

The issue of child trafficking in Poland – views and experiences of professionals



The present report is a summary of views and experiences described by representatives of various occupations who – in their professional capacity – are likely to encounter children – victims of trafficking or children from risk groups (e.g. separated minors). Questioned individuals represent divergent occupations and work for different institutions – as a result we were able to obtain input from professionals operating in a variety of sectors, and thus our analysis of child trafficking situation is comprehensive and multidimensional.

Background

Social attitudes of Poles toward the issue of human trafficking

There were several research projects conducted in Poland in recent years whose results may serve as a perfect background and starting point for the kind of analyses attempted by the present report.

The first project of the kind – carried out in 2010 by TNS OBOP and commissioned by the British Embassy in Poland – was a public opinion survey entitled „Public awareness of threats associated with human trafficking and taking up employment abroad“. The survey was conducted in a random, representative sample of Poles and it offers conclusions regarding public perception of the risks related to human trafficking. The survey could thus be perceived as a reference point for the below situational analysis, as it creates ground for comparison between the knowledge and awareness of the public and that of professionals who are likely to be faced with child trafficking in their day-to-day work. More detailed account of the comparison in question will be provided in the final section of the present report. First, however, let us take a closer look at the findings and outcomes of the survey. We will only refer to questions directly associated with child trafficking, disregarding those dealing with the broader issue of human trafficking, and human trafficking for the purposes of slave labor in particular.

The survey by TNS OBOP¹ revealed that the majority (65%) of Poles believe human trafficking does take place in Poland. To be more precise: „in terms of age, Poles consider teenagers to be at greatest risk of human trafficking (39%). Respondents pointing to small children are only slightly less numerous (35%)“. Hence, in the opinion of most Poles (74% of respondents) it is children who are most vulnerable to the risk of human trafficking. It also appears that Poles find “children and youth under 18 who fell victim to human trafficking, to be most likely to be coerced to provide sexual services (49%), made to engage in pornographic films or photographic sessions (34%), forced

¹ Public awareness of threats associated with human trafficking and taking up employment abroad, TNS OBOP, 2010.

to provide labor (23%) and participate in illegal adoption (21%)". In terms of trends observed in this context, a mere 10% of respondents expressed their belief that the scale of human trafficking in Poland is diminishing, 25% are of opinion that the magnitude of this phenomenon remains the same, while 36% of polled individuals find human trafficking to be on the rise. These findings suggest that Poles are largely aware of the threats associated with human trafficking, particularly the dangers faced by children and adolescents.

A system of combating child trafficking in Poland

In 2010, ECPAT – an international organization dedicated to combating child trafficking and child sexual exploitation – compiled detailed reports summarizing specific actions addressing child trafficking undertaken in 42 countries worldwide. According to this evaluation, Polish state policies in this respect are noticeable, yet insufficient. Authors of the publication point out that while the Polish government shows some level of activity in terms of combating and counteracting human trafficking, it fails to undertake any actions specifically addressing vulnerabilities of children – potential or identified victims of trafficking. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expresses similar opinion: „The government of Poland should develop, in consultation and cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, a national plan of action aimed at addressing comprehensively child trafficking and the various forms of commercial sexual exploitation and provide adequate human and financial resources for its implementation”². It is further emphasized, both in the ECPAT report and CRC observations, that institutional mechanisms for coordination between ministries and between the national and local authorities need to be established in order to create a systematic and coherent approach to address child trafficking and commercial exploitation of children, this approach in turn should be reflected in the implemented strategies. Insufficient activity of the state in the area of preventive measures is also discussed at length. It is underlined that preventive activities should target particularly at-risk groups, including children left behind when their parents have emigrated,

² Country Progress Card, ECPAT p. 11.

children in residential care institutions and unaccompanied minors. Finally, it is postulated that a public awareness campaign should be implemented, focusing on the threats associated with sex tourism and coercing children to engage in sexual services.

The two quoted reports shed some light on the specificity of child trafficking in Poland. At the same time, they provide a framework for the issue and create broader context. It is noteworthy that the two studies look at the problem of child trafficking from two opposing perspectives. The first one relies on social perception of the issue, the second illustrates its institutional and system-oriented dimension. Both projects offer valuable reference points for the situational analysis outlined below. It seems that only by combining the three divergent points of view – the perspective of the society, state and professionals – can we gain full and detailed understanding of the processes, challenges and threats we have to face. Such is the aim of our title analysis – exploring the views and ideas of individuals who are professionally involved in day-to-day identification of children-potential victims of trafficking. In the final section of the present paper we additionally include a brief summary of all three reports, with comparison of their conclusions.

Methods

The study was carried out by Nobody's Children Foundation in 2009. Two research methods were used – questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire included 14 questions regarding the subject of analysis and 6 demographic questions. Questionnaires were distributed to the employees of intervention centers and child-care institutions, as well as border guards. Interviews, on the other hand, were conducted with the representatives of police, border guard, intervention centers and child-care institutions, appointed by their respective supervisory bodies (such as police headquarters) on written request by Nobody's Children Foundation. Interviews were based on a standardized set of 14 questions included in the questionnaire, plus auxiliary questions. Interviewed individuals were additionally requested to comment on the topic of

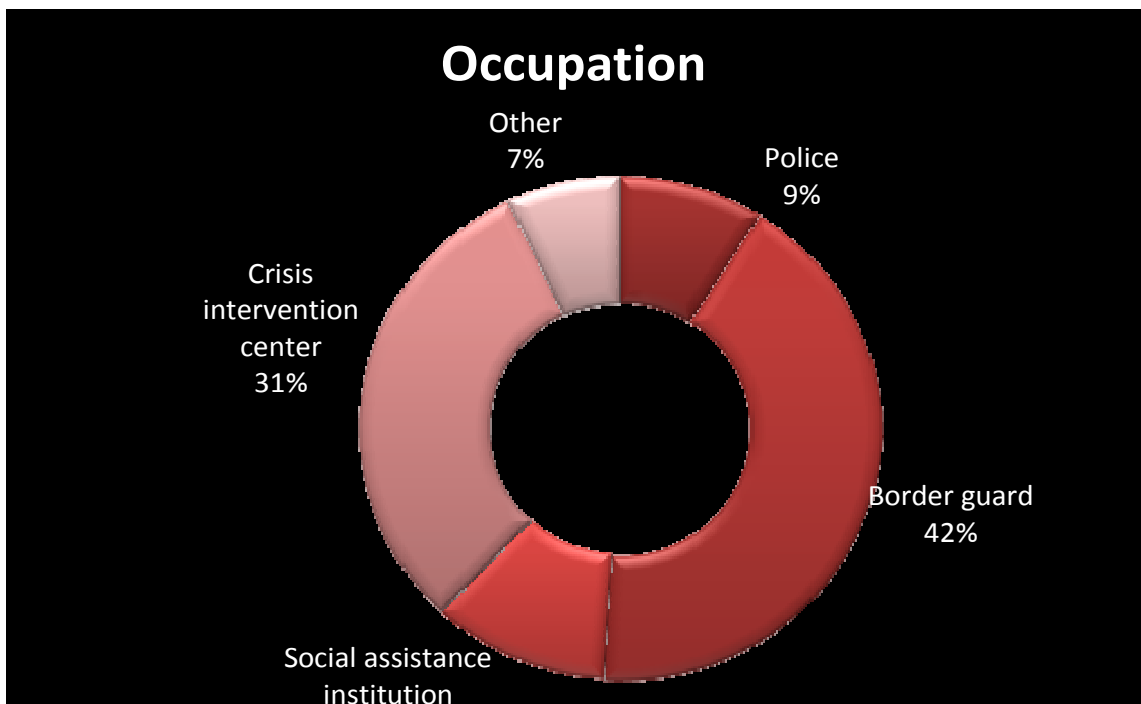
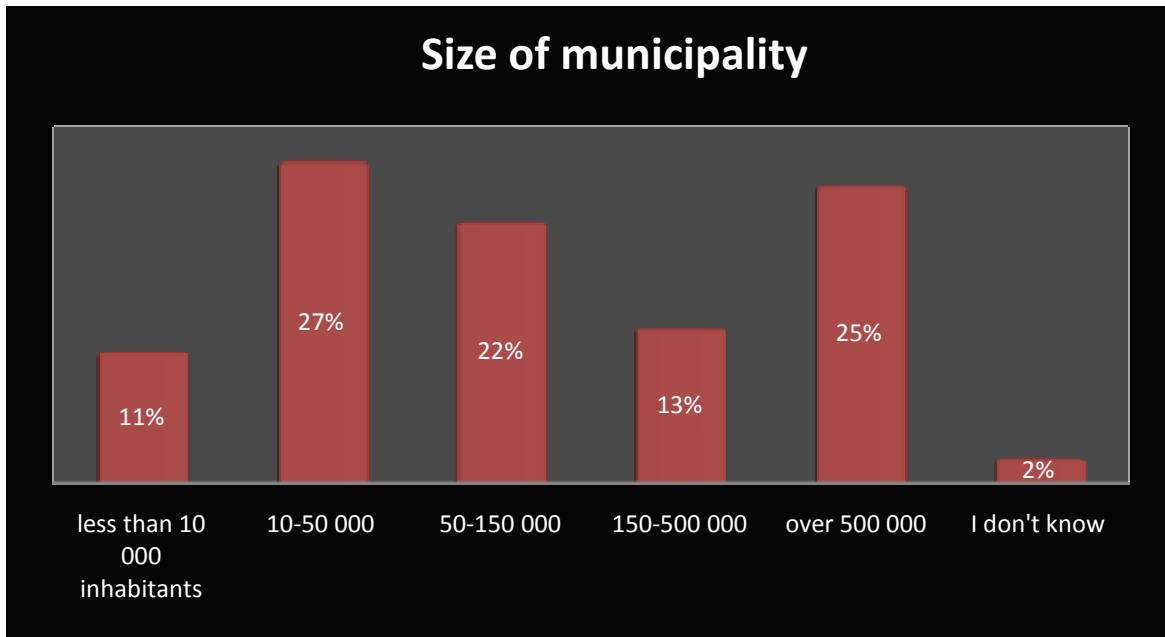
new social phenomena or social trends that may accompany child trafficking and that are witnessed by professionals in their daily work.

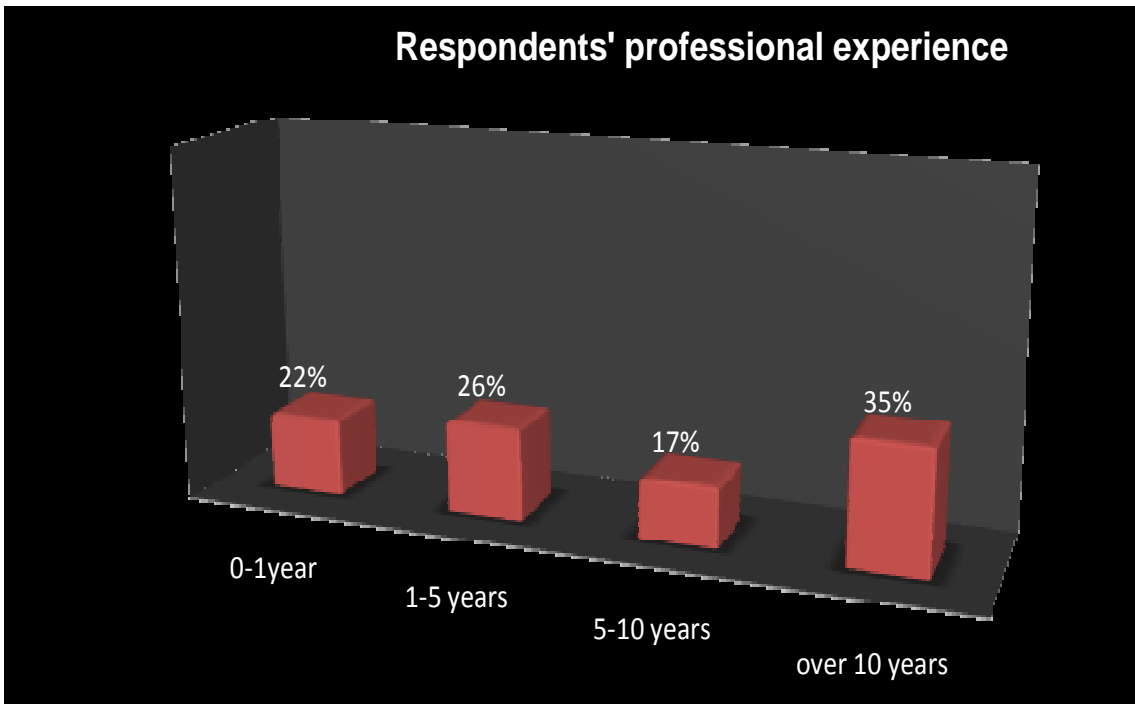
Material gathered by means of interviews and surveys was subject to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Responses to questions repeated in both questionnaires and interviews were analyzed jointly. Quotes cited in the report are excerpts from interviews.

A group of surveyed and interviewed individuals is not a representative sample. Therefore, the present work (deliberately referred to as a situational analysis) constitutes an attempt to explore and describe the problem of child trafficking from the point of view of Polish professionals, yet it does not allow for generalizations reflecting on the entire population.

Respondents' characteristics

In the total of 67 respondents, women constituted 64%. The majority of subjects (85%) had university education. The largest group (27%) represented smaller urban communities (10-50 thousand inhabitants), 25% came from major cities (over 500 thousand inhabitants). 51% of respondents were police officers and border guards, 42% - employees of child-care institutions and crisis intervention centers. Over one third declared more than ten years of professional experience, 17% have been professionally active for 5 to 10 years and 48% - for less than 5 years. The majority of respondents (79%) declared that in carrying out their professional duties, they come into contact with children.





Attitudes and experiences in the area of child trafficking

What is child trafficking?

While discussing the topic of child trafficking, professionals typically referred to various forms of exploiting children – victims of trafficking. “Sex business” including sexual exploitation and production of pornographic materials featuring children was the most commonly evoked association – this answer was offered by 21% of respondents. Second among the most frequent responses was adoption outside of legal framework (the so-called “illegal adoption”). The issue of children exploited for labor was also touched upon. In the context of coerced labor, respondents typically referred to engaging children in agricultural field work. Child trafficking was also associated with organ trade and beggary, respondents pointed to the connection between child trafficking and newborn-trafficking, as well as criminal exploitation of minors understood as forcing children to commit crimes. Further came the associations with kidnappings and organized crime activities aimed at incapacitating children, in the sense of depriving them of their ability to decide about themselves.

Other, more general associations, unrelated to specific ways of exploiting trafficking victims, were also mentioned – these included child abuse for profit. Some respondents referred to the circumstances around selling children; they stated such transactions could take place with or without consent of the legal guardian. International context of this type of crimes was also emphasized. Some responses focused on transferring children abroad and the role of Poland as a predominantly transit country.

Broad array of responses to this question seems to illustrate stark differences in the level of expertise demonstrated by interviewees and respondents. Some of the replies were extremely thorough, underlining multifaceted nature of child trafficking, pointing to specific dynamics and complexity of the problem, or even mentioning international legal acts regulating the issue of child trafficking. A statement by an individual who – as was revealed later on – participated in specialist training devoted to human trafficking, can serve as an example here:

Child trafficking is a situation of recruiting, transferring, transporting or harboring of persons for material gain. Trafficking victims are often faced with threats of force and coercion, fraud, deception, abduction, abuse of power, their lack of knowledge [is] exploited. Trafficking may equal prostitution, forced sexual abuse, forced labor, slavery, beggary, illegal adoption or sales for organ harvesting.

Another individual focused on analyzing the problem from the perspective of perpetrator's actions, pointing to specific stages of criminal activity:

The spectrum of perpetrator's actions from meeting the child, through recruitment, transport and harboring, to transferring the child to potential recipients for material gain and in order to exploit the child: for sexual purposes, for crime (e.g. theft), beggary, drug smuggling, slave labor, organ harvesting, porn business exploitation, adoption or pseudo-adoption (based on legal discrepancies between specific countries, e.g. age of majority in Bulgaria is 16).

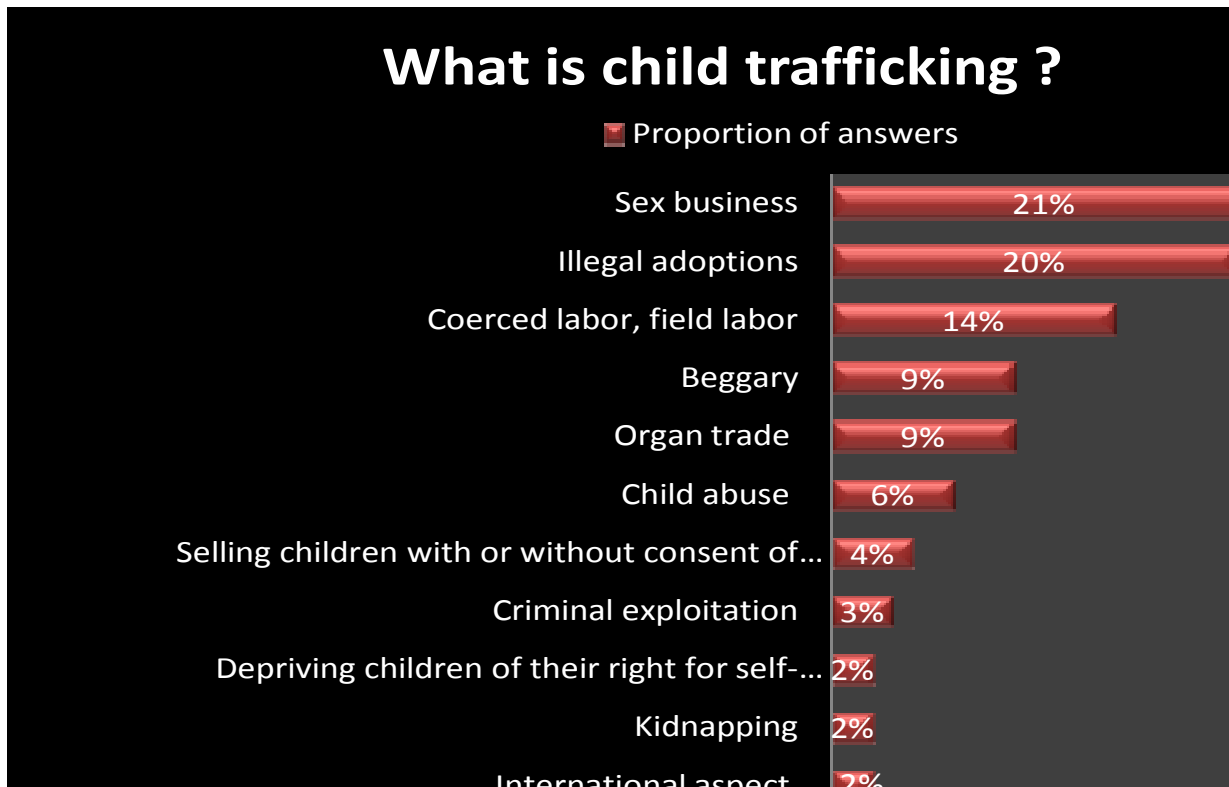
Excerpts quoted above are merely a sample of many thorough and well-thought-out definitions of child trafficking offered in interviews and questionnaires.

On the other hand, collected material included some very sketchy and incoherent responses as well. Their authors typically resorted to quoting disjointed catchphrases, thus suggesting that their knowledge of the problem originates mainly from the media. As media outlets tend to spotlight cases that are most controversial and spectacular, it comes as no surprise that respondents so often referred to organ trade and illegal adoptions, international ones for the most part. It is such incidents that tend to receive considerable media coverage. The best illustration is the quote below:

*In general you hear on TV, lots of coverage
- they buy children for adoption in other countries
- kidnappings for organs.*

These statements were typically followed by attempts at reducing dissonance by underlining that in principle child trafficking is not within the duties of the speaker, or that such issues are handled by other proper units, departments or structures.

In summary: professionals are largely polarized in terms of their understanding of child trafficking in Poland. Some of them demonstrate both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, as well as genuine interest in the topic. Nonetheless, there are many who only rely on general statements and sketchy, vague information offered by the press, radio and television.



Does child trafficking occur in Poland?

Definite majority of professionals answered this question in affirmative. Only 4% of respondents believed this problem does not apply to Poland.

At the same time, however, interviewees tended to offer only brief responses and were reluctant about additional questions posed by interviewers. They had a tendency to emphasize that – although aware of the existence of this problem in Poland – they were never directly affected by it, i.e. in their professional capacity they never encountered such cases nor had any suspicions. This attitude is best illustrated by the following statements:

I never witnessed it, but I assume it does.

I never encountered trafficking victims here, but I heard...

I guess so, but it's all hearsay, people talk about children vanishing into thin air, so there may be something to it...

It is also noteworthy, that in their reactions to this question respondents tended to reveal that their main source of knowledge on the topic is the media.

I don't know exactly, only what you find out from the media; that there's pornography and there's demand for it. There are also mall girls and that's it – you don't hear much about it.

On TV I heard about kidnappings, but I don't know if it's the same as trafficking.

In some of their answers, respondents did not point to mass media as the source of their knowledge, yet the nature of information they volunteered frequently reminded of media releases that characteristically expose the most spectacular details of the case. Moreover, references to the media traced in collected responses typically quoted press releases and television broadcasts made public in the period immediately preceding scheduled meeting with appointed professionals.

Organized crime groups operating in this area have a database of photos and parents can pick the ones they like, for organs you need blood type or something.

If it's for organs, then crime groups organize the surgery and donors and prices are on the internet.

By parents – one parent kidnaps from the other, and this was revealed, and there was a person travelling on a different passport.

...I heard once that someone wanted to admit fatherhood on allegro [online bidding service]...

These excerpts clearly show that the respondents' perception of child trafficking focuses on attention-drawing details – such as are most eagerly exposed in media reports and online accounts. Statements quoted below, on the other hand, validate the idea that opinions expressed by professionals are mainly shaped by most recent media releases – in this case: public debate regarding designated adoption.

Hmm, what's the situation with child trafficking in Poland... it's all secret, rarely brought to light. Often – pregnancy – sort of giving birth for money.

There's a problem that is not talked about, none of the parties is interested in talking about it.

I think the so-called surrogate mothers are the biggest problem.

As I said before – designated adoptions.

These excerpts clearly show one more element recurring in the collected material. Namely that professionals repeatedly underlined how little is said about this problem, that it receives little publicity. One of the interviewees explained the situation as follows:

These things do not affect 90 [percent] of people in Poland, so they are not discussed much.

Violence between peers also happens in children's homes, then kids run away and get involved in these situations.



What factors can predispose children to becoming trafficking victims?

Respondents' opinions about potential factors predisposing children to becoming trafficking victims can be divided into three categories:

The first area revolves around intrafamilial relations and includes the following risk factors: lacking care, pathological family, unstable family situation, sexual abuse, physical and psychological violence, lack of attachment, dysfunctional relationships within the family and the environment, running away from home, parental addictions. In total, factors associated with family and environmental situation of the child were named by 45% of questioned professionals.

When discussing these factors, respondents highlighted the issue of unaccompanied children, both in the sense of Polish children without parental care, and separated foreign minors deprived of adult supervision. In this context, the following remarks were made:

Young boys of Roma origin, without care, also Polish children without care. Gypsy children – without home and belonging nowhere, from children's homes or railway stations. I think it's about prostitution, because they are properly dressed, children around 13-14, in my experience – mainly boys.

There are also children from the Central Railway Station in Warsaw – teenagers. Turkish and Bulgarians recruit them there – they are transferred to Germany (without care? Polish? – question from the interviewer) Yes, also Polish, many of the Polish children are runaways, there are also children from other countries, hard to say where they ran away from, sometimes they are Romanian children [...] Children who run away from home are also recruited, mainly by Bulgarians. They are often children for prostitution – papers are forged, so it's difficult to prove anything.

... these are missing children whose disappearance is not reported, or it is reported too late...

Another category of risk factors associated with child trafficking reflects socio-economic status of the family and groups together external features that do not directly describe the child or the family. Such factors include: financial standing, social background and social status, parental education, awareness of the problem and being orphaned. These characteristics were referred to by **31%** of respondents.

The third category of identified risk factors relates to the condition of the child. These aspects were quoted by **14%** of questioned individuals and included the following factors: disability, health status, age.

Some professionals were of opinion that specific factors predisposing a child to becoming a potential trafficking victim are impossible to identify, since every child is faced with that risk. The following answers were given:

Personality traits are irrelevant. Every [child] can become a [victim].

The child itself shows no special characteristics.

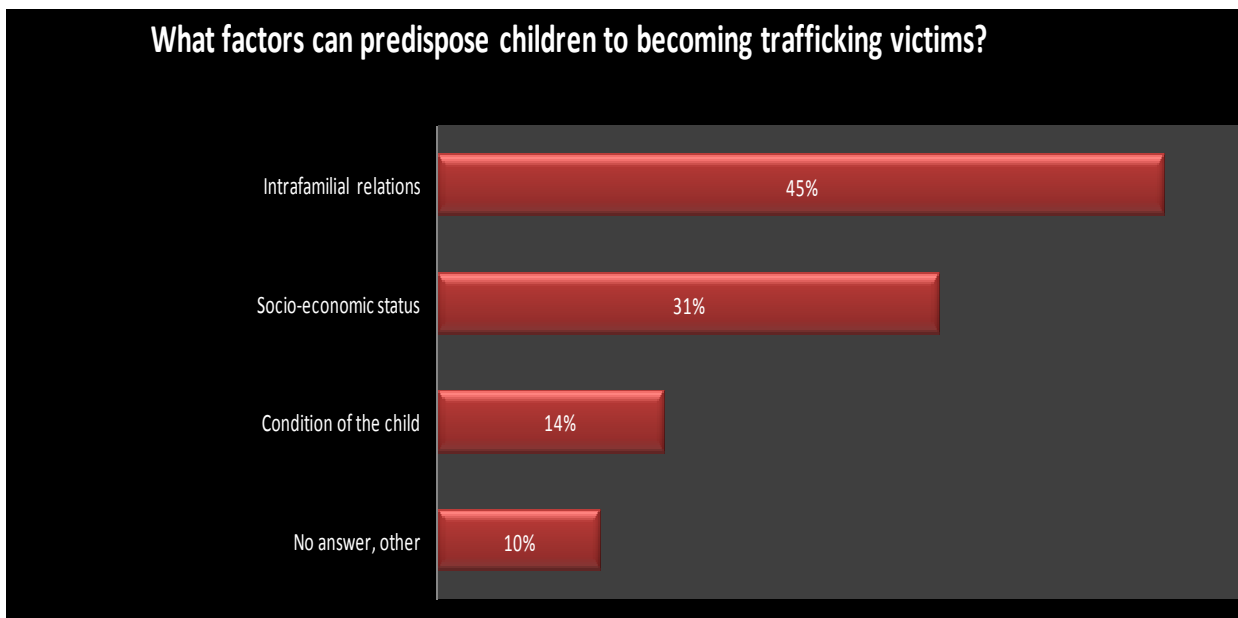
One of the respondents offered an interesting summary:

A child is by definition more prone to manipulation – it is easier to establish relations with children and persuade them to certain behaviors, the perpetrator can then make use of that gullibility, exploit willingness to make friends.

The likelihood of becoming a trafficking victim is higher among the so-called “transparent” children, invisible to the society, as if they never existed, out of pathology.

Children who are lonely, who no one cares about, who have little contact with parents or friends. Children from good families, but with absent working parents.

It seems that of all the factors affecting the risk of becoming a trafficking victim, our respondents were mostly focused on those associated with all kinds of dysfunctions and deficits in the area of family care and



immediate environment of the child. Interestingly enough, such deficits were not necessarily connected with disability, specific health status or age of the child. This category of factors was third to be named, while the element that recurred more often was the issue of financial resources available to the child and social standing of its caregivers.

Does Poland have a system for identifying children-victims of trafficking?

It seems alarming, that – when asked – most professionals stated Poland lacks the system for identification of children – victims of trafficking. Only 16%

of respondents claimed such system does operate in our country. Furthermore, a relatively numerous group of polled individuals were unable to indicate at all if Poland did or did not have a system of that kind. It is also indicative that even among those convinced that Poland does have an operational system for identifying trafficking victims many believe that system only covers adults and is not suited for children. It seems that this general system fails to ensure that the very specific needs and features of children-victims of trafficking will be recognized, considered and satisfied. Responses given by questioned professionals seem to emphasize that problem:

Yes, but it is a system focusing on human trafficking, child trafficking is part of it, even though it's not as publicized. It is difficult with open borders.

Yes, but it is in fact a general system for human trafficking, not specifically child trafficking. It is ambiguous, because it only mentions children, prostitution, organs, etc.

...there is an algorithm for prosecuting crimes like human trafficking, without distinguishing between adults and children. What lacks is also distinguishing between younger children, older children, youth – every child may be involved in other types of crimes...

It may be read as a positive symptom, however, that professionals are aware of the differences between adult and underage victims of human trafficking. They also understand that the system for identifying victims in specific categories should be constructed in a way best reflecting the situation of that category of victims; children in particular, as they are most vulnerable and frequently unaware of their rights.

How does a system for identification of children-victims of trafficking work?

Respondents who claimed that Poland does have a developed system for identifying children-victims of trafficking were asked to share their opinion on how the system works, what are its features and foundations. Few answers that were obtained indicated that the chain of identification runs from the police or border guard, through support center to specialist facility.

More thorough descriptions were offered by professionals who were directly interviewed. Police representatives stated that - on suspicion that a child may be a trafficking victim - actions are undertaken aimed at verifying and validating that hypothesis. The child is interviewed and all available information regarding suspected crime is collected. If, at that stage, confirming suspected occurrence of human trafficking proves possible, relevant procedures are set in motion. Police officers also underlined that the child needs to be properly looked after and interviewed by a psychologist – in the presence of the prosecutor and judge, so that stressful interrogations in the course of legal proceedings do not need to be repeated.

Border guard, on the other hand, highlighted the fact that *if suspicion occurs, there's a conversation with potential victim to assess their psychological status.*

Each case of this kind must be registered in the system. Some border guard officers speculated that the difficulties in identifying trafficking victims are a consequence of open borders. They also mentioned identification at airports.

At the airport, if suspicion arises that a child may be a trafficking victim – and this may be the case when the child is behaving oddly – officers take proper action. With infants, there are no grounds for checking if the child is a trafficking victim.

Speakers typically resorted to vague descriptions of victim identification, some openly admitted that they were not able to provide any detailed information on that subject or refused to answer.

What needs to be done in order to establish a system for identifying children – victims of trafficking in Poland?

In the course of direct interviews specialists were confronted with more in-depth questions regarding necessary activities aimed at establishing an effective system for identifying children – victims of trafficking. Obtained responses focused on three categories of actions:

1. Interdisciplinary cooperation of various institutions, dedicated coordinating units.

2. Proper monitoring and databases.
3. Adequately formulated regulations and internal codes governing operations of specific services and occupational groups.

Respondents emphasizing the need for efficient exchange of information and cooperation of different stakeholders, stated the following:

[What we need is] an agreement between relevant institutions. It is already being developed and brings together police, border guard, courts, the Ministry of Interior and Administration (MSWiA) , La Strada Foundation (NGO working to combat human trafficking) as well as care facilities where children can be placed at a later stage. The agreement is to specify that it is the border guard that bears main responsibility for identifying trafficking victims, they report relevant cases to MSWiA and further to courts. Support for victims is to be offered by the foundation (La Strada). In terms of legal assistance, the child is to be provided with a legal representative (curator), access to translator and healthcare; safety of victims needs to be ensured. The child is placed in a proper facility and receives psychological support.

Mechanisms are created on the local level [...], aimed at organizing support for children, e.g. cooperation with care facilities, so that we don't have to blaze a trail every time.

Healthcare for children [is essential], in order to follow-up with what happens to the child after it is placed in an emergency children's shelter. The role of the police is limited to catching perpetrators, but someone needs to look after the child and the system should ensure that other institutions assume that responsibility.

All parties with relevant experiences [should] meet. A profile [should be] developed [identifying] features of potential trafficking victims. [Developed materials] would then be forwarded to law enforcement units [...]. Just as we have an algorithm for adults.

Professionals focusing on the need to improve monitoring activities and database operations, pointed to the fact that in the area of data collection we need a system, a clear methodology of recording information and rules of obtaining access to collected resources. It was highlighted that lengthy judicial proceedings many a time result from courts being forced to search for relevant information and data in many different sources. If there was one uniform mechanism for data collection, legal proceedings could be considerably more

efficient and swifter. Remarks about monitoring typically focused on better follow-up of known perpetrators of human trafficking, and relevant information being exchanged by all member states of the European Union.

Respondents emphasized the importance of regulations governing their activities in terms of identifying children – victims of trafficking. Particular attention was devoted to travel documents issued to minors, which fail to sufficiently protect children from illegal transfer abroad. The following arguments were quoted:

Better ID's for children are about to be introduced – passports for small children. Children often do not resemble the photo in their travel document. Maybe it would be better to include fingerprints or retinal scan. Also, it is not specified anywhere that children are supposed to cross borders with their parents. If an adult has the child's passport and travels together with the child, border guard is not obligated to ask if the child is theirs or not. They are vigilant and if suspicion arises, they do check, but if there's nothing suspicious, they do not have to ask.

Parents' consent for the issue of passport is in itself equivalent to their consent for crossing borders. If the child travels with an adult guardian and has a passport, it is assumed that the guardian is entitled to travel with the child...

Regulations [should be] changed specifying the rules of issuing ID's to children – passports that in the case of children are issued for approx. 5 years. Small children change quickly and they cannot be identified on the basis of the photograph.

In the area of legal regulations it was also proposed that the introduced system should be universal enough to take into account the needs of different victims and apply to divergent situations.

It would be easier if the system was both universal and detailed, so that [it] could be adapted to specific cases, and every case is different, meaning we need to develop logistic and legal solutions for foreigners as well.

More detailed alterations were also suggested, for instance:

Transfer the obligation of registering infants from parents to OB-GYN's taking care of the mother and the hospital where the baby is delivered.

In general, professionals seemed willing to provide exhaustive answers to questions from that area. With varying intensity and in different

configurations, they remained relatively unanimous in underlining the three above-specified categories of action to be undertaken in order to implement an effective system of identifying trafficked minors in Poland. This unanimity carries even more weight considering that our respondents express similar views despite representing divergent professional groups.

Who should be responsible for creating that system?

When asked to pinpoint specific entities that should be responsible for developing and implementing a system for identification of children – victims of trafficking, respondents typically named various units of state administration, including: Ministry of Interior and Administration, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Justice, voivods, mayors. Ministries were usually listed as coordinating bodies synchronizing the activities of other stakeholders, such as the police, public prosecutor's office, courts, child care institutions and NGO's. Interestingly, the choice of ministries thought to be proper for this task was relatively broad, which suggests that none of them is unequivocally associated with counteracting human trafficking.

The need of developing effective mechanisms of cooperation was mentioned by many respondents. They underlined, for instance, that the system

should bring together translators/interpreters, healthcare, Office for Social Policy, embassies, state institutions... Hard to name all stakeholders, as the system is complicated.

It was also highlighted how important it is for all sectors to work together – public units and non-governmental entities – also at the international level. Physicians and healthcare, as further stakeholders to be involved in the system of identifying children-victims of trafficking, were also a recurring topic. This issue was mainly discussed in the context of tools and activities useful in specifying real age of potential victims. Finally, some respondents concluded that the best solution would be to establish a new, dedicated entity responsible for the development of the system.

It may seem that by pointing to so many and so divergent entities, whose participation in the system of identifying children-victims of trafficking would be fully justified, respondents indirectly expressed their belief that what we are dealing with is a multifaceted and multidimensional problem. On the other hand, their statements and responses fail to offer any positive remarks regarding the realities of our state structures and their readiness to handle child trafficking problem.

What are the limitations to creating a system for identifying children-victims of trafficking in Poland?

Interviewed individuals were unanimous in their assessment of stumbling blocks on the way to establishing a system for identification of trafficked minors in Poland. Once again, malfunctioning legal regulations impeding any effective action received greatest emphasis here. The issue of dead letters was discussed, with the requirement to register residence being the most commonly quoted example. Some professionals complained about ambiguous procedures, only seemingly regulating something, while in fact creating problems, as their interpretation may be varied.

This exhaustive account by one of the respondents is representative of opinions expressed by many professionals:

„PESEL No register and residence register are unreliable. [There are] difficulties with identification, legal and procedural obstacles. How can we check if a child is transferred for trafficking or other purposes? We lack clear procedures specifying what to do in such situations, how to take care of the child – if the child comes from another cultural background, how do we talk with them? With foreign children speaking different languages, we need an interpreter. Perhaps an interpreter could be referred to a given institution for the duration of the child’s stay there – maybe someone from the embassy could do it?

[Another issue is] inadequate exchange of information between the court and care institutions for instance on the weekend, in emergency situations reporting urgent cases is difficult, even though there should be a judge on call, but it would help if the judge had some grasp of the situations.

[There are also] procedural obstacles associated with the scope of responsibilities – some things are not specified in regulations, they rely on

good will. Regulations concerning services and organizations working in this area should be modified.”

Most respondents also mentioned the difficulties with collecting and storing children’s personal data, as it is legally prohibited to store personal data of individuals who are not deemed as suspects – and children-potential victims of trafficking are not suspects. It was postulated that existing databases should be perfected and new, integrated ones created. According to professionals, database records are incomplete for two reasons: insufficient financial resources and technological delay.

Insufficient financing was emphasized in the context of nearly all areas of operation, including activities associated with establishing systematic identification of victims. Inadequate human resources – lack of skilled professionals able to deal with the difficult field of child trafficking – were also mentioned by many respondents.

Some professionals, on the other hand, saw impediments elsewhere. Namely, they focused on the social dimension of the problem and referred to insufficient awareness of the public as regards child trafficking, some even mentioned the tendency to deny mere existence of the problem in Poland. According to one of the respondents:

We feel that the problem does not affect us, 'cause how can it be that in our [...] country people would do something like that, us and trafficking – impossible.

Another person claimed – rightly it seems – that in the public perception child trafficking is associated with pathology, thus giving it the stigma of an “embarrassing problem”, covered up and negated.

It was also repeatedly indicated that communication and cooperation with other countries are unsatisfactory. This takes on a whole new meaning considering the cross-border nature of organized crime – such as human trafficking.

Nonetheless, some of the more favorable statements deserve recognition as well. Several respondents were of opinion that creating a system of identifying children-victims of trafficking will not be halted by insurmountable

obstacles, provided that the problem is tackled with genuine interest and will of changing the status quo.

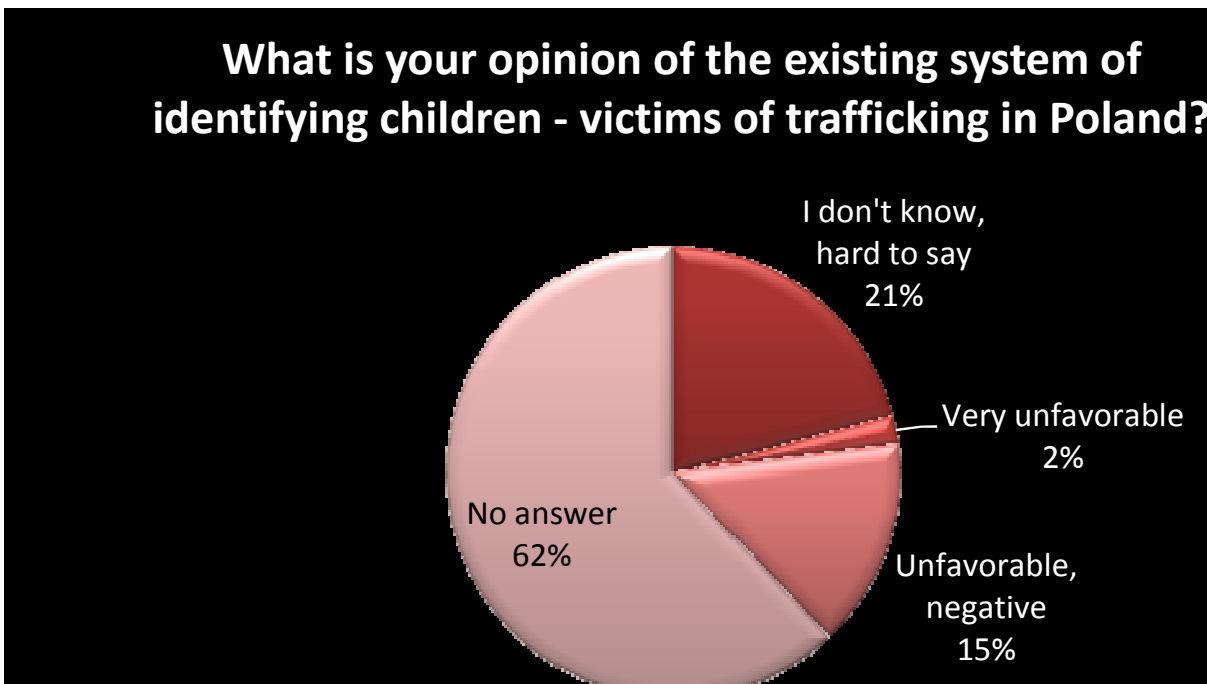
How is the existing Polish system of identifying children-victims of trafficking perceived?

Respondents who claimed that Poland does have an operating system for identifying trafficked minors were requested to express their opinion on that system. Unfortunately, most of them dodged the question.

17% of questioned individuals viewed the existing system as inadequate or extremely inadequate. Large proportion (62%) of respondents failing to answer at all may on the one hand point to their ignorance, on the other hand it may indicate that working within the system and viewing it negatively could be construed as an indirect criticism of the represented service or occupational group. This also illustrates that interviewing professionals whose work involves them in counteracting and combating child trafficking is difficult, as the existing circumstances are likely to affect their objectivity of opinion.

Undoubtedly, absence of opinion or clear judgment regarding this problem may be a consequence of the fact that most respondents – as seen in the analyses below – deny any previous personal exposure to cases of child trafficking. As one of the respondents puts it:

It's hard to evaluate [the system of identifying children – victims of trafficking] in theory, because I never had anything to do with it in practice, and it is a new phenomenon in Poland.



What is the perception of skills and expertise of professionals in the area of identifying trafficked minors?

In the selected occupational groups, declared knowledge as regards child trafficking many a time seems entirely theoretical; it is hardly possible to translate it into practical application within the specific profession. Some respondents remarked that expertise in this area is to certain extent monopolized by upper-level, senior employees, who fail to share it with junior officers or lower-level personnel. The excerpt quoted below is an example of this attitude:

There is a narrow group of highly specialized professionals, but communication – flow of information – may be obstructed, patrolling officers, for instance, tend to be under-qualified.

Whether their final judgment of competence was positive or negative, professionals frequently underlined the importance of specialist training devoted to the issue of child trafficking. The following statements were made:

I doubt these professionals have enough knowledge about child trafficking, training is only just beginning to be introduced.

Depends on the institution and their specific training offer. We need more training.

Training is available, it is getting better.

Some respondents were of opinion that ongoing, regular training in this area is a must. This need for training is twofold. Firstly, professionals seem to be aware that child trafficking – often viewed as one of possible manifestations of international organized crime – is a dynamic activity, altered and perfected with the changing MO of criminals and new forms of child exploitation. Secondly, professionals who were already provided with certain basic information feel compelled to find out more, focusing on selected areas most relevant to their specific profession.

...it's because people are creative – new forms of this criminal activity develop and we need to be trained to keep track of that..

We know about human trafficking, but in general we need more training in the area of intervention...

Questioned professionals stated that both the employees of crisis intervention centers and other entities (child care institutions, border guard, police) are insufficiently competent in the area of identifying children – victims of trafficking. Staff of crisis intervention centers and child care institutions were viewed most unfavorably in this respect – according to nearly half of respondents their knowledge and skills in identifying trafficking victims are insufficient. Assessment of police and border guard officers was similar – approximately half of respondents deem them insufficiently competent in this area. Alarming, 12% of respondents claim that professionals have no knowledge whatsoever on how to identify children – victims of trafficking.

In total, vast majority of respondents stated that the analyzed professional groups are poorly and insufficiently informed as regards identification of trafficked minors, or they have no knowledge of this area at all.

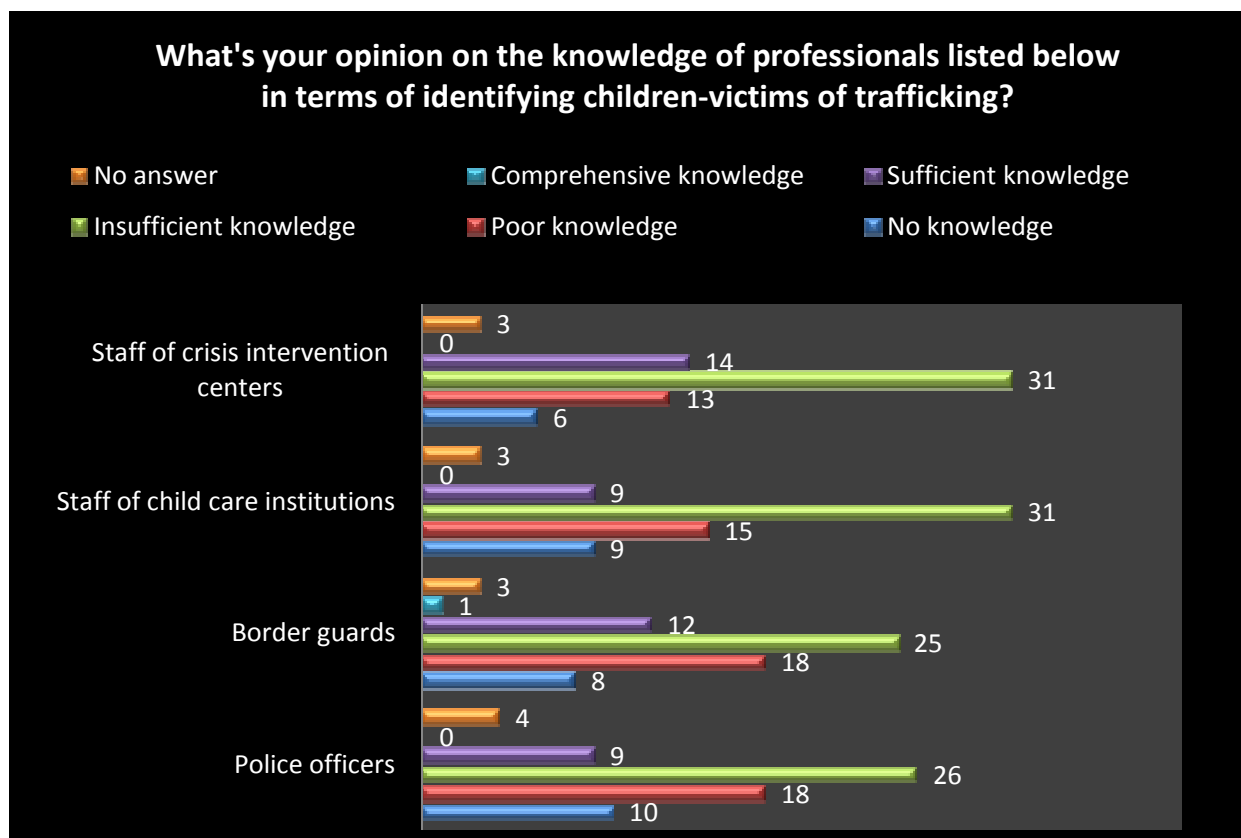
Respondents were very critical of their own professions – the most frequently selected response, namely „have insufficient knowledge“, was quoted in approx. 40% of cases across all listed professional groups.

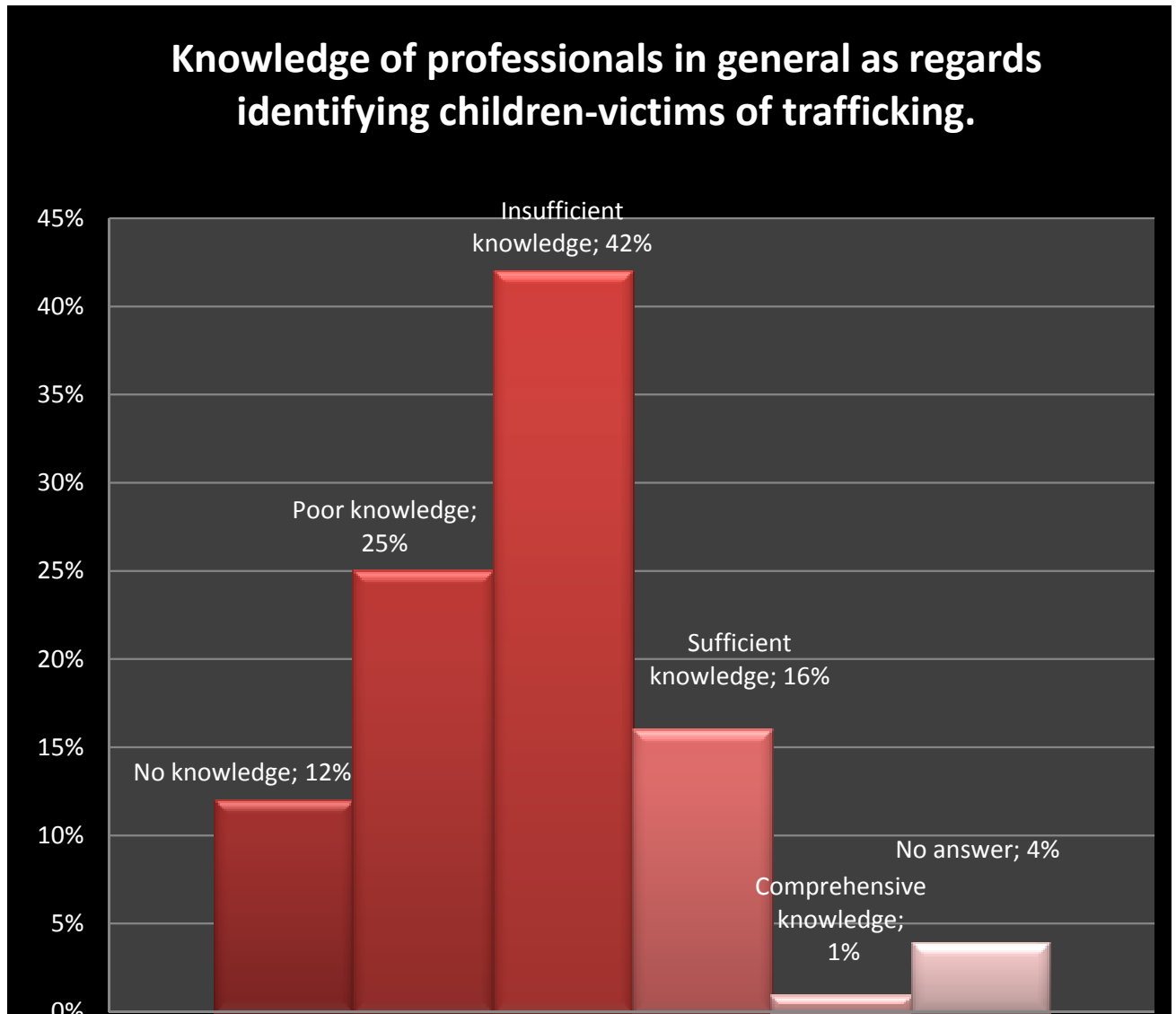
Furthermore, even respondents claiming that some categories of professionals are in fact able to identify trafficking victims, tended to qualify that this ability is largely limited to adult victims, rather than minors. In response to direct questioning aimed at finding out whether border guard, police officer or care institution employee would be able to identify a trafficked child, the following statements were made:

It's hard to say, but I don't think so. [Victim] of human trafficking rather than child trafficking.

Not all of them, let's be honest. The algorithm of action is in place, but there are difficulties in identifying children, small children.

I have no experience of such contact. In terms of adults – yes, police and border guard have proper knowledge, I don't know about others.





What is the perception of professionals' expertise in terms of intervention in cases of suspected child trafficking victim?

Professionals were now posed with a similar question, only now they were asked to evaluate competence of proper services and institutions when undertaking intervention in cases of child trafficking. Staff of crisis intervention centers and border guard were evaluated most favorably.

As with the previous question, critical evaluations dominated - „they have insufficient knowledge“ (42%), „they have poor knowledge“ or „they have no knowledge“ (26%). One fourth of respondents are of opinion that the listed professionals have sufficient or even excellent skills in the area of intervention in cases of child trafficking.

Many remarks and trends noticed in the context of responses devoted to identification of minors – victims of human trafficking, were reflected and confirmed in the context of undertaking intervention involving such victims. Namely, it appears that specific services and institutions find it more difficult to handle cases involving children. For most professionals, intervention procedures for cases of human trafficking with adult victims are more transparent, comprehensible and accessible.

I don't know. The police has algorithm, it's easier with adults – things are clear, it's different with children.

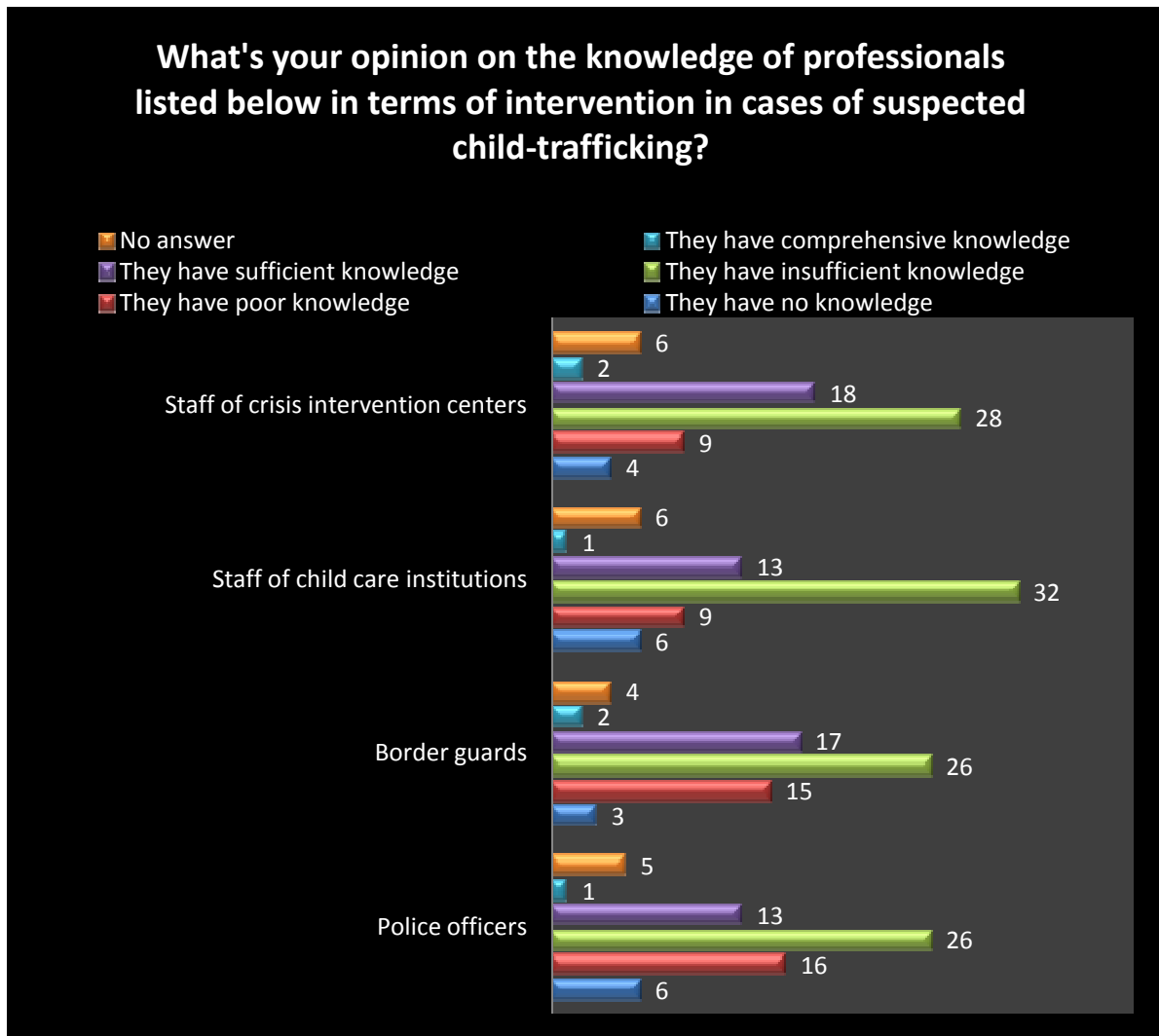
Not everyone [has knowledge about intervention], the majority doesn't, but then they can refer [the case] to someone else, properly trained. This was tested on adults.

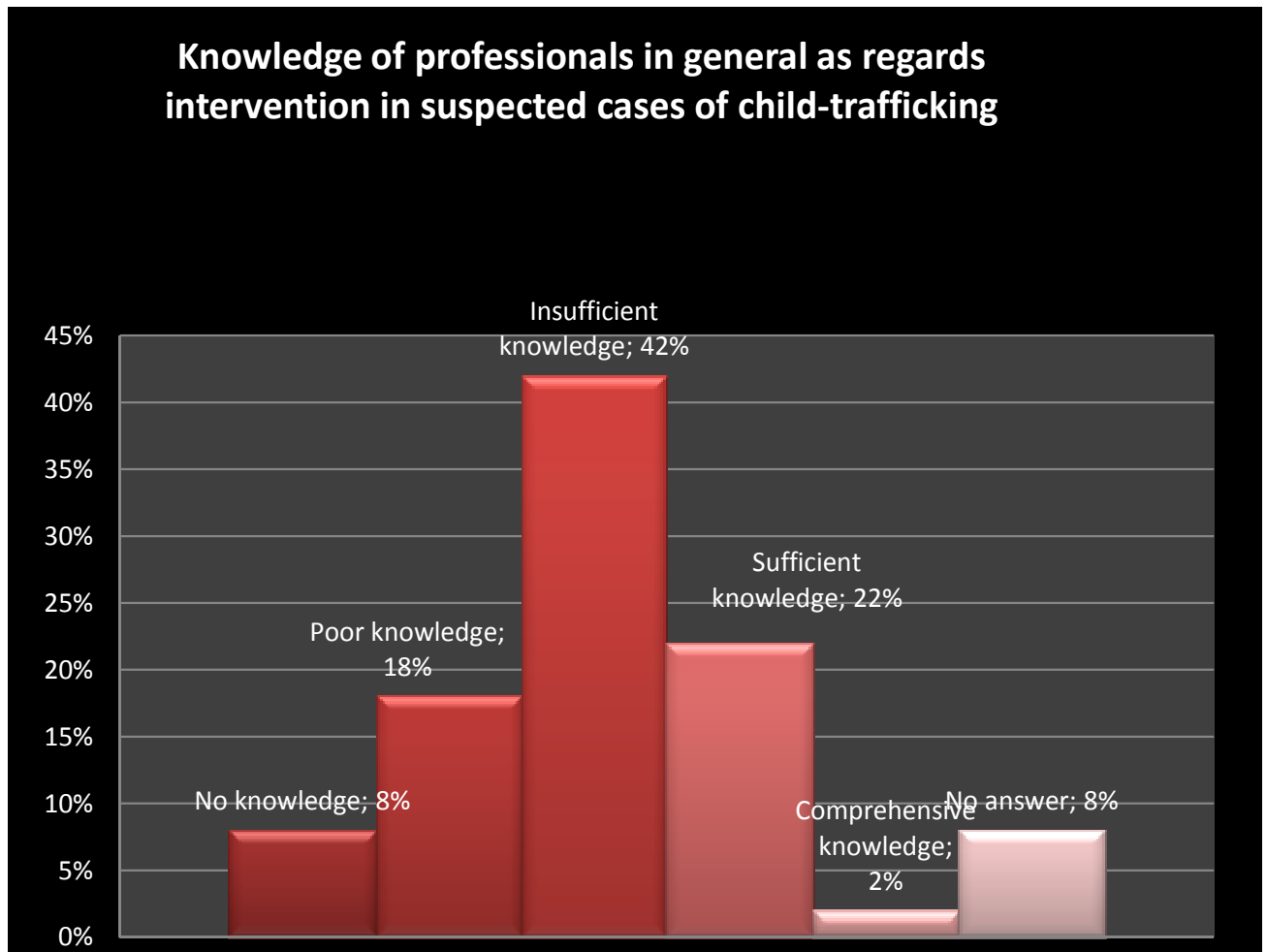
The author of this last statement indicates that there are dedicated units or individuals working within specific services, focusing on human trafficking and offering their expertise and experience to other officers faced with a case of human trafficking. This should be viewed as a positive symptom, perhaps even potential guideline for developing an algorithm of action in cases of detecting child trafficking.

The need for broad and in-depth training was further emphasized. Professionals could have a chance to first explore specificity of the problem and then to learn about the cues and children's characteristics they should be on the look-out for, as well as specific factors potentially indicating that the child could be a trafficking victim. There is immense demand for expertise in the area of assistance that could and should be offered to children by the representatives of specific professional groups. This knowledge would be first of all beneficial to child-victims, but it would also help professionals by identifying specific expectations toward them and mapping out ways of meeting these expectations.

When comparing the level of expertise represented by specific professional groups in the area of identifying children-victims of trafficking and undertaking intervention in cases involving such children, results in both categories appear to be alarming. However, it is also demonstrated that the

greatest deficits are observed in identification of child trafficking victims. It should be borne in mind that accurate identification of victims is the foundation for any form of intervention or support for victims.





Are professionals faced with cases of child trafficking in their work?

Professionals mostly answered in negative; even interviewees who affirmed having contact with such cases proved very unwilling to elaborate on the subject. Interestingly, even those who were relatively articulate with other questions, refused to provide any details when asked about their contact with victims or suspected cases of child trafficking.

Large majority of questioned professionals (as many as 94%) claimed that in their work they never came into contact with a child-victim of trafficking. At the same time, one fourth of them admitted to suspecting that a child might be a trafficking victim. The remaining three quarters were never put in this position.

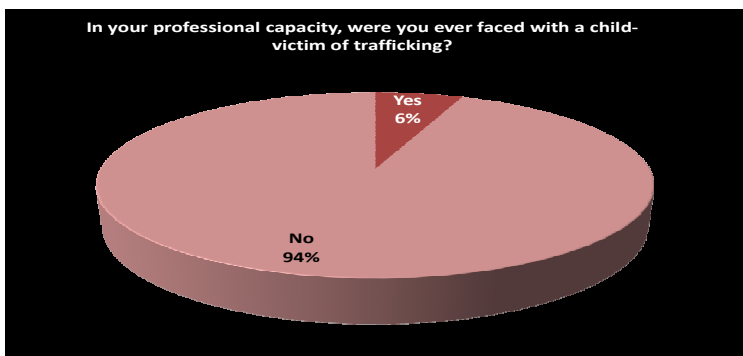
Even though most professionals denied any personal experience or contact with confirmed underage trafficking victims, some responses indicated

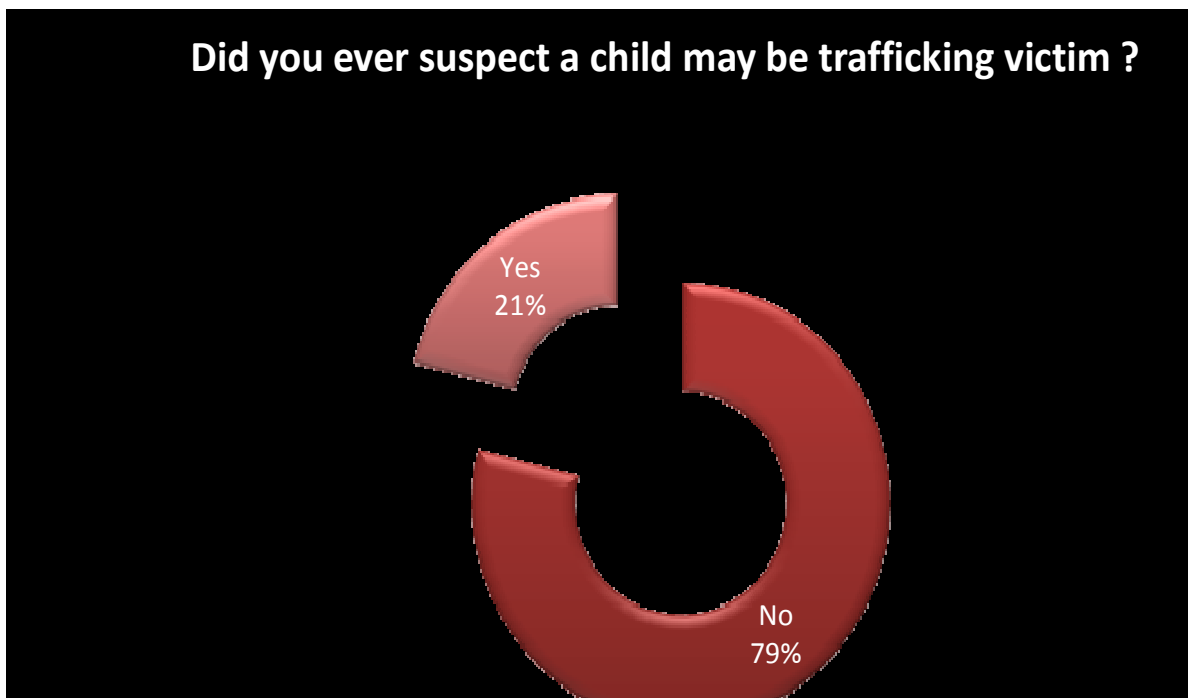
that their authors were vigilant to high-risk children likely to fall victim of human trafficking. Excerpts below best illustrate this attitude:

Yes, I did [encounter a child-victim of trafficking], but I wasn't handling this case in my professional capacity, I only knew it was a victim. I have my suspicions when I see begging children.

No, I never did [encounter a child-victim of trafficking], and in terms of suspicions – yes, every case of a travelling child is suspicious, but then it turns out everything is in order.

In summary: even though most professionals never crossed paths with underage victims of trafficking in their daily practice, at times they do suspect a child may be a trafficking victim, in other words: they are aware of the issue and translate this knowledge into their daily work.





In their professional activity, do professionals witness new phenomena or trends potentially affecting (facilitating) child trafficking?

Only directly interviewed professionals were questioned about new trends associated with child trafficking. This issue was not mentioned in survey questionnaires, as it requires more elaborate response, thorough explanation and seems incompatible with the questionnaire format.

Answers to this question are essential to the present analysis, as they illustrate views and ideas expressed by professionals in various lines of work potentially responsible for identifying and supporting children-victims of trafficking. Put together, these responses show a cross-section of the situation as seen from the perspective of different professional groups. Moreover, this account represents opinions of individuals from various regions of Poland, and – as we know – trends found in specific provinces are likely to differ. Finally, analysis of new trends is a highly specific task, since the area proves extremely difficult to explore – direct contact with practicing professionals, most likely to notice any emerging patterns, seems to be the only way to succeed.

In their responses, professionals emphasized many different aspects of the situation. Yet there were four distinctive dimensions of the problem that recurred on a regular basis.

Migrations

With Poland being within the Schengen Area, cross-border flows are facilitated, which is in itself a risk factor for children – potential victims of trafficking, as crossing of state lines is now largely uninhibited and it is virtually impossible to monitor such journeys or verify their purpose. Internal migrations were also indicated as one of potential trends facilitating child trafficking. It was observed that *people migrate from the countryside to big cities in search for a better, wealthier life.*

Migrations can thus be associated with certain risk for children not only if state borders are being crossed, but also if they occur within the territory of the same country. This should be borne in mind, especially now that the issue of domestic child trafficking gains so much attention in Europe.

Consumerism

Another emerging aspect of child trafficking is associated with the fact that young people nowadays crave a certain lifestyle, unattainable without strong financial standing. Respondents pointed out that social pressure to own certain goods leads to consumption-oriented view of the world, which in effect determines priorities in life.

According to questioned professionals, an ever-increasing impoverishment of societies and discrepancies in wealth between specific countries favor the development of child trafficking. The following examples were quoted in support of this hypothesis:

Financial discrepancies between Poland and the West is why they can traffic newborns.

Ukraine going bankrupt, became the source of young girls, possibly under 18.

Internet

Many interviewees focused on the negative effect of Internet on the problem of child trafficking. Professionals pointed to two dimensions of this situation. Internet is used by criminals to communicate with clients; as well as this, it facilitates contact between crime groups. On the other hand, Internet is also available to children and potentially encourages risky behaviors such as revealing personal data or making contact with strangers.

Infertility

The most frequently acknowledged trend – and the most surprising one – in the context of child trafficking are increasing infertility rates. Infertility and childlessness are directly associated with the issue of adoption. Respondents devoted much attention to this topic. In their opinion, the *rich and childless* constitute a significant group of clients willing to purchase a child – this is mainly due to demanding and lengthy adoption procedures. According to professionals, Poland is not free from this situation, as our procedures are deemed complicated and time-consuming.

Is enough attention being devoted to combating child trafficking in Poland?

Questioned professionals were nearly unanimous (94%) in their opinion that in Poland insufficient attention is being devoted to counteracting child trafficking. Despite the fact that most respondents were never directly exposed to underage victims of trafficking, they are aware of the existence of this problem. One of the interviewees summarized the issue as follows:

It is absolutely essential for institutions to communicate and to raise public awareness; child trafficking appears to be like magic, so American. We need media campaigns. More NGO's should become involved.

Other, less predominant responses deserve some looking into as well, since they could potentially lead to interesting conclusions. What were the arguments quoted by those convinced that in Poland enough is being done in the area of child trafficking? Some professionals suggested that since there are

so few identified victims of child trafficking in Poland, perhaps there is no need for further actions in this field or more publicity of the matter.

Child trafficking has been extremely publicized lately. More attention could be focused on human trafficking, child trafficking is a subcategory, only children are used for other purposes. With open borders, detection rates are low.

I don't know, but surely there is some focus; these situations are not common, so there's no need for more.

Other questioned professionals opposed this idea claiming that low detection rates and few confirmed victims are a result of insufficient knowledge of child trafficking among professionals and in the public.

There were some interviewees stating that, all in all, the problem of child trafficking does come up occasionally, it is not entirely overlooked by the media; however, it is the issue of efficacy and outcomes of specific initiatives undertaken in this field that is key in this context.

Hard to say, there are campaigns, but do they evoke any response in the society, I am not able to say.

It was also pointed out that evaluation of undertaken initiatives would be possible, if we knew more about the scope of the problem.

Both much and little. Hard to be precise, as this phenomenon is not diagnosed, unexplored...

Which institutions are responsible for combating child trafficking in Poland?

Among public sector entities responsible for combating child trafficking in Poland, police was listed most frequently, border guard being mentioned as second. The list includes NGOs as well: Nobody's Children Foundation, La Strada Foundation, Itaka Foundation and Kidprotect Foundation. Some professionals failed to provide specific names of non-governmental organizations, but did indicate the general category of NGOs. One in four respondents believed that the non-public sector should be responsible for combating child trafficking. Of the public sector, professionals mentioned public

prosecutor's office and ministries, more specifically pointing to the Ministry of Interior and Administration. Several respondents were familiar with the Crisis Intervention Center – established by the Ministry of Interior and Administration and offering assistance to victims of human trafficking.

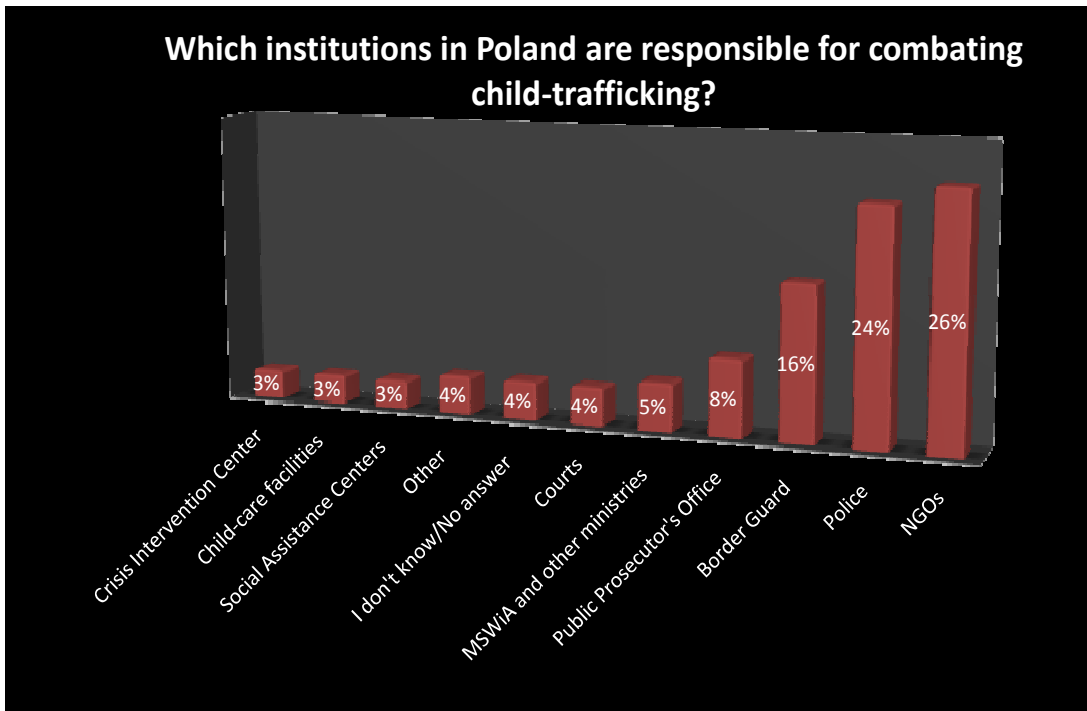
It would seem that professionals employed by the police, border guard, child care institutions or intervention facilities should have clear understanding of which entities have been appointed to counteract child trafficking in Poland. Nonetheless, their responses revealed uncertainty. This hesitation is reflected in vocabulary they adopt: as far as I know, I heard, I suppose, etc.

It is fairly understandable that police and border guard were first to be indicated as proper authorities best suited to handle child trafficking. What is puzzling though is the significant role attributed to NGOs in counteracting and combating this problem. Responsibilities of non-governmental organizations in this context were typically defined as first of all supporting state agencies in their operations, then monitoring the activities of the public sector.

Non-governmental organizations – supervision, cooperation, developing methods.

Foundations offer support...

Responses obtained from professionals suggest that - in their view - multiple agencies are obligated to counteract child trafficking. Coordinating role was typically assigned to the Ministry of Interior and Administration, but other entities were mentioned in this context as well. Clear information specifying which ministry is responsible for handling child trafficking in Poland could perhaps increase transparency and efficacy of undertaken initiatives.



Who should be responsible for combating child trafficking in Poland?

As opposed to the previous question – asking to relate to the reality at hand – this one was designed to find out about what the professionals wished for, in other words - their desired reality. Police was once again most frequently listed as proper entity to handle child trafficking in Poland, NGOs and border guard followed.

According to 26% of respondents, non-governmental sector is currently involved in combating child trafficking; while only 16% incorporate NGOs in the system that should in fact operate in Poland.

Some professionals supported the idea of establishing new bodies responsible for combating child trafficking and dedicated to various forms of operation. There were voices suggesting that such specialized units should be created within existing services.

...[There should be] dedicated departments for this type of crime, e.g. human trafficking, as it is connected with child trafficking.

[There should be] one separate institution bringing together police officers and border guards working with this specific topic.

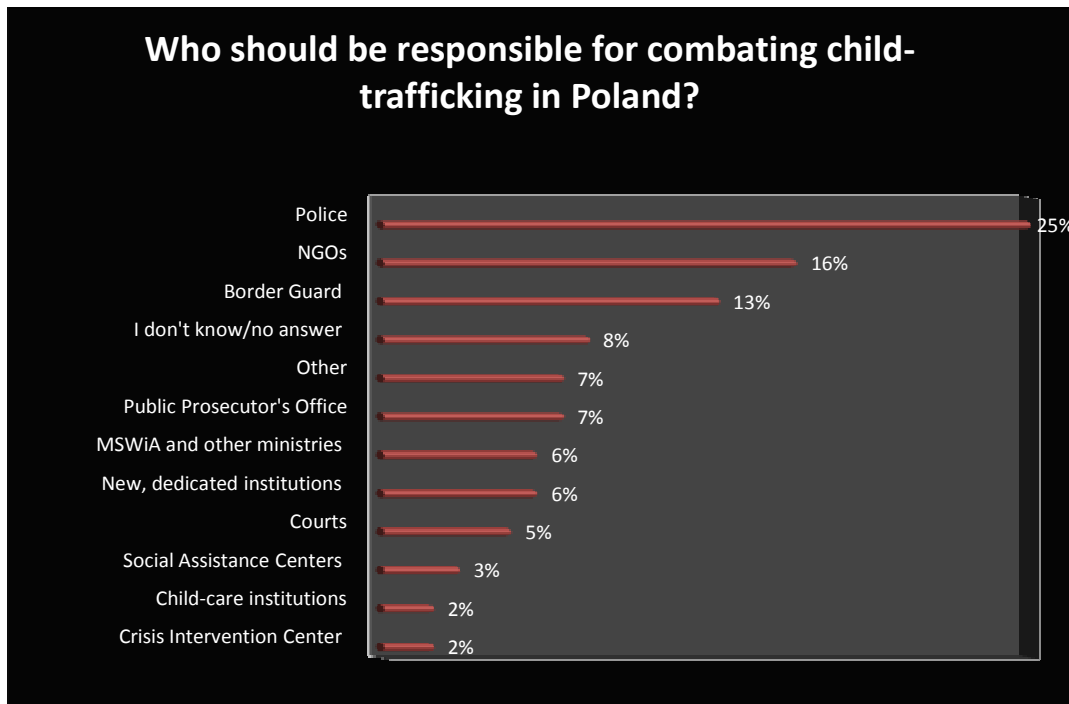
Others were in favor of establishing a separate child-care facility intended for underage victims of trafficking.

[We need] a special facility for children, offering access to a psychologist, a clean and cozy place, like child-friendly interview rooms, where children can feel good and safe, they know that they are in a safe place, with a caregiver looking after them.

Considerable emphasis is put on the need for close cooperation between specific stakeholders.

As regards the position of NGOs in the envisaged system, their role should be limited to preventive measures. Respondents perceived this area as well-suited for NGOs, since non-governmental organizations are – in their opinion – better equipped and more experienced in this field, and thus their preventive initiatives could be more effective. NGOs should also focus on research aimed at better diagnosis and understanding of the problem.

In summary: as suggested by questioned professionals, alterations to the system of combating child trafficking in Poland should take the form of evolutionary, rather than revolutionary changes. The proposed modifications are founded on the idea of perfecting specific areas of operation, as well as detailing the scope of duties and responsibilities assigned to specific entities.



Summary

The results of the present situational analysis were contrasted with the outcomes of two other research projects – public opinion survey entitled “Public awareness of threats associated with human trafficking and taking up employment abroad” (by TNS OBOP) and Country Progress Card published by ECPAT International.

The aim of the former research project was to investigate and explore public perception of the risks associated with child trafficking. ECPAT’s initiative, on the other hand, focused on describing and verifying Polish realities in terms of governmental involvement in counteracting and combating child trafficking, as well as other punishable acts associated with commercial exploitation of children. At this point, it could be worthwhile to view the results of the present situational analysis against the backdrop of the two earlier projects, bearing in mind that the situational analysis relies on opinions expressed by professionals, while the other two studies reflect – respectively -

public perception and institutional or system-oriented dimension of the problem.

It is absolutely essential to find out whether the society – and professionals in particular – are aware of the occurrence of child trafficking in Poland. The survey by TNS OBOB revealed that the majority (65%) of Poles believe our country is affected by this problem. Moreover, 74% of respondents are of opinion it is precisely children that are most vulnerable to the risk of human trafficking. Professionals were even more unanimous in their assessment that child trafficking does take place in Poland – 88% of respondents agreed with this statement. It is thus clear that vast majority of the public, and even greater proportion of professionals, perceive trafficking as a genuine threat. What's more, perception of child trafficking (both by general population and the narrow category of professionals) seems to be largely shaped by media releases - typically focusing on lurid details, not infrequently unilateral and selective in their approach to the topic.

The report by TNS OBOP also suggests that according to Poles the most common ways of exploiting children-victims of trafficking are as follows: coercion to provide sexual services, coercion to engage in pornographic films or photographic sessions, forced labor and participation in adoption outside of legal framework (the so-called illegal adoption). Responses offered by professionals were, again, very similar – the most frequently mentioned form of commercial exploitation of children is forcing them to provide sexual services and participate in the making of pornographic materials, followed by adoption outside of legal framework and forced labor. Data gathered in the course of interviews revealed significant discrepancies in the level of professionals' knowledge about child trafficking. Some of the questioned individuals prove to be well-acquainted with the topic, others resort to general statements and sketchy, vague information offered by the media.

In terms of the scale of the issue and emerging trends in the area of child trafficking, Poles are fairly unanimous in agreeing that the incidence of the problem increases or remains relatively unchanged. Professionals, on the other hand - when asked to describe new phenomena and developments they

witness in their daily work - tended to mention unrestricted flow of people – within the Schengen area in particular – as a source of significant risk for children. They also referred to a topic much discussed in the public debate - namely, consumption-oriented lifestyle, pursued by Polish teenagers and potentially leading to risky behaviors. In the context of financial standing, professionals also pointed to continuing impoverishment of the society, making it difficult to counteract child trafficking. Many respondents highlighted negative impact of the Internet as one of the tools used by criminals. Rising infertility rates, directly associated with demand for adoptions outside of legal boundaries, are another example of emerging trends in child trafficking as reported by interviewed professionals.

ECPAT International, in their report evaluating the activity of Polish government in the area of counteracting and combating child trafficking, describes Polish state policies as insufficient. Their main shortcoming lies in the lack of any actions specifically addressing vulnerabilities of children – potential or identified victims of trafficking. Polish solutions target broader topic of human trafficking and fail to acknowledge the specificity of child trafficking. Such acknowledgement is fundamental to developing any adequate and at the same time effective remedial measures. This point of view is substantiated by accounts of many professionals. The present situational analysis quotes multiple statements by professionals who are much better acquainted with the broader topic of human trafficking, than the more specialized area of child trafficking. This is best evidenced by questions regarding the system of victim identification or intervention in cases of child trafficking – professionals openly admitted that the existing procedures cover adult victims and are inadequate in cases involving minors.

ECPAT International puts particular emphasis on the need to implement widespread preventive measures protecting at-risk children from falling victim to trafficking. Professionals seem to share this conviction and speak loudly of it when discussing the idea of an envisaged future system to be implemented in Poland. In their statements on this topic they highlighted the importance of

preventive solutions, in particular – but not only - those executed by experienced non-governmental organizations.

To sum up: Polish professionals, whose views and ideas constitute the topic of the present situational analysis, to a large extent remain in agreement with the public opinion and with opinions of independent experts representing international community of non-governmental organizations.



JOINT ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM EXPLOITATION IN EUROPE