

Human trafficking in Europe disproportionately affects women, little spent on specialised support for victims

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Credit: Yupa Watchanakit

A new study finds that the total health, social and economic costs associated with the trafficking of women are almost three times greater than that for men.

The study was led by academics from City, University of London's Violence and Society Centre and published by the European Commission.

- The report estimates that the total [costs](#) associated with trafficking of women victims is €2,765,284,348, almost three times greater than those for men at €935,244,432
- It also finds that only three percent of the total costs is spent on providing specialist support for trafficking victims (€9,614 per victim) and only one percent is spent on prevention (€2,059 per victim)
- Victims of trafficking in human beings in the European Union (EU) are more likely to be women (69 percent female); and 90

percent of female victims of trafficking experienced sexual violence, compared to 46 percent of men.

Researchers mapped out the costs incurred along the victim's journey, including anti-trafficking coordination, law enforcement, specialist services, health and welfare services, lost economic contribution and reduced quality of life.

There were 11,832 victims of trafficking registered in the EU in 2016. Researchers estimated the cost of trafficking in people to be €312,756 per registered victim, over their life-time. This adds up to over €3.7 billion for the EU. These statistics under-estimate the costs, since they do not include the many victims who remain unregistered with authorities.

The average cost of trafficking per victim was higher for women at €337,999 than for men at €256,184. This was influenced by the larger costs associated with sexual exploitation, which women experience disproportionately.

The overall costs for women were three times as large for men because women are trafficked in higher numbers and more frequently for sexual exploitation.

The study found that the total costs related to the trafficking of people in the UK is nearly nine hundred million pounds (£897 million).

The costs associated with the reduced quality to victim's lives were developed by monetising the mental and physical impacts of being trafficked—for example the likelihood of experiencing physical problems linked to physical violence or [mental health problems](#) linked to sexual violence.

"Measuring the cost of trafficking in human beings brings an additional perspective to understanding the harms generated by trafficking," said Professor Sylvia Walby, Director of the Violence and Society Centre at City.

"Monetising the victim's journey can help improve decision making around the best way to use public funds. We see how the spending on specialised support services is small in comparison to the cost of the harms to society," she continued.

Trafficking costs must include [long-term effects](#) or they will fail women

The study improves methods of counting the costs of trafficking in people by including the long-term harms to survivors.

In 2018, the UK's Home Office published an estimate of the cost of 'modern slavery' in the UK, analysing the use of services, lost economic output, and intangible costs during the trafficked period, including a recovery period of up to five years.

The Home Office's estimation concluded that there was little difference in the cost to society between those trafficked for labour exploitation and those trafficked for sexual exploitation.

This method of 'discounting' with a five-year period cap, "focuses more on present costs than future ones," says Professor Walby.

However, including analysis of longer-term health effects, the Violence and Society Centre finds that costs associated with trafficking for sexual exploitation, were higher at €353,893 per victim than the costs associated with trafficking for labour exploitation at €219,382 per victim.

The study reports that 56 percent of registered victims were trafficked for [sexual exploitation](#)—the majority being women.

"By not including the long-term consequences for mental and physical health, service related costs are under-recognised by UK policy makers in the Treasury. So too are the health harms specifically related to [sexual violence](#)," said Professor Walby.

"The current 'gender neutral approach in UK government costings makes the disproportionately large costs for [women](#) invisible," she continued.

'Study on the economic, social and human costs of [trafficking](#) in human beings within the EU' was published by the European Commission.

More information: Study on the economic, social and human costs of trafficking in human beings within the EU. ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/..._gs_within_the_eu.pdf

Provided by City University London

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