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**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE BALTICS:
AN OBSERVATION ON THE PUSH AND PULL FACTORS**

Bachelor's Thesis

Programme Law, specialisation International Relations

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently and all works, important standpoints, and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading. The document length is 10241 words from the introduction to the end of the conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

During the latest decades, trafficking in humans has reached the point of becoming a global issue and obtaining critical attention of international scholarship. However, in general, the research to date has tended to focus on other geographical locales rather than the region of the Baltic states. More recently, Estonian, Latvia, and Lithuania have shifted their roles from countries of origin to destination in terms of human trafficking, and this factor represents a solid indicator that the issue has grown in regional importance in light of drastic changes. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to explain the development of trafficking in the Baltics, as well as examining the major factors, which may have contributed to it. To test the hypothesis that the Baltics' positive development in the political, economic, and social fields has made a substantial impact on human patterns of movement, the theoretical approach adopted for this study incorporates the push and pull framework and the information collected via semi-structured interviews with experienced experts-practitioners. The findings of this research display various framework-associated determinants for migrant victims being trafficked to the Baltics, and how those dynamics are interplayed with each other to cause trafficking as a multifaceted issue. Hence, this thesis concludes that there are specific patterns of human trafficking activities in the Baltics, explaining that the development of countries has a great extent to immigration flows.

Keywords: human trafficking, the Baltics states, development, migration flows, international crime.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Trafficking in human beings (further – THB), a ubiquitous form of criminal activity that is also closely associated with modern slavery, is a multi-faceted transnational crime threatening international security¹. Evidently, the trades in human beings affect almost all countries in the world, albeit in a variety of ways². Victims can be anyone of any gender, race, age, or status in any region of the globe. It has been operated by transcontinental criminal groups and, as a whole, has become a ‘criminal enterprise’ with tremendous illegal benefits. Barberet, for example, indicated that traffickers take advantage of the vulnerability and desperation of victims, global inequality, or politically unstable settings, driven by greed and significant benefits, and sadly, people who can be used repeatedly for labour force or sexual services owing to their defenceless³. As it involves various perpetrators and criminal networks that are managing the vectors of trafficking, selling and exploiting the vulnerable⁴, the scale of THB is hard to quantify accurately, and the crime-associated figures can seldom be analysed from the prism of comparability. However, as it was argued by Bales *et al.*, there are 27 million people worldwide who had been estimated as victims of the crime at any given moment in time⁵. Therefore, Obuah has plenty of empirical justification to define THB as the fastest-growing source of income for organised crime, which is also the third-largest illicit business after the drugs and arms trade⁶.

As this criminal phenomenon represents an international issue that is often featured by different types of violation of internationally recognised borders, it manifests itself in complex and multi-layered forms. Moreover, as Shelley pointed out, globalisation has constructed an immense gap between developing and developed countries with poverty and marginalisation being dominant push indicators for victims⁷. To get closer to this paper’s

¹ Interpol. (n.d.). Crime - Human trafficking. Retrieved from: <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Human-trafficking>

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2006). Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/pdf/traffickinginpersons_report_2006ver2.pdf

³ Barberet, R. (2014). *Women, Crime and Criminal Justice – A Global Enquiry*. Routledge. p.126

⁴ Ibid: p.116

⁵ Williamson, A. K., Bales, K., & Trodd, Z. (2009). *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People*. Oneworld Publications. p.473

⁶ Obuah, E. (2006). Combating Global Trafficking in Persons: the Role of the United States Post-September 2001. *International Politics, volume(43)*, p.241

⁷ Shelley, L. (2010). *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge University Press. p.2

region in focus, in the past, the Baltic states or Baltics (namely Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) could be objectively and speculatively perceived as being countries of origin in the context of the crime. Nevertheless, with the rapid socio-economic development, these countries have adjusted their *silhouettes* in the context of international crime. Currently, the existing scholarship on the issue tends to focus on the Baltics as places of origin, rather than of destination. Concomitantly, geography wise, the lion share of the research on the topic and media spotlight has been covering other regions. Despite this fact, the governments of Lithuania and Estonia have awarded a ‘Tier 1’ status, by fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of THB, according to the 2020 Trafficking in Persons (further – TIP) Report issued by the United States Department of State⁸. It does not mean that the Baltics do not hold research value anymore regarding THB. Let alone Latvia that still maintains ‘Tier 2’, meaning its government is recommended to make the essential and sustained effort in combating THB⁹. Besides, the three countries are the parties to the most significant international treaties providing for some standards of the fight against THB. Therefore, given this context and considering the factor of the topic’s under-researching state, it is insightful to study the dynamic determinants behind the theme-bond unlawful activities across the Baltics.

Another dimension that can direct this new research in the process of adding plenty of analytical value to the debate on THB is that the available literature on the topic is out of date, having been published 5-10 years ago. In principle, one may argue that the general debate evidently lacks a clearer understanding of current trends and conceptual frameworks for determining THB. Additionally, THB crime patterns are diverse and related to issues such as globalisation, population movement, border control, transnational crime, and political stability, so it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis to promote it as an important issue of national security policy. Furthermore, this research selected Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as a region in focus for the following several reasons. Firstly, a narrower geographical unit of analysis would usher for a more pragmatic counterbalancing to develop an analytical framework for examining the research problem. Secondly, the trio of the Baltics are uniquely similar and different in sharing socio-economic and politico-historical ties with the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, while now representing a geo-strategically important

⁸ The United States Department of State. (2020). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. p. 58. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Ibid: p.310.

territorial segment of both the European Union (EU) and NATO. Last but not least, the Baltics' geographical location brings plenty of 'maritime' analytical angles in the context of THB – the countries' immediate proximity to the Baltic Sea and Russia makes them, together and separately, a rich case study to explore how geo-strategic as well as socio-economic changes in Europe shift and shape migration.

Aims and Research Questions

Although there is a certain level of diversity in THB trends across the European continent based on the geographical, cultural, and historical differences of every nation, the victims of THB in every region, presumably, struggle with similar violations of rights. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of the THB issue in the Baltics, while exposing the causes and methods of the crime-associated patterns in the countries of origin and destination in Europe. The hypothesis that will be tested is as follows: **the Baltics' positive development in the political, economic, and social field, has made a profound impact on the arousal of the phenomenon of THB in the region, which shifted their roles progressively from the countries of origin to the countries of destination.**

Considering the aforementioned claim, this research seeks to address the following questions: 1) What are the features of the Baltics' positive development in the post-Soviet period from a criminology-driven angle? and 2) What types of THB are being detected in the Baltics and what industries have been involved? With this in mind, there are two primary aims of this study: a) to appraise the development of the Baltics as destination nations, and examine the overall economic, social, political, and normative development from the theory of international migration and criminology; and b) to identify and conceptually analyse a range of multi-dimensional factors pushing both victims and criminal groups to choose the Baltics as destinations and the interrelation between them.

Methodology and glossary

In order to raise the knowledge of THB and convey descriptive and empirical data, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were adopted in the investigation. The qualitative research was composed of five semi-structured interviews conducted via Skype or

Zoom, taking place between 3 February and 10 March 2021. Every interview lasts approximately one hour long. For protecting privacy and confidentiality, all participants were informed that the interview process would be recorded, and they also consented to be named in this research, instead of anonymity. The total sample consists of four informants (two government officials, one social worker, and one expert in the area of THB). The criteria, which this research used in the process of forming the list of prospective respondents, were that they should possess broad as well as in-depth knowledge on the issue, and have worked closely on and intently with trafficking themes and matters. Because of this, there was an educated presumption that the chosen respondents could present a comprehensive observation of the topic. For evaluating problems and apprehending the various perceptions expressed by the informants involved in this process, a questionnaire was designed (*Appendix 1*). This particular method allows for answering extensive research questions in a multi-dimensional way, touching upon different perspectives. The advantage is when interviewees are less confined during interviews, they tend to adopt a more open attitude to reflect on their thoughts and experiences in a broader analytical sense. Moreover, an interviewer can further ask more probing questions, being built on the interviewee's responses by observing different factors, including even body language and intonation.

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. This paper assumes that victims' voices are crucial to encompass in the research before having a comprehensive understanding of the problem. Nevertheless, it is controversial and contains sensitive issues, so it would be inappropriate ethically to do so. Additionally, not much research on related topics has been done in the Baltics, and most of the useful material and data were initially published in local languages. To ensure the information was accessible for doing this research, some reports were translated into English and shortened. Ultimately, this thesis is drawn from the literature review: principally European and international project reports, official publications (including statistics, legislations, policies) of government agencies, academic research, and publications by civil society organisations and media reports. TIP reports are also extensively used in the paper because it is the most exhaustive and thoroughly constructed resource of governmental anti-THB.

Before delving into any data related to THB, it is significant to understand the definition of what it is. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the so-called 'Palermo Protocol') gives the first comprehensive, global

definition of THB. Therefore, this thesis will use the definition based on the UN's Palermo Protocol¹⁰.

[...] the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

This UN Protocol further explicitly reaffirms three major elements constituting trafficking¹¹, namely, 1) *the actions*, such as the recruitment, transportation, and movement of the person being trafficked; 2) *the means*, for instance, threat, fraud, use of force, abduction, or deception; 3) *the purposes*, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, or slavery. All three components are fundamental to structuring the violation of THB. At present, most countries in the world have adopted this protocol and formulated criminal laws pertaining to THB at international and national levels. Thus, the success of accomplishing unanimity on a definition cannot be underrated. This paper attributed that the factor of using a widely accepted interpretation of the phenomenon will be the most suitable for addressing the research problems.

A theoretical approach for creating a discussion platform

The phenomenon of THB encompasses many levels of meaning. Although, generally speaking, the flow of migrants cannot be explained by a single theory, this research established a discussion platform to discover the root cause of THB and suggests different perspectives. On the other hand, with the advancement of technology, it could be suggested that more detailed research and complete theories need to be developed in the future, to deepen prevention and solutions. Since there will never be a day to satisfy crimes as human needs are countless.

¹⁰ See <https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

The paper will primarily focus on the theoretical underpinning supported by the push and pull theory of migration¹². This paper selected this model insofar as migration is widely accepted as the interaction of push force in the original place and pull force in the place of migration, although numerous factors affecting migration are difficult to predict. Consequently, it can be used to scrutinize the fundamental factors driving individuals being exploited to THB and the cause of the THB development in the Baltics. According to Lee, push factors are those people experience around them where they live, comprising demographic growth, low living standards, lack of economic opportunities, and political oppression¹³. On the contrary, pull factors include demand for labour, attractive economic opportunities, political and religious freedom, and high standards of living¹⁴.

Indeed, the push and pull factors are not only crucial forces playing an influential role in individuals' decisions to migrate. Lee further elaborated that intervening obstacles, including distance and cost of movements, can fluctuate migrant selectivity of their destination¹⁵. Besides, personal factors will also affect the extent of these forces, such as education, mastery of information of destination countries, family ties, and the cultural milieu of individuals¹⁶. Accordingly, the research results were applied to this chosen framework to explain the THB phenomenon in the Baltics.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters, encompassing this introductory chapter. Introduction, presents the research motivation and purpose, the background of THB in the Baltics, methodology, and research scope. Chapter 1 consists of a review of economic, political, and social development in the Baltics from a positive perspective on criminology. Chapter 2 is concerned with the methodology used for this study, focusing on evidence of THB being detected in three nations, and the patterns of people's movement in recent years. Chapter 3 displays the findings of the research, and by having the lens of the push-pull theory, a discussion platform is broached to dissect why the Baltics have become the popular destinations for both criminal groups and immigrants. The final Chapter draws upon the entire thesis, reviewing the research results based on various theoretical and empirical strands for answering research questions.

¹² Lee, E. S. (1966). A Theory of Migration. *Demography*, Vol.(3), 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>

¹³ Ibid: p.51~55.

¹⁴ Ibid: p.51~55.

¹⁵ Ibid: p.51~54.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.50~52.

Chapter 1: Positive Development in the Baltics as a factor of criminology

The politico-historical period of the 1990s marked a significant turning point for the Baltics. They have used their newly re-gained sovereignty to change the countries' economic and political structures, having become well-functioning liberal democracies. In this regard, this paper looked at the positive development of the Baltics in the economic, political, and social fields as a factor from the criminology perspective. Strictly speaking, before determining THB flows and criminal behaviours, it is indispensable to examine the advantages and beneficial characteristics, which the Baltics hold as destinations that appeal to foreign victims. Furthermore, the author would have a better picture of how organised criminal networks utilize those traits to make trafficking destinations become attractive for victims, in order to receive more economic benefits. As Hughes and Denisova argued, since traffickers know that “the higher the economic development of the destination country, the higher the price that will be paid”¹⁷.

1.1. Economic growth and development

Before regaining their independence, the Baltics were deeply influenced by the Soviet central control economic plan, namely, they were part of the Soviet economic division of the labour system. As a result, their economic structures were highly unified, specialized, and had to receive subsidies from the central government. Nonetheless, after becoming parts of the EU, they relied on the vast EU market to accelerate the pace of economic transition, and strong domestic demand promoted a significant economic upswing. As Irandoust demonstrated that investors' confidence increased, and foreign capital poured into the Baltics expeditiously, due to the open market¹⁸. The EU has continued to provide economic support, prompting the three countries to gradually integrate with the EU's internal market and strengthen their trade dependence on the EU. Nowadays, they are sometimes called the ‘Baltic Tigers’¹⁹, and they are making a mark in the global economy. In this context, this paper supposed that presenting explicit data of the three nations from the economic perspective is foremost since its

¹⁷ Hughes, D. M., & Denisova, T. A. (2001). The transnational political criminal nexus of trafficking in women from Ukraine. *Trends in Organized Crime, Volume(6)*, p.48.

¹⁸ Irandoust, M. (2016). Structural changes, FDI, and economic growth: evidence from the Baltic states. *Journal of Economic Structures, Volume 5*, p.2.

¹⁹ Åslund, A. (2015). Why Have the Baltic Tigers Been So Successful? *CESifo Forum, Vol. 16(4)*, p.3-8.

development plays a vital role in converting countries of origin to destinations in terms of THB. Therefore, the thesis deduced that the following collected figures might be useful in the third Chapter, for analysing determinants contributing to migrants' movement, while incorporating the push-pull model.

In the process of economic changes in Estonia, digital technology with e-Government as the main axis has become a key turning point. At present, according to the UN E-Government Development Index, Estonia ranked third in the world²⁰. Estonia even proposed the e-Residency system in 2014, based on its rapidly improving digital capabilities, and its membership in the EU, to issue an invitation letter to the world to immigrate to Estonia. The development strategy of “digital citizenship” similar to “membership” can not only fill the gap in business investment and labour in Estonia, but also enable Estonia to be closer to the globe regarding technological knowledge, social culture, and industrial innovation, leaving the world an extraordinary impression. An organisation carried out major research on 63 global economies based on investment and development, appeal, and readiness. In 2020, the newest survey to date, Estonia was ranked as 19th in the list, closely followed by Taiwan and New Zealand²¹, highlighting its achievements in actively seeking transformation and development. Although it experienced a drop during the Eurozone crisis, its economy has been rising stably in recent years. Estonia statistics governmental agency displayed that the unemployment rates continue to decline largely, from a peak of 16.7% to 4.4%, from the period 2010 to 2019²², which is ordinarily considered a positive sign of a growing economy. Thus, this research further presumed that these dynamics-focused metrics are critical as they would be pertinent to the research claim in the later discussion. In brief, it can be seen that Estonia has taken great strides from a small agricultural and industrial country to a digital world obviously, after the Cold War.

The neighbouring nation, Latvia, has also left the public a remarkable impression on its alteration. Latvia's key advantage is its geographical location, having the three leading commercial ports, namely Rīga, Liepāja, and Ventspils, resulting in the logistics industry booming. Gžibovska observed that the importance of Rīga port is getting stronger since it is

²⁰ United Nations. (2021). 2020 E-Government Development Index. Retrieved from: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/data-center>

²¹ The Institute for Management Development. (2021). *IMD World Competitiveness Talent Ranking*. Talent Ranking - Estonia. Retrieved from: <https://worldcompetitiveness.imd.org/countryprofile/EE/talent>

²² Statistics Estonia. (2021). *Unemployment rate*. Retrieved from: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/work-life/labour-market/unemployment-rate>

the most effective way for permanent cargo flow between Russia, Central-Eastern Europe, and the EU, especially when the intensity of transport services in the Baltic Sea region is continually increasing²³. In addition, based on the ease of doing business, the World Bank's newest publication can serve as the most compelling evidence, which Latvia ranks 19th among 190 nations²⁴. Despite what the Latvian official indicated over the past couple of years, its budget has been with a small deficit, and economic growth has moderated, Latvia has used its export potential, liberal economic policies, and competitive tax system causing its GDP to advance by 3.5% annually on average from 2011 to 2018²⁵. In general, its macroeconomic indicators are still on an upward trend and are considered as a gateway to the EU and the Eastern market. Thus, this research attributed this as crucial information to take into account while probing the pull factors about the destination of THB. Indeed, there are still lots of internal challenges that must be dealt with within Latvia, such as income inequality and regional disparities; however, Latvia has substantially raised the well-being of its citizens after independence. In this sense, the author conjectured that its overall positive development might ignite the THB crimes taking place.

Likewise, Lithuania has also put tremendous effort into boosting its competitiveness and prosperity during the transition period. According to the European Commission, its real investment has been increasing at approximately 8% for 3 consecutive years, more than double the EU average²⁶. In 2019, its real GDP even enlarged by 3.8% and both public investment and public sector wages facilitated, regardless of the slowdown in the EU, and there has been a steady decline in the unemployment rate²⁷. A manufacturing risk index report underlined that Lithuania ranks 2nd globally for the most charming country for manufacturers, lagging behind China only²⁸. To illustrate, 18.3% of Lithuania's entire value-added is developed by the manufacturing sector and from 2010 to 2017, a total of 100 foreign manufacturers established or expanded operations in Lithuania, an average of 12 companies a year²⁹. Thus, as Lazutka *et al.* demonstrated, Lithuania remains among the fastest-growing economies in the EU; its annual disposable income per capita is close to that

²³ Gžibovska, N. (2013). The role of transit in the economy of Latvia. *Baltic Region*, (2), p.107.

²⁴ Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia. (2019). *Economic Development of Latvia*. p.115. Retrieved from: <https://www.em.gov.lv/en/media/1942/download>

²⁵ Ibid: p.10-11.

²⁶ European Commission. (2020). *Country Report - Lithuania*. p.8. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european_semester_country-report-lithuania_en.pdf

²⁷ Ibid: p.8.

²⁸ European Commission. (2019). *SBA Fact Sheet LITHUANIA*, p.3

²⁹ Ibid: p.3.

of Slovenia and the Czech Republic, the most advanced nations in Central East Europe³⁰. In effect, all the accomplishments proved that Lithuania has a clear understanding of its potential, and is moving forward on its unique path. Not only by creating a more business-friendly environment, but also by establishing itself as a manufacturing destination for high value-added products. Consequently, it could be argued that the country's solid economic growth and employment opportunities are likely to make Lithuania perform as an enticing destination for immigrants to move.

Evidently, since the independence had been regained, the Baltics have fulfilled substantial economic success when embracing neoliberal economic models. These structural economic changes fuel the trade. However, they also further proffer more resources and demands available to the trafficked victims for migrating to the Baltics, as well as causing traffickers to take advantage of any opportunities to prey on the vulnerable since the financial return is also the largest in wealthy destination countries. Next, this research is to outline the process of the development in the Baltics from the political and social aspects, contextualising it with the main theme of the study.

1.2. Political and social development in human rights and immigration activities

Since the restoration of independence, Baltic states' diplomatic policies have objectively resembled a distinctly pro-Western stance, striving to integrate with Western values, be it economically, politically or socially. After acceding to the EU, the three countries have actively promoted democratic development, the market economy, and maintained good relations with neighbouring countries, which opened new opportunities for intra-EU mobility. In the already declared perspective of the push-pull mode, in order to create a practical discussion framework, it is crucial to underline the relevance of both political and social development of the countries in focus.

Politically, as sovereign and independent countries today, their establishment is based on the principle of the rule of law and full-fledged democracy, which is faithfully reflected in their new constitution. The separation of powers is implemented, and there are multi-party systems with numerous parties. Accordingly, there is broadly progressive politics in the Baltics, and

³⁰ Lazutka, R., Juška, A., & Navickė, J. (2018). Labour and Capital Under a Neoliberal Economic Model: Economic Growth and Demographic Crisis in Lithuania. *Europe-Asia Studies*, (70:9), p.1436.

its citizens are all granted the right to select their government in free and fair elections held by secret ballot, according to universal and equal suffrage, without interference from external or non-state actors. This accomplishment seems ordinary in other European countries, but it manifests the ambition of the Baltics to engage in such successful reforms.

Furthermore, women's participation in the political sphere has improved significantly in the three nations. In Lithuania, Ingrida Šimonytė was appointed to be the Prime Minister in 2020, which not only establishes new political traditions but also builds a new bar for the government. Similarly, after *Riigikogu* elected the country's first female president in 2016 (Kersti Kaljulaid) and with Kaja Kallas having become the Prime Minister in 2021, Estonia became the only nation in the world where both the president and the prime minister are women. In Latvia, females also accounted for 31% of Member of the *Saeima* elected in 2018³¹; although the figure is not even half, it has risen remarkably in the last several years. In short, despite gender equality in the Baltics is still far from the Nordic/Scandinavian standards, it has become more prevalent, especially in the political field.

Alternatively, the Baltics have respected the rule of law, human rights, and freedom by ratifying main global and regional instruments, such as the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Generally, they are considered as totally “free” nations, since their constitutions also guarantee civil liberties. Either individuals or independent media are allowed to express various views without restrictions. Besides, discrimination, including indirectly, is inhibited under the law in the Baltics (*Table 1*), displaying the fact that the Baltics have made imperative moves towards nations valuing diversity and equality. Interestingly, Kuzelewska imparted that Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia have been actively taking part in the process of building appropriate guarantees for human rights protection because the number of complaints of violating ECHR submitted by individuals has maintained a steady level and seems modest compared to other 47 member states of the Council of Europe (CoE) as a whole³².

³¹ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2020). *Power and Decision-Making*. Retrieved from: <https://www.csb.gov.lv/en/gender-equality-indicators/Power-and-Decision-Making#:~:text=Women%20accounted%20for%20one%20third,Estonia%20and%2021%20%25%20in%20Lithuania.>

³² Kuzelewska, E. (2019). Jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights in the Baltic States' Cases. *Studies in Logic*, 59(1), p. 102

Table 1 – General anti-discrimination legislation in the Baltics

COUNTRY	LEGISLATION	GROUND OF DISCRIMINATION PROTECTED IN GENERAL ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION
ESTONIA	Equal Treatment Act ³³	Ethnic origin, race, colour, religion or other beliefs, age, disability, or sexual orientation.
LITHUANIA	Law on Equal Treatment ³⁴	Age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnic origin, origin, citizenship, religion, belief, convictions, views, language, social status.
LATVIA	There is no dedicated anti-discrimination legislation.	Nevertheless, other legislation covers discrimination: Labour Law; Law on Social Security; Consumer Rights Protection Law; Law on Prohibition of Discrimination against Natural Persons – Economic Operators.

Broadly speaking, as Birka stated that the Baltics have been very sensitive to immigration from outside the EU and stringent about retaining their ethnic balance, and protecting their languages and cultures³⁵. Nevertheless, currently, like many other countries, they are experiencing the problems of ageing populations and low birth rates, bringing about an approaching demographic pressure, and the shortage of labour in some industries. Consequently, this research indicated that another vital point to determine a nation's long-term development and stability is its immigration activities, and how the government responds to its policymaking.

³³ See <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/503052017002/consolide>

³⁴ See <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.389500?jfwid=-oo3xjf4tu>

³⁵ Birka, I. (2019). Can return migration revitalize the Baltics? Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania engage their diasporas, with mixed results. Retrieved from: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/can-return-migration-revitalize-baltics-estonia-latvia-and-lithuania-engage-their-diasporas>

Data compiled by the Estonian government, displaying net migration amplified positively for the fifth year in a row thanks to Immigration³⁶. Astoundingly, the Estonia government issued the largest number of type D visa (so-called long-stay visas) to people originating from Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine³⁷. From the legislation perspective, Estonian 2018 amendments to the Aliens Act, prolonging a longer period of short-term employment for third-country nationals extended to 365 days, instead of 270 days, in order to abate the recruitment and employment process in temporary vacancies³⁸. Correspondingly, in Latvia, although net migration maintains negative, having only some compensatory effect, the overall population growth of 2020 is improving, which is contributed by the external migration from post-Soviet nations, accounting for 6% more than in 2018³⁹. Stabiņa outlined specifically that the top five nations are Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan, and India, whose citizens primarily apply for working permits in Latvia⁴⁰. In like manner, this is relevant for Lithuania. Blažytė enunciated that since 2014, the number of foreigners living in Lithuania has enlarged drastically, and according to 2020's statistics, the figure constitutes 2.64% of all Lithuania residents⁴¹. It is noted that the migration trend has changed significantly in Lithuania recently due to the positive net migration of external nationals, especially citizens of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia⁴². Besides, the Lithuanian government approved the amended list of shortage occupations, hence, employers are granted to bring in the required foreign workers who fall into that enumeration, under facilitated procedure without a permit from the employment service⁴³.

In a nutshell, from the statistics presented above, this study contended that the Baltics' rapid economic growth and the deficit of workforce have served as a means to magnify immigration, chiefly from post-Soviet nations. Evidently, the Baltics have adopted a Western political model, which not only fully integrated into important Western institutions such as

³⁶ Statistics Estonia. (2020). *Immigration helped to increase the population figure*. Retrieved from: <https://www.stat.ee/en/uudised/news-release-2020-059>

³⁷ Estonian Ministry of the Interior & European Migration Network Estonian Contact Point. (n.d.). *Overview of Migration Statistics 2015-2019*. p.5, Retrieved from: https://www.norden.ee/images/Migra_2020/Ettekanded/Randestatistika_ENG_PDF.pdf

³⁸ See <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/529032019002/consolide>

³⁹ Stabiņa, Lāsma. Personal interview. 04 Mar 2021.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Blažytė, Giedrė. Personal interview. 10 Mar 2021.

Dr. Blažytė is a researcher at the Lithuanian Social Research Centre and Diversity Development Group. As a project executor and independent expert, she has been involved in different projects and migration research on the national and international level.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/9336ce702bbc11eabe008ea93139d588>

the EU and NATO, but also functioned as solid and sustainable democracies. However, the paper argued that “living in a safe nation” can be used as an advertisement for recruiting those from war zones. After all, such a prospect becomes extremely attractive to individuals suffering from the socio-economic consequences of the crisis. As Cho *et al.* expounded, nations with higher GDP per capita, larger populations, larger stocks of pre-existing migrants, and a democratic political regime are more likely to be destination countries for immigrants⁴⁴. Hence, even in the case of population, which is quite small in the three countries, this paper could still use the collected evidence to explain the Baltics appeal as destinations in the subsequent Chapter, after combined with other considerable developments. In short, it can be said that the more stable a country may be, the greater it will evolve to the destination of THB.

Chapter 2: Human trafficking being detected

The issues pertaining to THB have gradually received considerable critical attention in the Baltics. Especially, the new feature discloses a negative trend that they have evolved into destination countries for both victims and criminal groups. However, it is complicated to accurately measure the overall scope or extent. Hence, the following chapter aims at further exploring the problem area of this research, namely, the foreign victims identified in the Baltic nations. The evidence is chiefly assembled from the interviewee’s experiences and knowledge. This is done because the author argued it contributes to a holistic understanding of THB flows from third nations, and factors driving them from home. Furthermore, this paper also addressed the root cause of sex trafficking by dissecting the prostitution legislation of the Baltics.

2.1 Foreign victims identified in Estonia

To begin with, it is noted that prostitution is neither forbidden nor allowed in Estonia. Selling one’s body is legal, whereas pimping, luring minors into prostitution, as well as providing premises or the practice of prostitution are illicit⁴⁵. Even so, the Estonian Ministry of Justice signified that the number of victims registered for pimping crime has tripled significantly

⁴⁴ Cho, S.-Y., Dreher, A., & Neumayer, E. (2013). Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking? *World Development*, 41 (1), p. 16.

⁴⁵ Blumberg, Sirle. Personal interview. 03 Feb 2021.

from 2018 to 2019, and the figure also has reached the highest peak in history (*Table 2*); only until 2020, the number was slightly lower due to the pandemic. Furthermore, almost all pimping crimes took place in some Tallinn apartments or erotic massage parlours (only two of the 45 crimes occurred elsewhere), and almost half of the cases involved women involved in prostitution from abroad⁴⁶. Based on the CoE, in 2019, 75 women from third countries, such as Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Moldova, who arrived in Estonia through the WhatsApp and Telegram communication groups for so-called ‘Sex Tours’, have been arrested and more than 10 women from third countries have been sent back from the border⁴⁷. The police also discovered that those communication groups simultaneously composed of thousands of people, almost entirely from Russian-speaking countries of origin, and the users of which (or dispatchers) are mostly located in third nations, causing the investigation process to become more complicated⁴⁸.

Table 2 – Registered crimes related to THB ⁴⁹

PENAL CODE	TYPE OF CRIME	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
§ 133	Trafficking in human beings	6	8	5	4	15	10	4	5	20
§ 133 ¹	Support for human trafficking	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
§ 133 ²	Pimping	9	13	8	17	19	13	14	45	37
§ 133 ³	Aiding prostitution	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	1

⁴⁶ The Estonian Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Crime in Estonia 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/kuritegevus2020/inimkaubandus/>

⁴⁷ Council of Europe. (2020). *Report submitted by the authorities of Estonia on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP(2018)23 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. p.9. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/cp-2020-14-estonia/1680a09ae0>

⁴⁸ Ibid: p.10.

⁴⁹ The Estonian Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Crime in Estonia 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/kuritegevus2020/inimkaubandus/>

§ 175	Human trafficking in order to take advantage of minors	6	18	15	63	59	67	28	32	26
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Another recent trend is the number of labour exploitation cases is rising slowly, chiefly the victims of third countries, such as men from Ukraine and Moldova, who are subjected to labour exploitation in construction, agriculture, and forestry within Estonia⁵⁰. Focusing on the topic, this paper benefited from interviewing Sirle Blumberg, currently working at Estonian THB prevention and victim helpline, which enables officials to identify victims seeking help. Concerning what types of employment foreign victims engage in generally, Blumberg exemplified that

males usually work in construction areas, while females work in cleaning areas, and seasonal works, such as picking up strawberries in the countryside is prevalent. Some people also work in kitchens of restaurants that sell ethnic cuisine. To elucidate, Blumberg brought up one important case, involving a restaurant located in the Rotermann area with great food and atmosphere. Nevertheless, behind the kitchen, there were victims of THB from Ukraine and India. Therefore, now government officials try to investigate what is going on with ethnic restaurants in Estonia⁵¹.

Blumberg further outlined another case she was working on:

[O]ne male from Ukraine came to Estonia through Poland. He worked at one famous factory in Ida-Viru County, responsible for the chemical process. Thereupon, he got an allergic reaction, so he had to visit the hospital. Nevertheless, under this terrible circumstance, he still got kicked out of the apartment which the company provided, resulting in him having nowhere to go. Many foreign victims like him enduring abusive practices. The most typical one is inadequate working conditions; to enumerate, they do tremendous overtime, and not get paid regularly. Moreover, it is common that they did not sign any contract before starting work, leading victims to lack imperative information. Some victims are orally and physically abused, as well as threatened⁵².

⁵⁰ The United States Department of State. (2019). *Trafficking in Persons Report Report*. p.190, Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf>

⁵¹ Blumberg, Sirle. Personal interview. 03 Feb 2021

⁵² Ibid.

By contrast, Blumberg pointed out the problem that “when employers detect the victims are ill, usually they tend to send them back home directly, by speaking the lie that medical treatment is expensive in Estonia. Because companies are afraid the government will discover the employees’ documents are not correct, or social insurance taxes have not been paid⁵³.

To reiterate, evaluating this type of crime is challenging since not all people turn to the police, or call the anti-trafficking hotline. Notwithstanding, according to the CoE’s statistics, in a total of 679 clients called the consultation helpline, and among those, 80% were third-country nationals from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Moldova, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan⁵⁴. In 2020, statistics point out that 608 clients called for support⁵⁵. From the collected data, this research found that Estonia has become a popular destination for transnational crimes to occur, hence, it might contribute as the practical attestation to analyse structural causes in the later chapter.

2.2 Foreign victims identified in Latvia

In a similar way as in Estonia, the TIP report exposed that an increasing number of THB for labour exploitation takes place in Latvia, and the majority of foreign victims come from Moldova, Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in industries of agriculture and construction⁵⁶. Furthermore, an inflow of unregistered workers from Ukraine, Russia, and India in construction, hospitality, and taxi service⁵⁷. Allegedly, Latvian embassies that are hosted by Central Asian countries observed an amplified interest of Latvian entrepreneurs to employ migrants for low qualified jobs in the construction sector⁵⁸. Indeed, the statistics from the Latvian Ministry of the Interior also display this phenomenon. In 2020, 48 people were

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Council of Europe. (2020). *Report submitted by the authorities of Estonia on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP(2018)23 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. p.19. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/cp-2020-14-estonia/1680a09ae0>

⁵⁵ The Estonian Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Crime in Estonia 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/kuritegevus2020/inimkaubandus/>

⁵⁶ The United States Department of State. (2020). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. p.311, Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

⁵⁷ Ibid: p.311.

⁵⁸ Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Secretariat. (2020). *Human Trafficking – Baltic Sea Region Round-Up report*. p.88, Retrieved from: https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CBSS_Report_25.06.2020.pdf

recognised as victims of THB in Latvia. Among those, only 17 people are Latvian, the other 18 people are Tajikistan nationals, 7 people are Indian, and 6 people are Uzbek nationals⁵⁹.

Notably, those foreign victims came to Latvia by an informal and unsystematic process, namely, their job searches are elementally based on contacts from acquaintances, verbal agreement on work, trust, and confidence in compatriots, as well as the information they provide⁶⁰. As a consequence, lots of male workers are deceived about wages and working conditions in Latvia. One recent news seems to support this phenomenon, that is, Latvian state police discovered that THB occurring in a famous confectionery company, namely Adugs⁶¹. During the preliminary investigation, up to 10 third-country nationals had been exploited by the employer for a long time, taking advantage of their vulnerability without paying them a full amount of the salary and driving them into a disproportionately large debt. Moreover, migrant workers have been confiscated of their passports, beaten, and threatened with deportation from Latvia if they did not comply⁶².

The CoE's report noticed the difference between local construction workers having the appropriate equipment and protective gear, and immigrants employed at the site who are less well equipped⁶³. Numerous workers are not capable of displaying employment contracts, or contracts are handwritten notes not in the standards of labour law⁶⁴. Moreover, the same document also corroborated one adverse case that a Ukrainian worker who was severely injured during work and was left on his own due to a lack of compulsory insurance; he and other colleagues from Ukraine have been covering his hospital bills⁶⁵. Lāsma Stabiņa, in her capacity as the Latvian government's National Trafficking in Persons Coordinator since 2014, substantiated that those migrant victims have to pay up to €150 monthly for such accommodation without heating, hot water, and electricity, as well as disbursing up to €3000

⁵⁹ Latvian Ministry of the Interior. (2020). *Report on preventing and combating human trafficking in Latvia*. p.1, Retrieved from: https://www.iem.gov.lv/sites/iem/files/media_file/parskats-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversanu-un-apkarosanu-latvija-2020.gada.pdf

⁶⁰ Ibid: p.3.

⁶¹ European Commission. (2020). *European Website on Integration*. Exploitation of foreign workers becomes more apparent in Latvia. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/exploitation-of-foreign-workers-becomes-more-apparent-in-latvia>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Council of Europe. (2020). *Reply from Latvia to the Questionnaire for the evaluation of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the Parties*. p.35. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/greta-2018-26-lva-rep/16809e4101>

⁶⁴ Ibid: p.35.

⁶⁵ Ibid: p.35.

for recruiters who promised them to find work in Latvia, causing individuals are in debt all the time⁶⁶. Furthermore, traffickers tend to take photos of third-country nationals when meeting them in the airport, to intimidate them not to escape⁶⁷.

What is more, in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation no. 32, namely 'Regulations on Restricting Prostitution', prostitution is legal but regulated in Latvia⁶⁸. It is noted that currently, the definition of prostitution is not defined in regulatory enactments, but it is interpreted as the provision of sexual services for payment. Hence, based on CoE, Latvia is a destination for men from Western European countries, especially men from the UK, and women reported the experience of offensive and overbearing behaviour in nightclubs, bars, and on the streets, indirectly facilitating THB for sexual exploitation⁶⁹. Inevitably, Latvia is also a destination and transit nation for the trafficking of victims for sexual purposes from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, due to its image as a country of sex tourism⁷⁰. Females from third countries are coordinated by traffickers to engage in prostitution, using work visas issued in Poland, and visa-free travel for tourists crossing the land borders of the EU Member States⁷¹. Thereby, this study briefly concluded that Latvia has faced the expanding trend of organised crimes, exceptionally people come from the former Soviet titular republics, which seems to match the situation in Estonia as well. In this regard, this research further strengthened that the gathered data being feasible for the coming discussion.

2.3 Foreign victims identified in Lithuania

Kristina Mišinienė, currently the Head of Kaunas-based KOPŽI (the Lithuanian centre for combatting THB and exploitation), noted a clear change that Lithuania has long been described as a country of origin and transit for victims, nevertheless, starting three years ago,

⁶⁶ Stabiņa, Lāsma. Personal interview. 04 Mar 2021.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/169772-prostitucijas-ierobezosanas-noteikumi>

⁶⁹ Council of Europe. (2015). *Report submitted by the Latvian authorities on measures taken to comply with Committee of the Parties Recommendation CP(2013)2 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. p.22. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806dbfba>

⁷⁰ Downes, P., Zule-Lapimaa, A., Blumberg, S., Ivanchenko, L., & Living for Tomorrow. (2008). *Not One Victim More: Human Trafficking in the Baltic States*. p. 208. Retrieved from: http://lft.ee/admin/upload/files/Not_One_Victim_More.pdf

⁷¹ Latvian Ministry of the Interior. (2020). *Report on preventing and combating human trafficking in Latvia*. p.2, Retrieved from: https://www.iem.gov.lv/sites/iem/files/media_file/parskats-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversanu-un-apkarosanu-latvija-2020.gada.pdf

immigrants falling as victims to the Lithuanian traffickers⁷². Conventionally, foreign victims are recruited by traffickers through international agencies. Notably, those trafficking agencies are well-organised; they put advertisements systematically in the local newspaper of victims' original countries, and maintained great ties with embassies in Lithuania for making "all doors" open while doing business⁷³. However, when pursuing a better life and well-paid jobs in Lithuania, foreign workers from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, are facing the exploitation of labour trafficking, such as truck drivers, builders, and welders⁷⁴. In 2019, the Lithuania Ministry of the Interior discovered that a large number of illegally employed third-country nationals in the sectors of economic activity: construction (1,500 people), manufacturing (95 people), accommodation and food services (87 people)⁷⁵. Among this, the majority of illegally employed people are Ukrainian, made up 62%⁷⁶.

Nonetheless, as Mišiniienė signified, the situation of migrant victims from Central Asia is ten times worse than Ukrainian ones because some of them do not speak fluent Russian; they work for months without salaries, even sleeping in cars⁷⁷. Besides, a significant number of victims were identified working in prestigious and expensive massage spas, which is shocking for Mišiniienė to witness "employees" come from such luxury places exposing their negative stories, encompassing psychological terror and physical beaten⁷⁸. Moreover, some of them did not get promised salaries because especially employers tend to use several excuses to decrease their pay, such as they are not smiling at customers, or their clothes look dirty, leading them to lose money each month⁷⁹. What is worse, a range of 'tricks' are hidden in the employment contracts; firstly, they are in the Lithuanian language which foreigners cannot understand. Secondly, the versions of contracts for employees and employers list diverse contents. Lastly, some employers even fake the signatures of employees, causing them to not be aware of what is written on the contract.⁸⁰

⁷² Mišiniienė, Kristina. Personal interview. 05 Mar 2021

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The United States Department of State. (2019). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. p.320. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

⁷⁵ Lithuania Ministry of the Interior. (2020). *An overview of the anti-human trafficking situation in Lithuania*. p.14, Retrieved from:

https://vrm.lrv.lt/uploads/vrm/documents/files/LT_versija/Viesasis_saugumas/Prekyba_zmonemis/2019%20m%20kovos%20su%20prekyba%20zmonemis%20situacijos%20Lietuvoje%20apzvalga_LP%2B.pdf

⁷⁶ Ibid: p.14.

⁷⁷ Mišiniienė, Kristina. Personal interview. 05 Mar 2021

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

From the perspective of prostitution, the author noticed the significant differences in related regulations among the three Baltic nations. As Mišinienė referred that both the paid use of prostitution services and the practice of prostitution are illegal by the Code of Administrative Offences in Lithuania, however, nobody has really paid attention to it⁸¹. Therefore, the immigrant women mostly arrive in Lithuania for various purposes on a voluntary basis, quite a number of them intending to work as prostitutes⁸². A report depicted that those immigrant women from the neighbouring countries, are transported to Lithuania mainly by train, accounted for 12% of the total number of prostitutes in Lithuania⁸³. In 2019, Europol cooperated with Lithuanian and Spanish police, dismantling a large organised crime group involved in the THB for sexual exploitation, which profited by taking women to Lithuania from third nations, such as Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova⁸⁴.

Besides, people generally suppose low levels of education are frequently assumed to have an inextricable link with vulnerability trafficking, while Mišinienė did not concur. She attested that many migrant victims are well-educated, such as teachers, doctors, even police officers, moving to Lithuania for prostitution⁸⁵. Mišinienė revealed a story that a Ukrainian doctor working in prostitution who could not tell her family what she is doing, even she had to form different lies to let them not worried; because pimps are controlling her by threatening, also the personal situation of being in debt, she could not leave prostitution⁸⁶. Countless women like her are depressed, and begin to use drugs and alcohol to minimize their shame and guilt⁸⁷. Mišinienė also delineated that, despite many unfair treatments, foreign victims suffering in Lithuania are unwilling to quit dreadful jobs, which is connected to their working permits after all. In other words, if they give up their job, they must leave Lithuania. Additionally, many can not afford a flight ticket back home, thus, after combining various reasons, they always decide to be patient and wait for any possible hope in Lithuania; for example, convincing employers to pay them properly⁸⁸.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Lithuanian Human Rights League. (n.d.). *Situation of human trafficking in Lithuania - Summary Report*. p.9.

⁸³ Ibid: p.125.

⁸⁴ Europol. (2019). *15 ARRESTED IN A HIT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING GANG IN LITHUANIA AND SPAIN*. Retrieved from: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/15-arrested-in-hit-against-human-trafficking-gang-in-lithuania-and-spain>

⁸⁵ Mišinienė, Kristina. Personal interview. 05 Mar 2021

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

In this sense, this study discovered that despite the discrepancy of national development in the Baltics, immigrants face the same infringements of human rights, which is significant to explore the roots and provide reflective results in the later discussion. Next, this paper would display the arguments with the support of the push-pull theory.

Chapter 3: What factors push foreigner victims to be trafficked?

Before diving into the topic, it is necessary to underline similarities of sending countries to comprehensively appreciate the mechanisms behind individual migration. Firstly, based on previous research findings and interviews, the majority of the foreign victims, identified in the Baltics, are from the constitutional parts of the former Soviet Union, where many of them have external borders connecting the Schengen zone. Besides, it appears that when combating THB, none of the governments has achieved the status of ‘Tier 1’, signifying a dire need for improvement going forward⁸⁹. On the other hand, from the author’s view, it is impossible to present all victims’ countries of origin; therefore, the following chapter would primarily focus on people from former-Soviet republics, as this is the mainstream in the Baltics. The study is determined to explore the impact of various contributors on migrant victims’ decisions, from macro-level such as political, economic, and legal, and micro-level factors comprise languages, cultures, and distance.

3.1. Economic geography and liberalisation of labour legislation

The globalized market has shortened the distance and time of population movement. In the view of the author, there has been a powerful force behind the economic development of various countries, giving freedom of population migration and encouraging individuals to compete for their own interests. Objectively, the development of the global market and people’s freedom are closely associated with each other. Deutsche Bank research affirmed that in spite of the increasing influence of non-economic factors, most people still migrate, whether legally or not, for economic reasons.⁹⁰ Thus, as Wheaton *et al.*, signified, when

⁸⁹ The United States Department of State. (2019). *Trafficking in Persons Report Report*. p.58. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

⁹⁰ Messina, A. M., & Lahav, G. (2006). *The Migration Reader: Exploring Politics and Policies*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

applied to the issue of THB, profit is the driving motive, in which traffickers connect the supply of labour in source areas with the demand for labour in destination areas⁹¹.

Talking about pushing factors, this paper observed that high and long-term unemployment, with a weak social security system, gained importance as a force governing migration decisions. A study on THB in men from Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova documented that immigrants accepted suspect job offers because of the widespread closure of industrial enterprises where a tremendous part of the local population traditionally worked, and a lack of opportunities for career growth⁹². Furthermore, another precondition is the level of income is less satisfactory than in the Baltic countries, to illustrate, the average nominal salary of 2019 in Ukraine amounted to UAH 10,497 (€312), in Belarus is BYN 1091 (€347), and in Moldova is MDL 6268 (€298); however, mean wages in Estonia is €1407, Latvia is €1076, and Lithuania is €1307⁹³. Undoubtedly, giant gaps in average incomes are a magnet for migration. As Hernandez *et al.*, discovered, a generous welfare system in the destination country is an assured determinant, incentivizing migration into developed nations, even without job certainty⁹⁴. Hence, male victims desire higher earnings, seeking countries with a better outlook, allowing THB to flourish.

Concerning female victims, this paper attributed that another immigration motivation lies in the result of women's unequal economic status. Specifically, wage differentials and recruitment bias not only manifest gender inequality but also create various obstacles for women to enter the labour market. To illustrate, according to Article 262 of the Labour Code of Belarus, females are prohibited from pursuing 181 occupations and 42 spheres of work, such as miner and diver, as they are considered harmful and (or) dangerous for women⁹⁵. In Kyrgyzstan, women also face similar prejudice; based on Article 303 of the Labour Code, the government has maintained a ban on 446 professions, including porter with the particular

⁹¹ Wheaton, E. M., Galli, T. V., & Schauer, E. J. (2010). Economics of Human Trafficking. *International Migration, Vol. 48*(4), p.117.

⁹² International Organisation for Migration. (2016). *Trafficking in Men for Labour Exploitation Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova*. p.4. Retrieved from: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/IOM-Ukraine-Trafficking-in-Men-for-Labour-Exploitation.pdf

⁹³ International Labour Organisation. (2020). *Global Wage Report 2020–21*. p.178-179. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_762534.pdf

⁹⁴ Hernandez, D., & Rudolph, A. (2015). Modern day slavery: What drives human trafficking in Europe? *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 38(issue C), p.6.

⁹⁵ See <https://xn----ctbfcfvic3abdqybq.xn--90ajs/statya-262>

annotation ‘movement of baggage and hand luggage’⁹⁶. Distinctly, women from the former-Soviet are suffering deeply from the patriarchal world, and fundamental discriminations have deprived of women’s rights to choose their professional development, further leading to unemployment. Besides, Cynthia indicated that traffickers tend to exploit the unequal status of women and girls in countries where stereotypes persist about not educating women, treating girls as property and sexual objects⁹⁷. Consequently, this research asserted that when there are few options, women are likely to turn to prostitution, then falling into traffickers’ hands.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought economic uncertainty, causing countries to be undergoing economic transition. Conversely, this research confirms that numerous factors in the Baltics proffer third-nation citizens a romantic imagination to work abroad, considered as “pull factors”. High-income countries have a massive demand for cheap labour in informal and insecure service sectors, like domestic, factory work, and prostitution because such positions are rarely filled by nationals, as highlighted by Hernandez *et al.*⁹⁸. Indeed, the Baltics are currently experiencing a shortfall of labour, such as the construction and manufacturing sector, and the service sector, demonstrating their dependence on external migrations and the deficiency of their economy⁹⁹. One news stated that a special flight was organised by the Chamber of Agriculture during the pandemic, to bring 170 Ukrainian workers to Estonia; since the local workforce is not interested in working in livestock or agriculture sectors, employers have no choices other than to take workers from outside Estonia¹⁰⁰. Accordingly, when individuals from the former-Soviet can fill low- and medium-skilled vacancies in various industries, the paper asserted that it is one of the solid factors triggering people’s decisions in immigrating.

In this connection, government immigration policies also play an imperative role, as they can grant for an enlargement in the rate of migration. While probing the labour legislation of the Baltics, this study observed they have gradually liberalized their policies to some extent for

⁹⁶ See <http://cbd.miniust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1505>

⁹⁷ Knight, C. R. (2017). *Human Trafficking: A Global Tragedy in Five Acts*. MSU Graduate Thesis 3168. P.76.

⁹⁸ Hernandez, D., & Rudolph, A. (2015). Modern day slavery: What drives human trafficking in Europe? *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 38(issue C), p.6.

⁹⁹ European Commission. (n.d.). *EURES. Living & Working - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania*. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?acro=lw&lang=en&catId=490&parentId=0&lang=en&app=4.6.0-brexite-build-0>

¹⁰⁰ Sein, K. E., & ERR.ee. (2020). Migrant workers from Ukraine arrive in Estonia. Retrieved from: <https://news.err.ee/1115444/migrant-workers-from-ukraine-arrive-in-estonia>

the admission of migrant workers. Although there is no evidence to prove visa liberalisation is firmly associated with THB, the author emphasised that policies favouring immigrants are one of the pull factors for third-nation citizens. For instance, in 2019, 66.6 thousand immigrants arrived in Lithuania for work, and 86 % of people satisfied the list of occupations lacking in Lithuania (they do not need permits for work); only the remaining 14% were employed after the issue of permits for work¹⁰¹. Obviously, the minimisation of administrative impediments for individuals from the regions concerned, stimulating immigration. In contrast, Baltics' employers keenly have migrant employees, particularly those foreigners who can fill seasonal work, and no need to receive a long-term visa to enter the EU. Summing up, although there is no absolute connection between THB and the liberalisation of labour legislation, it can be considered as catalysts to enhance immigration, and somehow indirectly escalates the possibilities of individuals falling as victims.

As prostitution and sex trafficking are firmly related phenomena. It is obscure to measure the demand for women's sexual services in Baltics, nevertheless, the author pointed out that the governments' legislation in this area is essential to explore. As reported previously, prostitution is legal and unregulated in Estonia; legal and regulated in Latvia; the sale of sexual services is generally prohibited in Lithuania. However, an acute question that should be answered is 'does legalized prostitution expand THB?'. Concerning this, Cho *et al.*, indicated, nations with legalized prostitution are associated with higher THB inflows than countries where prostitution is illicit; because it engenders an expansion of the prostitution market¹⁰². In this perspective, the author contended that prostitution is both legal in Estonia and Latvia, can be seen as one of the substantial reasons to advance the probability of sexual slavery. Contrarily, the author discovered that although prostitution is criminalized in Lithuania, a significant number of migrant women still work in the sex industry, falling victims to false employment opportunities. Therefore, this study upheld besides economic demand and liberalisation of legislation, other crucial factors driving immigrants' choices must be taken into account. To elucidate, Cho *et al.*, certified, democracies have a higher probability of maximized THB inflows than non-democratic countries¹⁰³. Accordingly, in the

¹⁰¹Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania. (2020). *Lithuania's Economic Development Scenario 2020–2023*. p.15, Retrieved from: https://finmin.lrv.lt/uploads/finmin/documents/files/LT_ver/Aktual%C5%ABs_valstyb%C4%97s_finans%C5%B3_duomenys/ERS_aprasymas_2020_kovas_EN.pdf

¹⁰² Cho, S.-Y., Dreher, A., & Neumayer, E. (2013). Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking? *World Development*, 41 (1), p.71

¹⁰³ Ibid.

next section, the paper would interpret to what extent political instability and desires for western values bring critical impacts on THB.

3.2. Political instability and human rights infringements

To begin with, the author professed that political instability and social unrest exacerbate the migration flow, including THB, since individuals are eager to flee from their homes in search of refuge or more secure lives. Any armed conflict may lead to a wide range of violations of human rights and freedoms. After all, complex turmoil with the participation of criminal groups, terrorists, etc. causes the destruction of law, order, and the absence of a functional legal system in its area of operation. This creates an environment ripe for THB, as well as strong “push factors” for migrants.

The TIP report evidence that Russia’s annexation of Crimea and ongoing military aggression in eastern Ukraine has displaced more than three million people, and this population is particularly vulnerable to exploitation¹⁰⁴. Critically, since the beginning of the crisis, the demographics of Ukrainian victims have transformed, including more urban, younger, and male victims exploited increasingly in forced labour and criminality, namely drug trafficking and couriers¹⁰⁵. Pertaining to this, Giedrė noticed that innumerable Ukrainian came to Lithuania, including refugees, since the breakout of conflicts¹⁰⁶. Moreover, the political crisis in Belarus has caused numerous Belarusians to flee their home, although the number of asylum seekers deteriorated due to the pandemic¹⁰⁷.

Despite that individuals may not be persecuted in their places of birth, concerns that limit people’s freedoms and human rights force them to migrate. Reportedly, especially in Transnistria (a breakaway region of Moldova), authorities engaged in the capricious arrest and detention of individuals with impunity, and even in some cases that authorities detaining civilians on fabricated charges without due process¹⁰⁸. As a result, the unfavourable situation

¹⁰⁴ The United States Department of State. (2020). *Trafficking in Persons Report Report*. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid: p.507-508.

¹⁰⁶ Blažytė, Giedrė. Personal interview. 10 Mar 2021.

Dr. Blažytė is a researcher at the Lithuanian Social Research Centre and Diversity Development Group. As a project executor and independent expert, she has been involved in different projects and migration research on the national and international level.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The United States Department of State. (2017). *Moldova Human Rights Report*. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/moldova/>

in every perspective of public life expounds that Transnistria became predominately a source region for THB¹⁰⁹. In this respect, this research underlined that a significant element of the migration systems outwards is human rights infringements.

Nowadays, many ex-Soviet states remain authoritarian regimes. Even though governments' legislations guarantee the protection of human rights, the implementations maintain poor and not in compliance with global standards. A classic example is that Belarus retains the merely European country to exercise the death penalty, and it does not fall under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, therefore, its nationals are despoiled of rights to address their claims to this authoritative institution. Furthermore, serious human rights encroachments also sustain commonplace in Uzbekistan. To exemplify, Article 120 of the Criminal Code, outlawing that consensual sexual intercourse between male individuals, with up to three years imprisonment¹¹⁰. The neighbouring to Uzbekistan nation of Turkmenistan also stipulates homosexual relations being criminalized, with up to two years' imprisonment, and 5 to 10 years if repeated, according to Article 135 of the criminal code¹¹¹. In brief, this paper detected that blatant discrimination and violation of human rights entail citizens to doubt their national cultural traditions and social taboo were in certain dimensions inferior to European values, reasonably "pushing them away" to search for the application of minimum standards and individual rights elsewhere.

By contrast, this paper noticed that the Baltics represent a remarkable exception regarding the post-Soviet transformations. Politically, instead of being the crisis-torn nations, the Baltics are acknowledged as consolidated democracies and citizen-friendly. In addition, political and civil rights are extensively respected for achieving a high level of integration with the EU and the West. Blumberg denoted that her clients once expressed "they came to Estonia due to its outstanding image, and they have heard abounding positive information about this democratic nation. They are inspired by the way its government treats citizens¹¹²". Blumberg further indicated that foreigners migrate to Estonia with pink glasses by thinking nothing perilous could occur¹¹³. Conclusively, just as Heerdink *et al.*, declared, victims are typically pulled by

¹⁰⁹ The United States Department of State. (2019). *Trafficking in Persons Report Report*. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

¹¹⁰ See <https://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/8931>

¹¹¹ See http://www.untuk.org/publications/legislation/ug_kod/

¹¹² Blumberg, Sirle. Personal interview. 19 Feb 2021

¹¹³ Ibid.

an idealized picture of the West, rather than being pushed to escape “the unlivable”¹¹⁴. Correspondingly, statistics displayed that 54% of Ukrainian respondents asserted they will never fall victim to THB, whilst only 4% assume there is a high possibility¹¹⁵.

The Baltics have embraced Western standards of human rights legislation and guaranteed individual rights. Although it is unavoidable to bear human rights issues, like any other nations, human rights abuses by the States barely happen. Even so, any investigations and legal processes in civil and criminal matters are universally impartial and free. Giedrė elaborated that due to political prosecution, the number of asylum seekers from Tajikistan to Lithuania has advanced evidently, highlighting they may consider Lithuania is a safe choice¹¹⁶. Succinctly, this research attested that the Baltics proffer post-Soviet nations a Western model, which can be seen as momentous “pulling factors” for immigrants.

In summary, based on push forces of political instability and human rights infringements in ex-Soviet states, as well as pull factors of freedom and citizen-friendly in the Baltics, the author professed that it is reasonable that foreigners are eager to migrate. For victims, the Baltic states stand out in a volatile region as prosperous, relatively liberal, and stable nations. Therefore, the author asserted that differential characteristics of the source and the destination nation contribute to motivation to migrate.

3.3. Personal willingness to migrate

When potential migrants consider host nations, the author inferred that similarities of languages, history, cultures and geographical distance are significant criteria to examine. Firstly, from the language’s perspective, Russian is the major language in all parts of the Soviet Union, which is still the formal language recognised by governments in Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan till today. Pavlenko indicated that in Belarus, Belarusian merely holds a symbolic function, whilst Russian functions as the de facto main

¹¹⁴ Dettmeijer-Vermeulen, C. E., Kragten-Heerdink, S. L. J., & Korf, D. J. (2018). More Than Just “Pushing and Pulling”: Conceptualizing Identified Human Trafficking in the Netherlands. *Crime and Delinquency, Volume 64* (Issue 13). p.1765-1789

¹¹⁵ International Organisation for Migration. (2017). *Survey On Migration And Human Trafficking In Ukraine*. Retrieved from: https://iom.org.ua/sites/default/files/migration_and_human_trafficking_in_ukraine_eng.pdf

¹¹⁶ Blažytė, Giedrė. Personal interview. 10 Mar 2021.

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language; the local population also prefers Russian-language literature, TV, and print media, causing Belarus a refuge for Russian-speaking immigrants from other ex-Soviet states¹¹⁷. On the flip side, despite many governments having enforced regulations to alleviate public use of Russian, it has functioned as an international lingua franca, and language of interethnic communication in other former-Soviet republics. To depict, the Ukrainian government adopted the Law “On ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language” in 2019; the purpose is to magnify the role of the Ukrainian language in state-building, as well as reinforcing the territorial integrity and national security of Ukraine¹¹⁸. Nonetheless, it is noted that Ukraine still has the greatest Russian-speaking population outside of Russia, and Russian has a high status among not only the older generation, but also youth, particularly in eastern Ukraine¹¹⁹.

By the same token, Baltics as the destination nations, have a related phenomenon. The level of integration on national language knowledge among Russian-speakers is worst in Latvia and best in Lithuania. In Latvia, only 58.2% of the population have Latvian as their first language, whereas Estonia accounts for 67.3%, and Lithuania represents 82%¹²⁰. Undoubtedly, this research observed that the Russian-speaking population sustains widely in every post-Soviet state nowadays. Blumberg further elaborated that when she met her clients, they often communicated fluently in Russian and even the THB helpline also offers the Russian language option¹²¹. Therefore, while identifying factors attracting immigrants to relocate to the Baltics, this study established important insights into the language similarity. Certainly, when immigrants can comfortably speak the same language in the destination nations as their home countries, there will be no linguistic frictions and communication problems, then blending in with local life seems not challenging anymore.

Since the process of adapting to a new society is closely associated with the change in individual psychology, the author proposed that any cultural obstacles can profoundly affect immigrants’ decisions. For instance, after moving to the Baltics, immigrants have abandoned their original jobs, and are far from relatives and friends, thus, they alienate from the old

¹¹⁷ Pavlenko, A. (2008). Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries: Language Revival, Language Removal, and Sociolinguistic Theory. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11(3-4), p. 275-314.

¹¹⁸ See <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2704-19?lang=en#Text>

¹¹⁹ Pavlenko, A. (2008). Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries: Language Revival, Language Removal, and Sociolinguistic Theory. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11(3-4), p. 275-314.

¹²⁰ Best, M. (2013). The Ethnic Russian Minority: A Problematic Issue in the Baltic States. *Verges: Germanic & Slavic Studies in Review*, Vol 2(No 1), p. 33-41.

¹²¹ Blumberg, Sirle. Personal interview. 19 Feb 2021

relationship, and lost the support of the social values they are familiar with, which may further lead to the self-isolation and emergence of mental illness. As Bhugra *et al.*, revealed that for immigrants, a sense of alienation may occur if the cultural and social characteristics of an individual differ from those of the surrounding population, whereas a sense of belonging tends to occur if the individual and surrounding population have similar cultural and social characteristics, consequently, it is significant to balance between interaction patterns and cultural identity¹²². Furthermore, racism and harassment are other unavoidable challenges. To recapitulate, if individuals can overcome the acculturation process, then it will result in positive mental health. When the author applies this theory to THB, it is logical that immigrants are willing to relocate to the Baltics, as the post-Soviet states are shaped by a common Soviet history, sharing similar cultural patterns. Therefore, the author identified that similarity of cultures can encourage immigration movement.

Geographic proximity also plays a vital role in advancing migrant flows. As Hernandez *et al.*, acknowledged that shorter journeys minimized costs and risks, consequently, wealthier nations geographically closer are preferred as destinations for migration¹²³. Besides, Giedrė stated that the Baltics are the closest EU nations for individuals from other post-Soviet republics, which is rational they could be an option¹²⁴. Interestingly, the statistics displaying the number of Ukrainians travelling to Estonia enlarged outstandingly due to direct WizzAir flights from Kyiv to Tallinn¹²⁵. In this regard, this paper proved that immigrants select their host nations also based on geographic adjacency. Collectively, the studies presented thus far provide evidence that languages, cultures, history, and geographical distance, along with economic, political, social and legal factors, have considerable impacts on the immigration streams and the lucrative business of THB.

¹²² Becker, M. A., & Bhugra, D. (2005). Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity. *World psychiatry : official journal of the World Psychiatric Association*, 4(1), p. 18–24.

¹²³ Hernandez, D., & Rudolph, A. (2015). Modern day slavery: What drives human trafficking in Europe? *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 38 (issue C), p. 118-139.

¹²⁴ Blažytė, Giedrė. Personal interview. 10 Mar 2021.

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¹²⁵ European Migration Network & Luik, E. (2018). *EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum*. Retrieved from: <https://www.emn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/emn-annual-report-on-migration-and-asylum-estonia-2018.pdf>

CONCLUSION

As Castelli unveiled that migration is always the result of a complex combination of macro-, meso- and micro- factors, the former acting at the society level and the latter acting at the family or even individual level¹²⁶. As a result, it is impossible to clarify with absolute exactitude why migrants come to the Baltics as no exhaustive evidence tracks all of the reasons. Nevertheless, this thesis aimed to fundamentally shed light on the underdeveloped research field regarding THB in the Baltics, and provide a glimpse of future research on investigating factors impacting immigration patterns. Given the current realities in the Baltics, this research logically concluded that push impetus — economic, political and social realities pushing individuals to deviate from their home — coupled with the pull factors in the Baltics, contribute to a more alluring place to live.

Explicitly, the acknowledged push factors affecting those who are vulnerable include economic crises, social inequality, lack of opportunities, political instability, discrimination, human rights infringements, and the wider processes of transformation. In this context, the push factors from the Baltics provide foreign victims ideal illusions to live in a prosperous place where they will have high incomes, great employment opportunities, as well as personal rights and freedom are being protected. In other words, the push and pull model displays how the world is divided into two distinct parts after integrating dissimilar conditions. These findings also suggest that generally, migrant victims are simultaneously being pushed and pulled into the Baltics through various channels, and being exploited diversely. Consequently, returning to the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this study, the results of this investigation demonstrate that the Baltics' positive development in the political, economic, and social field, has made a profound impact on the arousal of the phenomenon of THB in the region, which shifted their roles progressively from the countries of origin to destinations.

Furthermore, this study makes several noteworthy contributions to the current debate in the field. Firstly, it enhances our understanding of THB issues in the Baltics, as well as the linkages between positive development within the state and criminology activities across international boundaries. Additionally, since the research with the Baltics as the focus is

¹²⁶ Castelli, F. (2018). Drivers of migration: why do people move? *Journal of Travel Medicine*, Volume 25 (Issue 1).

exceptionally underdeveloped, this paper will lay a foundation for future studies, providing important implications and insights. Nevertheless, there is abundant room for further progress in revealing the true picture of THB. For instance, it would be useful to further explore the push and pull factors from the victims' angles, as it might demonstrate absolutely different findings and observations. Moreover, if researchers understand local languages, better information and interpretation could also be presented. On the other hand, it would be worth conducting a more nuanced academic investigation on how the Baltics' governments combat THB or to what extent the Baltic states' legislation has addressed the issue of THB.

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Appendix 1. The Interview Questionnaire

Beginning

1. Thanks to the respondents for participating in the interview.
2. Can you please introduce yourself?
3. Describe how you are associated with human trafficking in your daily work?

Main Questions

1. What is the current trend of human trafficking in your country?
2. The Baltics have always been a source country for human trafficking, but during recent years, it has also become a destination country. How did that happen in your opinion, regarding the situation of your country? What do you think about these changes?
3. Which nationality is the most common to see in foreign victims? What do you think about this? Why?
4. What types of industries are involved with trafficking in your country?
5. What methods do traffickers use to recruit their foreign victims?
6. In your opinion, what factors push foreign victims from third nations to be trafficked to your country? Why?
7. If you have experiences in working with victims, can you please share some of their stories if it is possible?

Conclusion

1. Do you have anything else to add?
2. Thanks to the participants again for attending the interview.

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