

## Media framing of human trafficking

The CBSS Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings commissioned a study in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and Sweden to examine how human trafficking is framed in mass media. The topic has been researched internationally, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom but in the CBSS Member States this area is yet to be comprehensively explored. The studies aim to help fill this gap.

The point of departure for the studies is that the media play an important role in forming and shaping public and, to some extent, political opinion on human trafficking and therefore how journalists do their job is an important area for research. The opinion formed by the media can also affect such important matters as how assistance is organized for victims, how high the topic is on the political agenda, the amount of allocated resources for combating this crime and other matters.

The studies were guided by the main question **“How is human trafficking framed in mass media?”**. The reports analysed news articles, scrutinized used language and illustrations and conducted interviews with journalists, who have covered human trafficking issues in the researched countries. Articles which could be presented as “good practice” were presented in more detail. The reports also offer practical suggestions for journalists covering issues of human trafficking.

### The main conclusions are the following:

- The framing of human trafficking has changed from covering human trafficking as a matter of prostitution and human rights issue of women to becoming a criminal justice and migration issue.

**“There has been a development from a focus on women’s “bodies” to concentrating instead on “borders” and migration politics.”** (S. Plambech, M. Brus Predersen (2019) From bodies to borders. Human trafficking, migration and gender in the Danish media 2010-2019, DIIS)

- Trafficking for sexual exploitation is still the most covered form of human trafficking. However, in recent years the interest of the press in majority of studied countries have also shifted to trafficking for labour exploitation. Other types of human trafficking like

trafficking for forced begging, forced criminal activities, sham marriage and others are underreported or are almost completely absent.

- Majority of the studied articles are messages transmitted directly from either authorities or press agencies. Only a handful of studied articles explore the broader context of human trafficking and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, for example of the factors that enable it, types of human trafficking etc.
- The most frequent sources journalists use are the police and criminal justice institutions, NGOs are also often consulted.
- Positive conclusion is that sensationalist language is not commonly used. There were only a few instances of sensationalist language and imagery and some cases of not entirely appropriate language used in articles concerning women.

The findings of the studies contributed to the development of the guidelines for journalists.