceedings involving sexual and labour exploitation are “evidence-poor”, with only personal evidence being available, including in many cases victims’ statements. The victim is (also) a particularly important actor in these cases: they can provide a lot of information that can help the investigating authority and the prosecution to establish criminal responsibility, including the gathering of further evidence. A cooperative and reliable victim/witness can help the authorities in their work. However, it is also clear from analyses of cases (Windt 2021c) – of both trafficking in human beings and exploitation of child prostitution – that some of the victims have an extremely low level of intellect (as determined by an expert), and are therefore simply unable to give coherent testimony, not only because of their attitudes. The physical and mental condition of the victim, as a result of what they have been through, makes it even more difficult for them to give comprehensive testimony.

¹ Tier ranks are important for the different countries: there are four different placements according to the different countries’ efforts to meet the (American) Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000’s (TVPA) minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking, which are generally consistent with the Palermo Protocol (for more, see TIP 2022: 51–52).

1.2. Changes since 2019

In Hungary, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for coordinating the fight against trafficking in human beings. The Ministry's Deputy State Secretary for European Union and International Affairs is the national anti-trafficking coordinator, assisted by the Anti-Trafficking and Horizontal Affairs Unit.² The Ministry of the Interior has taken further steps to combat trafficking in human beings, reinforcing previous measures in 2019. A new countdown began in combating human trafficking in 2019 in Hungary, followed by the new anti-trafficking strategy and Act V of 2020. This period coincided with the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is undisputed that the number of prosecutions was indeed low between the middle of 2013 and the beginning of 2019. The interpretation of the "vulnerable situation" in Article 192 of the Criminal Code (based on Directive 2011/36/EU), the exploitation purpose and the assessment of the victim's voluntariness were indeed "misinterpreted" in the absence of uniform practice. However, in recognition of this, in October 2018, the Prosecutor General's Office issued a very important Guideline (No. KSB 3771/2018/5-I-NF. 3889/2014/11), which provides the correct interpretation of exploitation and vulnerable situations in the case of trafficking in human beings, the distinction from the crime of fencing. This is a very important step towards ending the above-mentioned "culture of impunity". This guideline has contributed significantly to the visible increase in the number of offences under Art. 192 of the Criminal Code since 2019 (Balogh, Huszár, Windt 2020; Huszár 2022; Report 2022: 9).

The next important milestone in analysing judicial practice on the interpretation of human trafficking was a supplementary guideline (KSB 3771/2018/45-II.-NF. 3889/2014/17-II.), which was issued in May 2019 and draws the attention of prosecutors identifying victims as such to the fact that the treatment of victims as being in need of special treatment is most likely justified in most cases. The prosecutorial guidelines on the status, situation and protection of victims of exploitation, based on the indicators of Government Decree 354/2012 (XII. 13.), were incomplete. It was a decisive step towards the much-vaunted change of approach and the development of a victim-centred approach.

In the beginning of 2020, three major amendments were also made to Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code. The legal definitions of trafficking in human beings (Section 192) and forced labour (Section 193) were merged – a reasonable simplification of their regulation, since they are conceptually parts of the phenomenon (Windt 2021b).

The Prosecutor General's Office collected the experiences and different examples in the country after the changes to the Criminal Code after 2020, and published a third guideline (No. KSB.3771-2018-246-NF. 3889/2014/18), regarding the correct and common interpretation of the new parts of Article 192 in order to unify jurisprudence in 2023.

² For more information, see <https://thb.kormany.hu>.

By 2023, also partly due to awareness-raising training, the perception of the crime of human trafficking by law enforcement had changed significantly. Among many other things, this can be observed in the rise in criminal statistics: while in 2018 there were four registered trafficking offences in the Unified Criminal Statistics of the Investigative Authority and the Prosecutor's Office (ENYÜBS), in 2020 there were 57, and in 2021 even more, almost tripling the number.

In addition to the changes in legislation and the number of training courses, another important event from 2020 onwards was the COVID-19 pandemic; it peaked in different waves and different efforts were made to contain its spread (Fisayo, Tsukagoshi 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the fight against trafficking in human beings in Hungary, but the processes that had barely begun have continued. The Hungarian characteristics of trafficking in human beings were slightly overshadowed by the first wave: the closure of brothels in Germany, Austria and Switzerland led to the return of Hungarian victims. In each wave, the protective measures – curfews and border closures – mainly affected sexual exploitation.

2. Attitudes

Attitude is an important but imprecisely defined term in social psychology. At the beginning of the 20th century, many researchers were concerned with attitude. In 1935, Gordon Allport put it this way (Allport 1972: 179–198, 188): “Attitude is a mental and nervous state of readiness, organised through experience, which exerts a controlling or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations in relation to him” (Allport 1972: 188).

Social attitude is measured by the rejection or acceptance of evaluative statements, using a sequence of statements and responses to form a picture of the quality or intensity of evaluative attitudes (Halász, Hunyady, Marton 1979: 20). Measuring attitudes is a way for empirical social research to gain access to the individual and social values inherent in evaluative attitudes. It is a fundamental factor in the understanding of social reality and in building knowledge (Halász, Hunyady, Marton 1979: 23–24). Attitudes are a product of an individual's life history, a function of previous experiences (Halász, Hunyady, Marton 1979: 27).

It should be stressed that one's social environment has a decisive influence on the development of attitudes (Halász, Hunyady, Marton 1979: 122). Attitudes determine our behaviour towards an object, summarise our value judgments about it and thus guide our behaviour and organise our way of knowing the world (Bencze, Vinnai 2012: 130).

2.1. Legal practitioners and their attitude

The professional attitude, and professionalism desire to improve among law enforcement officers (police, prosecutors and judges), as well as their personal attitude, influence their everyday work. This impact is evident in their communication with victims, during investigations, in the prosecutor's instructions to members of the investigating authority in each case, in their manner of supervising proceedings, when representing the prosecution and handling the aforementioned discretionary process and in the delivery of judgements, despite the fact that they have acquired the principles of professionalism through regular professional training (see Gibson 1978).

Many American researchers have had the opportunity to examine the attitudes of law enforcement officers, particularly in relation to domestic violence, but their Hungarian colleagues have not. Little is said about the attitudes of Hungarian law enforcement, though the public's perception of their work is better known (e.g. Garner 2005; Sun 2007; Gover, Pudrzynska, Dodge 2011; Gracia, García, Lila 2014). Although attitudes of law enforcement officers are rarely studied, they are of paramount importance for both the internal and external perception of the organisation (Dianiska et al. 2022).

It should be noted that, following the amendment of 1 July 2013, it took a long time to implement, in particular, the assessment of the vulnerable situation and the development and/or maintenance of a uniform practice. It is not possible to list them in a taxonomy, as each victim is different and law enforcement officers have to make a "judgement call" (i.e. whether an act falls under the offence of fencing or trafficking in human beings). As Supreme Court judgement No. IV. 37.088/2008/6 states, "discretion is the process whereby the legislature selects the most appropriate solution in a given case from among the provisions."

However, in cases of human trafficking, the decision of the legislature is based on their own experience and personality, in addition to the wording of the Criminal Code. Little is said about this, although it is extremely important. If the legislator legislature is not precise, they obviously have more discretion. However, in the case of trafficking in human beings, the legislature also had a difficult task and used common terms which were not well developed in Hungarian jurisprudence – having been derived from international instruments – and which gave police officers, prosecutors and judges leeway, which they used to apply a much clearer definition of the offence (e.g. fencing or facilitating prostitution instead of trafficking in human beings). So-called awareness-raising training has been initiated to develop a common practice among law enforcement, in order for officers to understand the complexity of human trafficking and to meet international standards.

The TIP report, the EU reports and the GRETA country evaluations have repeatedly underscored the fact that the number of convictions in trafficking cases is low in Hungary, with relatively few having resulted in custodial sentences and even fewer in long prison sentences. It should be stressed, however, that this is not only a criticism of Hungarian law enforcement, but is also reflected in international experience.

It should also be mentioned that in many cases proceedings are prolonged for years, and that the passage of time is then seen as a mitigating circumstance when sentences are handed down. This practice sends an inappropriate message to the victim and society in general, since court judgements and case decisions are important signals about attitudes towards crime.

It is precisely the attitudes of legal practitioners outside the law, outside the legal framework, that the awareness-raising and sensitisation training sessions seek to nuance, by talking through common problems and by presenting the difficulties and successes of other professions, the problems of the victim and the challenges of victim support.

Three important characteristics can lead to organisational renewal: professionalism, social embeddedness and the willingness to innovate (Christián 2016: 221). However, these also require managers to be familiar with the attitudes of the staff (Christián 2016: 221; Dianiska et al. 2022). We could add with regard to human trafficking that proactivity, a victim-centred approach and knowledge of the different countries' experiences are also important (see Binder 2022).

2.2. Summaries of the attitude tests

Below is a brief summary of the results of the various studies conducted in 2020 and 2022, with the answers of 1,106 law enforcement officers altogether (police officers, prosecutors and judges). These have already been published separately, but there is good reason for summarising them in order to serve as a basis for further research at the national and international levels.

Between 2020 and 2022, Hungary was not spared by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also affected the research methodology; thus, the questionnaires were typically completed online. The demographic part of the questionnaire, as well as the questions measuring attitudes, were the same for all professions, but we also added some specific professional questions for police officers and asked about the impact of the pandemic in 2021 (Windt 2023).

One of the main difficulties in examining the attitudes of legal practitioners was the lack of influence on the identity, number or composition of the respondents, as once permission was granted, the link to the questionnaire was distributed centrally within the organisation. In the autumn of 2019, an attitude training course was developed based on the idea of the Head of the Anti-Trafficking and Horizontal Unit of the Ministry of the Interior, where police officers, prosecutors and judges worked on trafficking cases in small groups, following presentations on the phenomenon and crime of trafficking in human beings. Following the first so-called pilot session in November 2019 (and the positive feedback) (Huszár, Windt 2020), the Ministry of the Interior decided to continue these trainings in 2020 and 2021. In total, six training sessions were offered: four online and two face-to-face.

The participants were asked to complete an anonymous 13-question attitudinal questionnaire to measure their attitudes “before the trainings”. Unfortunately, we

did not have the opportunity to return and measure the respondents' attitudes after the training. A total of 90 participants (police officers, prosecutors and judges) completed this questionnaire during the training sessions in 2020–2021 (Windt 2022).

As mentioned above, the Prosecution Service has played an important role in combating human trafficking in Hungary in the last few years. Besides the different guidelines, since 2020 the Prosecutor General Office has organised training for their own staff about human trafficking and its complexity. Prosecutors have special places in the criminal proceedings in Hungary: they are “mediators” between police and judges, they can direct and instruct police officers and they can suspend terminations. They represent the prosecution in court. With the permission of the Prosecutor General, prior to the internal training of prosecutors on trafficking in human beings, two surveys were conducted in 2020 and 2021 with the prosecutors who participated in these trainings (with 189 and 65 respondents) (Windt 2021a).

In February–March 2022, we also sought the opinion of “police officers”, based on a slightly modified version of the questionnaire from previous surveys, with the permission of the ORFK Director General of Police and Crime. We received a total of 702 responses from police officers (525 patrol officers and 177 criminal investigators) (Windt 2023).

In spring 2022, the National Office of the Judiciary organised an online training for “judges” on human trafficking. The President of the National Judicial Council gave us permission to ask those who took part in an online training about human trafficking. The judges who participated in this training were also asked about human trafficking with presidential authorisation. We received 60 responses.

The distribution of the four different data sets is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the four surveys

Who (professionals)	When	No. of respondents	How
attitude-shaping training (judges, prosecutors and police officers combined)	2020–2022	90	
prosecutors	2020	189	online
prosecutors	2021	65	online
police officers	2022	702	online
judges	2022	60	online

Source: Own elaboration.

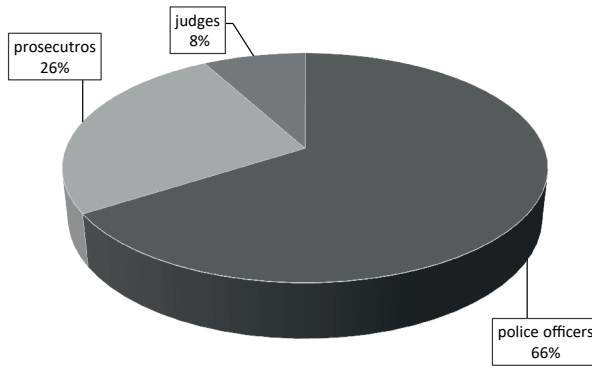
2.2.1. Characteristics of the total sample

In the different examinations, the questionnaires were based on the same questions, but we added some new ones for the various professionals (certain questions that only apply to police officers, or ones about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic,

which was only added in the last year). After some questions about the respondent (gender, occupation, how long they have been working for the organisation, whether they had ever participated in such training or whether they had ever had such a case), they were asked to respond to statements measuring their attitude.

Due to the limitations of space, here we will only summarize the attitudes after presenting the descriptive data of the entire sample. The total sample across the four surveys comprised 1,106 people, and the characteristics of each are briefly described below. In the total sample there were 727 police officers, 284 prosecutors and 95 judges (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of professions in the total sample



Source: Own elaboration.

The gender and age group distribution of the respondents is noteworthy: although the study is not representative of any of the professions, the high number of those working for more than 15 years and of female prosecutors and judges was typical. Two thirds of the respondents were men (n=723; 65.4%) and one third were women (n=382; 34.5%). As Figure 2 shows, there were more women than men among the prosecutor and judge respondents.

Figure 2. Distribution of professionals by sex



Source: Own elaboration.

We assumed the respondents would have had more experience, since 57.6% (637) of them had been working for their organisation for more than 15 years.

Table 2. Tenure of respondents at the time of the survey

	Frequency	Per cent
Less than 3 years	73	6.6
Between 3 and 5 years	92	8.3
Between 5 and 10 years	118	10.7
Between 10 and 15 years	186	16.8
More than 15 years	637	57.6
Total	1106	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

In Hungary, 19 counties and the capital are the main territorial units. The respondents came from all counties, with Budapest (the capital) being the largest (one fifth of all respondents), with a significant number of respondents being reluctant to disclose their county in the anonymous questionnaire.

2.2.2. Attitudes of the respondents

Before developing the questionnaire, we formulated some hypotheses regarding the crime of trafficking and the larger phenomenon: we assumed that our respondents would have a more accurate view of the phenomenon of trafficking if they had already encountered such cases. Article 192 of the Hungarian Criminal Code has recently come into focus due to international expectations and subsequent domestic reactions. Victim-blaming was not assumed to be common among the law enforcement officers. Based on the results of previous studies on a different topic (fear of crime), every respondent considers their own county to be better, or those who have encountered such a case have a more realistic perception of the prevalence of the phenomenon in their county. Presumably, there is a significant difference among the attitudes of police officers, prosecutors and judges in terms of their perception of the victim, their requests for help and their willingness to volunteer. Attitudes are also influenced by whether the law enforcement officer has had such a case previously.

In recent years, trafficking in human beings (section 192) has become over-estimated; there has been some feedback that trafficking in human beings has recently become a “hot topic”, although there was no reason for it – according to some opinions. As we see later, the judges (60) rejected this claim more than the representatives of other professions.

The aim of the attitude survey was to investigate the opinions of the responding law enforcement officials (police officers, prosecutors and judges) on a total of five deliberately provocative statements related to human trafficking. They were

asked to indicate their opinion on the allegations using a six-point Likert scale from 1 (disagree very strongly) to 6 (agree very strongly). The four common provocative statements and a question were as follows:

1. Trafficking in human beings is not a widespread phenomenon in Hungary.
2. The latency rate for trafficking cases is very high.
3. Victims of human trafficking usually do not do their best to get out of their bad situation.
4. In most cases, the victims carry out their activities voluntarily.
5. How prevalent do you think the phenomenon of human trafficking is in your county?

The individual samples showed different results; the responses of the entire sample are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Data on the provocative statements

		Trafficking in human beings is not a widespread phenomenon in Hungary.	The latency rate for trafficking cases is very high.	Victims of human trafficking usually do not do their best to get out of their bad situation.	In most cases, the victims carry out their activities voluntarily.	How prevalent do you think the phenomenon of human trafficking is in your county?
N	Valid	1104	1104	1099	1105	1103
	Missing	2	2	7	1	3
Mean		3.13	4.48	3.58	2.85	3.02
Median		3.00	5.00	4.00	3.00	3.00
Standard deviation		1.377	1.312	1.350	1.288	1.325

Source: Own elaboration.

2.2.2.1. Trafficking in human beings is not a widespread phenomenon in Hungary

Human trafficking is a widespread phenomenon in Hungary. Those respondents who shared this opinion either knew more about the complexity of the phenomenon, had had such a case or had attended a related training course. Those who had not previously participated in human trafficking training and those who belonged to the first study group rejected this statement even more than later respondents (mean: 2.93).

2.2.2.2. The latency rate for trafficking cases is very high

The high latency associated with human trafficking is clear, according to almost all respondents. There was no significant correlation between the gender and the

profession of the respondents, but there was a correlation with how long they had been working for their organisation.

In the autumn 2020 survey of prosecutors only (Windt 2021a), the same result was found: trafficking in human beings is a widespread phenomenon in Hungary, and the respondents believed that the latency rate is very high. This was the case even when the respondent did not believe that trafficking is a widespread phenomenon in Hungary: the high latency is nevertheless related to it. It is a different question as to what the reasons for the high latency are and how the respondents could do something about it through their own work.

Although the victim is obliged to participate in certain procedural steps, many cases are delayed because the victim's whereabouts are unknown and they have not notified the authorities of the change of address. This causes difficulties for all three professions, and the lack of cooperation by victims can lead to delays and failed proceedings – in other words, a failure to establish criminal liability, possibly resulting in a lesser offence with a lighter penalty (Brunovskis, Skilbrei 2016; Farrell, Kane 2020).

2.2.2.3. Victims of human trafficking usually do not do their best to get out of their bad situation. In most cases, the victims carry out their activities voluntarily

We tried to measure the victim-blaming attitudes among the respondents with these two statements. The answers given to the statements separately, as well as their relationship to each other and the gender and profession of the respondents, were all important variables. There was not much agreement among the respondents regarding the failure of the victims to quit; several people accepted this opinion, while the victim's voluntariness was much more strongly rejected in the entire sample.

Among the respondents, prosecutors typically rejected this claim, but more police officers and judges agreed. Those with previous experience of trafficking in human beings prior to the training were more likely to agree with the statement, although again no significant correlation could be found. Although the respondents' profession did not influence their opinion on the victims' failure to ask for help, their gender did. The women disagreed with this statement more than the men. There was no significant difference in the responses and attitudes of either prosecutors or judges in terms of the gender of the respondent, although it should be noted that the women were more emphatic in their rejection of victim-blaming statements.

In the total sample, these two statements were overwhelmingly rejected, so there was no clear evidence of victim-blaming by the respondents. Through training, a strong victim-centred approach and an understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon, the negative attitudes of some respondents seem to be changing.

2.2.2.4. *How prevalent do you think the phenomenon of human trafficking is in your county?*

The prevalence of human trafficking in the respondent's county outlined a mentality that it is "not so much a problem in our county". Despite the fact that the majority of respondents believe that trafficking in human beings is a widespread phenomenon in Hungary, when asked to judge their own county they considered it atypical.

Most respondents gave reasons for the prevalence in their own county. The most prominent were social reasons (44%; poverty, exclusion and social problems), mainly expressed by the female respondents and those who had experience of trafficking in the past. Judges tended to explain the prevalence or lack of prevalence in their own county by geographical location. Prosecutors expressed the difficulties of detection and high latency. Those who had no previous experience of such cases considered trafficking to be less significant in their county, attributing this to a better standard of living, but were unable to articulate why this might be. It should be emphasised that the length of time that a given respondent had been working for their organisation influenced their assessment of the county.

Although the attitudes of the whole sample are highlighted in this study, some important additional data are worth mentioning.

2.2.2.5. *Police officers' opinion in 2022*

In February–March 2022, 702 responses were received from police staff, an extremely high number: 525 police officers and 177 police officers serving in the criminal investigation sector responded. Respondents voluntarily answered an online questionnaire, following a request from their chief; therefore, the survey is not representative, but the data is nevertheless indicative and unique, as no similar survey had ever been conducted before.

The attitudinal questionnaire for police officers was modified in that, before attitudes, we also wanted to inquire about their professional knowledge: whether staff who may encounter a (suspected) victim of trafficking in human beings in the course of their daily work would recognise them and know what action to take under what legislation. In total, 533 men (76%) and 169 women (24%) responded, with a difference by profession: proportionally more women work in the criminal service branch.

More than half of the respondents had been with the police force for more than 15 years, and two thirds for more than 10 years. The age range of respondents' time in the profession was slightly different, with mainly criminal justice professionals serving longer than 10 years.

This sample showed us the differences between the branches of service: the criminal investigation part had broader knowledge about human trafficking, while the police officers had more experience with human smuggling and less information about the complexity of the phenomenon.

In connection with the study presented herein, it should be mentioned how difficult it is to research police attitudes, although learning the opinions of police officers anonymously can help not only in gaining external knowledge of the organisation, but also in identifying internal problems and shortcomings. However, this requires trust on the part of the respondents (and their commanders). It was clear from the responses that some were taking the questions lightly, being unused to having their professional opinions and insights sought by anyone, which is a sad conclusion.

The main research question was whether the staff respondents could indeed be seen as victim-blaming, or whether they held the victims responsible for putting themselves in a vulnerable position. Based on the responses of 700 police officers, this cannot be stated so categorically. The clear victim-blaming of respondents was not outlined, with a much more nuanced picture emerging from the responses.

2.2.2.6. Judges (60 people)

Altogether we received 60 responses in February 2022, the response rate was not very high and does not represent the whole judiciary staff, though it does highlight some attitudes. We did not focus on the decision-making process, but what we wanted to find out was how victims were handled in front of judges (which words the judges used, how the victims were questioned and whether the judges tried to help the victim understand the legal language and the whole process).

Despite the fact that the attitude test was voluntary and anonymous, many people refused to answer certain questions (one did not share their own sex with us). Many respondents had already received training related to human trafficking, despite the fact that few of them had had such cases. Compared to other law enforcement officers, they were much more likely to reject victim-blaming claims. The judges' approach to trafficking was more complex than that of the police, and they were more sensitive in their opinions. The respondents had knowledge about the complexity of this phenomenon.

Conclusions

Human trafficking is not an “invisible crime” in Hungary and the latency is still very high, but following different training courses, awareness-raising campaigns films and so on, we have started to speak about it (Atkinson, Hamilton-Smith 2022). Knowledge of the law as laid down in the legislation, observance of criminal law and criminal procedure and the internal regulations, instructions and guidelines of each profession are the professional skills expected by society.

At the same time, law enforcement officers are also human beings, whose professional work and decisions are influenced by their own personalities, which also affect the perception of their organisation as a whole through their work. In this paper we are not examining the attitudes of law enforcement officers in

general (and we could not touch on some important related topics, such as corruption), but we are asking questions about a social phenomenon. However, we consider it important to carry out further similar research for the organisations of the different professions – even for internal use only – as this could lead to a number of valuable results. These results could be useful for both the internal and external perception of the organisation: since the work of potentially burnt out, unmotivated colleagues and their victim-blaming attitudes are not good for any profession, identifying them could provide a basis for further training that goes beyond the presentation of legislation. Moreover, it should be mentioned that law practitioners are also human beings and that their work is often influenced by feelings, impressions and their professional experience, in addition to the law. They must be trained for this. However, we should not forget those already working in law enforcement, who should receive such training from time to time, possibly in a joint, inter-professional way, to prevent burnout and to increase efficiency.

Neither the survey conducted in the autumn of 2020 with prosecutors only (Windt 2021a) nor the responses of attitude-shaping training courses (Windt 2022), nor the separate tests with the different professionals revealed clear victim-blaming attitudes by a majority of the respondents (Windt 2023). All professions rated their own county better in terms of human trafficking. However, law enforcement officers in the highly infested counties were well aware of it.

The study presented herein has partially confirmed our hypotheses. The phenomenon of trafficking in human beings is better understood by those who have encountered such cases. It has recently come into the spotlight due to international expectations and subsequent domestic reactions, which the majority of respondents see as necessary and far from overrated (this was somewhat more nuanced in the case of police officers). Victim-blaming is not a common feature among the law enforcement respondents, who tended to be dismissive of the provocative allegations. All those who had experienced such cases were more realistic in their perception of the prevalence of the phenomenon in their county.

However, there were some differences among the attitudes of different professionals: prosecutors and judges had knowledge about the complexity of the phenomenon and demonstrated victim-blaming less frequently than the police officers. The police officers had fewer opportunities to take part in training on human trafficking, and this should be made regular and accessible to the staff in order to change the organisational culture to a mainstream victim-centred approach through the work of the institution in question (OSCE 2020: 25).

The results of the prosecutors' surveys were promising: their knowledge and perceptions about human trafficking were more qualified than those of the police officers, although the former had met few cases.

The respondents obviously answered honestly but in line with "expectations". The reason for this can be found in the fact that Hungarian legal practitioners rarely take part in attitude surveys; their own opinions are not often sought and they have little freedom to formulate any. It would be worthwhile to change this

and to encourage Hungarian researchers to carry out such surveys, also in fields other than trafficking in human beings.

Since the end of 2019, significant progress has been made at several levels by Hungarian authorities in the fight against human trafficking. This period also saw the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, with its difficulties and new challenges, has imposed additional tasks on the actors in the judiciary. Nevertheless, it can be said that there has been significant progress, together with a major change of attitude, which can be seen in international and national crime statistics. In the next period, the aim is to continue these efforts and to hold continuous training courses and training sessions. The good news is that a network of prosecutors specialising in human trafficking just started its work on 1 January 2023, which is a guarantee for this.

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