

CIVITTA

EVALUATION OF THE FUNCTIONALITY AND RELEVANCE TO THE NEEDS OF THE TARGET GROUP OF THE TRANSNATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS DEVELOPED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES

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ABBREVIATIONS

Baltic Sea States	For the purposes of this assessment, 10 countries are considered to be Baltic Sea States: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden
THB	Trafficking in human beings
EU	European Union
GRETA	Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
HOF–BSR	Project “Paving the Way for the Harmonized Operational Framework in the Baltic Sea Region”
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Contracting Authority	Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia
TRM	Transnational Referral Mechanism
Specialists	Representatives of the public sector and non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea States involved in preventing and/or mitigating trafficking in human beings.
TRM-BSR	A common identifier for the website https://bsr-trm.com/ , which brings together information on the TRM and national contact details.
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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SUMMARY

The evaluation analyses the Transnational Referral Mechanism have been developed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (TRM-BSR)¹ according to six OECD criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, impact, sustainability) to enable the Council of the Baltic Sea States to make evidence-based decisions on the further development of the TRM-BSR. The TRM-BSR was launched in 2018 with the aim of promoting coordinated action in the Baltic Sea Region in cases of trafficking in human beings.

The evaluation included a literature review of studies, policy documents and legislation, an online survey for professionals, two focus group discussions with representatives of non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea countries and separately with professionals from public authorities, and 20 semi-structured interviews with professionals.

The data obtained show that the use of the TRM-BSR is currently not widespread in the Baltic Sea States, as professionals were not aware of the existence of this mechanism, and other channels are used to seek the necessary information to support victims of trafficking in human beings in the referral process. The infrequent use of the TRM-BSR is also explained by survey data showing that victims of trafficking are more likely to come from the EU's eastern borders and the Balkan countries than from the Baltic Sea states. The experts interviewed stress the need for a mechanism for cooperation between institutions and organisations within a country and between different countries, so that the responsibilities and duties of the parties involved are separated and clearly defined. Given the changing nature and trends of trafficking in human beings, it is important that the tools available to professionals are flexible and up-to-date with the current situation and needs.

When assessing the TRM-BSR according to the OECD criteria, a common feature emerges that the number of users of the TRM-BSR depends on the popularity of the mechanism among practitioners and the practical application of the mechanism as it competes with internal mechanisms or procedures in the Baltic Sea region.

The authors of the evaluation recommend that improvements to the TRM-BSR should be made first and then its promotion to the relevant target groups should begin. To make the tool more widely accepted, human and financial resources need to be mobilised.

Following the recommendations on expanding the possibilities of the TRM-BSR as a tool - adding more information, new sections, new cooperation countries and partners, new users and target groups (not only specialists) - the TRM-BSR could potentially become an effective tool for coordinated action between the Baltic Sea States and beyond, ensuring cooperation at both national and international levels in cases of trafficking in human beings.

The evaluation was funded by the project CAPE "Competence building, Assistance provision and Prosecution of labour Exploitation cases in the Baltic Sea region" (2019/02). Project implementation is co-funded by the CBSS Project Support Facility (PSF), Ministry of the Interior of Latvia and Joutseno Reception Centre in Finland.



¹ Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region // <https://bsr-trm.com/>

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation on the Transnational Cooperation Mechanism for the Referral of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (available at: <https://bsr-trm.com/>) was prepared by SIA "Civitta Latvija", with the assistance of additional expert Zane Melķe (researcher at the Diaspora and Migration Research Centre, University of Latvia). The evaluation has been carried out in accordance with the order of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia in accordance with procurement number IeM NVA 2022/110 and on the basis of the procurement contract signed by both parties on 4 October 2022.

The **OBJECTIVE OF THE EVALUATION** is to assess the functionality of the Transnational Referral Mechanism (<https://bsr-trm.com/>), developed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States in order to make evidence-based decisions on its further development, and its relevance to the needs of the target group .

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

- 1) Collect information on the TRM-BSR and similar mechanisms, both transnational referral mechanisms and national referral mechanisms of the Baltic Sea States;
- 2) Develop an evaluation methodology including surveys, discussions and semi-structured interviews;
- 3) Collect and analyse the necessary data using empirical methods;
- 4) Draw conclusions and make recommendations for future TRM-BSR activities.

METHODS USED IN THE EVALUATION:

- 1) Document analysis;
- 2) Online survey for professionals;
- 3) Focus group discussions;
- 4) Semi-structured interviews;
- 5) Case studies;
- 6) SWOT analysis.

The **EVALUATION RESULT** is a report containing an assessment and recommendations for future TRM-BSR developments.

The evaluation has been carried out between 4 October 2022 and 30 November 2022.

The content of the evaluation is the sole responsibility of the experts who prepared it, and it does not represent the opinion of the contracting authority - the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia, nor of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. At the same time for the purposes of transferability, it should be highlighted that in the public versions of the report, the sections 1.2. and 1.3. on the definition and scope of national and transnational referral mechanisms (i.e. sections that does not enclose analysis) was drafted together with the Ministry of the Interior of Latvia.

We thank everyone who gave their views in surveys, interviews and discussions.

1. CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

1.1. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS (THB) is the process by which persons are brought into or maintained in an exploitative situation for economic gain. This is a serious crime under international law and a violation of human rights.² THB can affect different groups of people, regardless of their gender, age and place of residence, and takes many forms (prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, forced criminal acts, removal of organs, also marriages of convenience, etc.). THB is an international problem involving almost every country in the world, either as a target country or as a country of origin.³

In 2017, the International Labour Organization published the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery study, which compiled data on THB around the world. By 2016, it was estimated that there were 24.9 million victims of human trafficking worldwide. The study shows that THB occurs in all regions of the world, while the types of THB may vary according to local and national circumstances⁴. The study divides THB into two types: forced labour (20.1 million victims) and sexual exploitation (4.8 million victims). While in forced labour the number of women and men is similar, in sexual exploitation 99% of victims are girls and women.

The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020 analyses THB trends in different parts of the world. Unlike the study of the International Labour Organization, this report shows that in 2018, 50% of THB is sexual exploitation and 38% is forced labour⁵. 2018 has also seen a new trend of increasing numbers of male victims, one of the explanations being the forced importation of narcotic drugs into the UK.

In 2022, the EU issued its annual report on migration, which also includes data on victims of trafficking in Europe in 2021. In Europe, the highest number of identified victims was recorded in France (1251) and Italy (508)⁶.

STATISTICS IN THE BALTIC SEA COUNTRIES Summarising the statistics on victims of trafficking in human beings in the Baltic Sea States for the period 2017-2021, it can be concluded that the highest number of identified victims was in Germany - although precise data for 2021 were not available at the time of the assessment, Germany has identified 2174 victims between 2017 and 2020 (in previous years, an average of 544 victims were identified in Germany in one year). The second highest number of identified victims is in Finland, where 1009 victims were identified between 2017 and 2021. While in Germany the annual number of victims has been similar in recent years, in Finland there is an increasing trend (from 127 in 2017 to 243 in 2020). It should be noted that in Finland, the statistics on victims include clients who have been identified in the National Assistance System (while in Finland, victims can also be identified by the police, border guards, courts). Sweden has reported the third highest number of victims (955 over 5 years), followed by Poland with 814 over 5 years.

Looking at the countries mentioned above, there have been challenges identified in data collection, which leave an impact on statistics on trafficking in human beings. Therefore, when interpreting data for this evaluation, it is important to consider some statistical issues:

² Baltijas jūras valstu padomes Darba grupa cīņai pret cilvēku tirdzniecību (2019). Glosārijs. Cilvēku tirdzniecība.

³ A national information resource on the topic of fighting trafficking in human beings and current events in Latvia. Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/kas-ir->

⁴ International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation (2017). Global estimates of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage. Available:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf

⁵ UNODC (2020). Global Report on Trafficking in persons 2020. Available: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_15jan_web.pdf

⁶ European Union (2022). Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021. Statistical Annex. Available: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/14760013/KS-01-22-123-EN-N.pdf/283e6304-acb8-cde1-a09c-6f7a55e7241a>

- 1) Data unavailability - There is no common data tracking system at the EU level and data is not always published at the national level, including all identified victims from the public sector, service providers, support systems or other institutions, which would provide insight into how many and which victims are identified as victims of trafficking in human beings in the country as a whole;
- 2) The definitions and methodologies used are not internationally comparable - the terms "victim", "identified victim", "potential victim", "person believed to be a victim" are used interchangeably. Depending on the system and rules of support provided by the country (e.g. whether a criminal case is required to receive support), who the country considers a victim also varies, so simple numbers without in-depth analysis can give a misleading interpretation.

The difference between the number of identified and potential victims is illustrated by the example of Estonia: the number of identified victims in Estonia in 2021 was 31, while the number of potential victims reached 417 in the same year. When comparing national statistics, it is important to take these nuances into account, as the statistics are not actually comparable. A summary of the statistics can be found in Table 1, and attention should be paid to each country's explanation of the type of data collected.

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF VICTIMS AND THEIR RECORDING CONDITIONS IN EACH COUNTRY

COUNTRIES	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TOTAL
Denmark (identified victims)	98	97	64	64	68	391
Estonia (identified victims and persons believed to be victims)	12	14	67	34	417	544
Finland (clients who have received any available support in the national system)	127	163	229	247	243	1009
Germany (identified victims)	669	503	494	508	n/a	2174
Iceland (identified victims)	7	9	7	9	5	37
Latvia (identified victims)	25	27	39	48	61	200
Lithuania (identified victims)	60	44	36	24	26	190
Norway (identified victims)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Poland (identified victims)	155	262	221	82	94	814
Sweden (identified victims)	212	213	162	131	237	955

Source: US State Department reports, 2018 - 2022

In Latvia, an average of 35 victims were identified per year between 2017 and 2020, increasing to 61 victims per year in 2021. Since 2017, the number of victims reported in Latvia has increased every year. The total number of identified victims in Latvia between 2017 and 2021 has reached 200. Similar numbers of victims have been identified in Lithuania and Estonia.

In 2022, GRETA published a new report on trafficking in human beings online and through technology, highlighting the rapid involvement of adults in forced labour⁷. Although at the time of the assessment there no precise data for 2022 were available, the report indicates that forced labour has become the main form of THB in European countries, with 50% of identified victims of labour exploitation in Belgium, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

When looking at the nationalities of victims of trafficking in 2021, trends vary between countries. In Germany, the most frequently identified individuals are from EU countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Germany and Hungary) and neighbouring countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina). No data are available for the last 3 years on the nationality of identified victims in Poland, but in 2017 and 2018, the most frequently identified were Polish nationals, followed by nationals from North Korea, Ukraine, Vietnam, Romania, Germany. In Finland, the most frequently identified victims in recent years are from Africa and the Middle East (Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Nepal) and also from Finland. Note that Finnish statistics include all people who have received assistance, regardless of their official status in the criminal case. Table 2 summarises the most frequent nationalities of victims in each country between 2019 and 2021. Estonia, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Poland are not included in the table, as data for these countries were not available at the time of the evaluation.

TABLE 2. TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF IDENTIFIED VICTIMS BETWEEN 2019 AND 2021

COUNTRIES	MOST POPULAR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN
Denmark	Nigeria, Thailand, Morocco, Romania, Vietnam
Finland	Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Cameroon
Germany	Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary
Latvia	Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India
Sweden	Nigeria, Romania, Bulgaria, Thailand

Source: Data provided by the Contracting Authority

Even though the statistics on victims are ambiguous, as there is no common approach or definition of which victims are included in these statistics, it is clear that the most frequently identified countries of origin of victims identified in the Baltic Sea States extend beyond countries that are included in the TRM-BSR, which is the subject of the evaluation.

1.2. DEFINITION OF NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISMS

There is no formal definition of national or transnational referral mechanisms in EU law.⁸ At the same time, these terms are widely used in anti-trafficking policy. For example, the Council of Europe Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) often assesses the presence of NRM when evaluating country

⁷ GRETA (2022). Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings. Council of Europe. Available: <https://rm.coe.int/online%E2%80%93and%E2%80%93technology%E2%80%93facilitated%E2%80%93trafficking%E2%80%93in%E2%80%93human%E2%80%93beings%E2%80%93full%E2%80%93rep/1680a73e49>

⁸ Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA // <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011L0036>

compliance with the Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings.⁹ The NRM is also a subject that is assessed by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings during country evaluations.¹⁰ The EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021 - 2025 has defined the creation of the European referral mechanism as one of its aims and invites Member States to strengthen their national referral mechanisms.¹¹ Thus, it could be concluded that, even though there is no legal international definition of the NRM or TRM, in practice these terms are widely used, mainly in various guidelines, when referring to cooperation to assist THB victims.

The most frequently used definition of NRM was invented by the OSCE/ODIHR, which defined the mechanism as a *“a co-operative framework through which state actors fulfil their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons, co-ordinating their efforts in a strategic partnership with civil society”*¹² in their 2004 handbook. In the second edition of the same handbook, which was published in 2022, OSCE/ODIHR elaborated that the *“NRM essentially concerns the process of identifying and referring victims of trafficking for assistance, while ensuring respect for the human rights of the persons concerned. The NRM concept therefore links the protection of trafficked persons’ rights with efforts to secure criminal sanctions against the perpetrators of trafficking, while ensuring strong victim protection mechanisms. The rights that should be protected under an NRM are broad and include non-discrimination, legal assistance, data protection, privacy, informed consent, access to housing, healthcare, social and medical assistance, recovery and reflection periods, temporary or permanent residency, compensation, asylum and protection from unsafe return to countries of origin, among others.”*

As seen in the definition, there are several elements or steps that are part of any referral mechanism: identification, protection, short-term and long-term assistance, criminal justice. These steps can be divided further into more steps or combined into fewer steps in national referral mechanisms or guidelines.

When it comes to the formalisation of the NRM in national systems in EU countries, the results of the European Commission study support the conclusions that, at the national level, a majority of countries have some cooperation mechanisms aimed at early identification of, assistance to and support for victims of THB. These take the form of a formal or informal NRM, although in some Member States, the cooperation is very informal and largely based on the engagement of individual professionals who maintain working relations.¹³ Similar conclusions can be attributed to the countries of the Baltic Sea Region, because some countries have a formal referral mechanism while others have national systems or other mechanisms equivalent to the referral mechanism. For example, Sweden has formalised their referral procedure in a guideline,¹⁴ while in Finland there is no formal national referral mechanism, but assistance and support is ensured through the National Assistance System.¹⁵

Establishing an NRM is important for another referral process – the TRM, which includes the same elements and principles of the NRM, but is tailored for cross-border referrals. As described in the methodology of the International Center for Migration Policy Developments (ICMPD), the TRM *“is a co-operative agreement for the cross-border comprehensive assistance and/or transfer of identified or potential trafficked persons. A TRM links all stages of the referral process from the initial screening, through formal identification and assistance, to the voluntary assisted return, the social inclusion, and the civil and criminal proceedings. It is based on the co-operation between governmental institutions, intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organisations of countries of origin, transit and*

⁹ For example, country monitoring // <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/country-monitoring-work>

¹⁰ Country visit reports by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings // <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/107636>

¹¹ EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021- 2025 // <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0171&qid=1651774224298>

¹² T. Kröger, J. Malkoc, B.H. Uhl, National Referral Mechanisms. Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons. A Practical Handbook, OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, 2004, p. 15

¹³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, Gregulska, J., Healy, C., Petreska, E., et al., Study on reviewing the functioning of Member States’ National and Transnational Referral Mechanisms, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2837/697914>

¹⁴ Available // https://www.nmstverige.se/sites/default/files/ta_sgea_national_referral_mechanism_191203.pdf

¹⁵ About the system // https://www.ihmiskauppa.fi/en/information_on_helping_victims/assistance_system_for_victims_of_human_trafficking

destination of the assisted trafficked persons. Through the TRM, state actors of different countries fulfil their obligations to promote and protect the human rights of trafficked persons.”¹⁶

Based on this definition, the ICMPD proposes five steps for the transnational referral mechanism, variations of which are also included in similar guidelines, such as TACT and TRM-BSR, which are described in more detail further in the text.

FIGURE 1. 5 STEPS OF THE TRANSNATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM



The IOM has launched the TACT platform¹⁷, which presents a model for an transnational referral mechanism and was created within the framework of a project. This tool helps to enforce victims' rights throughout the process, especially when transnational cooperation is needed. TACT defines the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder at a national level and connects stakeholders in countries of origin and destination. This project is aimed at victims of trafficking in human beings from Albania, Morocco and Ukraine, to assist their safe return home from countries such as France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain. These specific countries of origin have been selected because they were defined as priority countries in 2009 (Action Oriented Paper).

Within the framework of another project, RAVOT-EUR¹⁸, another TRM was created, covering cooperation between Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Hungary. This TRM also uses the ICMPD guideline on TRM elements and the content of each element.

These two TRMs are only part of projects that could be identified during the evaluation, because information was publicly available. Most likely, there is a number of other TRMs that encompass two or more countries or even regions, but these were not detected due to language barriers or they were not available publicly. Besides these mechanisms, there are also alternative measures through IOM, national agencies, police channels, embassies and consular departments, etc. This, in fact, may have contributed further to the confusion among states and authorities on what an NRM entails, and what are its aims.

1.3. TRANSNATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION

To promote common understanding and coordinated action, the TRM of the Baltic Sea Region, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine was established within the frameworks of the project "Paving the Way for the Harmonised Operational Framework in the Baltic Sea Region" (hereinafter - HOF-BSR).¹⁹ The TRM-BSR is intended as the bench mark for the macro-regional cooperation that would boost more coherent and harmonised approach when referring victims between countries.

The TRM-BRS contains several measures which are to be carried out in order to ensure efficient and secure referral of persons who may have been subjected to THB and to offer them support and protection. This TRM-BSR is primarily intended for professionals who are likely to identify potential victims and in that way are participating in the support process, for example, the police, social services, migration agencies, NGOs,

¹⁶ International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2010). Guidelines for the Development of a Transnational Referral Mechanism for Trafficked Persons in Europe: TRM-EU.

¹⁷ Available at: <http://www.iomfrance.org/tact/>

¹⁸ About the project: <http://www.ravot-eur.eu/en/transnational-referral-mechanism>

¹⁹ About the project // <https://si.se/en/projects-granted-funding/hof-bsr-paving-the-way-for-the-harmonised-operational-framework-in-the-baltic-sea-region/>

shelters, lawyers, health care providers and psychologists. The information on the website is divided into the following topics:

- 1 – A presumed victim of Trafficking in Human Beings is identified
- 2 – National Point of Contact / Initial Referral
- 3 – Formal identification of a victim
- 4 – Reflection/ Recovery period
- 5 – Available urgent assistance
- 6 – Return process
- 7 – Long-term assistance²⁰

Under each of the sections, professionals can find necessary information and the contact information of counterparts in each country. The information and referral procedures are easily explained by using charts and brief comprehensive information.

At the same time, although the establishment of such mechanisms is necessary, it must be constantly updated and adapted so that it is relevant to existing situations. As time passes, new additions and adaptations are needed. On top of this, it is important that the tool remains useful and relevant for professionals, to ensure that it has a positive impact on transnational referrals of victims. Therefore, any changes to the tool should be planned in an evidence-based manner to tackle and address the needs of professionals. To accomplish this, it was decided to carry out an evaluation of the TRM-BSR, the results of which would be contributing in further developments. It is necessary to better understand how relevant the TRM-BSR is, whether professionals use it and in what situations, how effective and efficient the mechanism is and how coherent it is with various national and international systems. Finally, to avoid the situation where the TRM becomes an outcome of the project that is no longer relevant after some time, the sustainability and continued maintenance of the TRM-BSR is another dimension that has been included in the evaluation.

²⁰ About TRM // <https://bsr-trm.com/about-trm/>

2. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

2.1. OECD EVALUATION CRITERIA AND THEIR ROLE IN THE EVALUATION

The evaluation uses the OECD criteria - relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability²¹. These criteria and the questions they raise help to assess the role and impact of the TRM-BSR today and the need for it in the future. The OECD criteria provide a standardised framework according to which a given project/strategy/tool (in this case, TRM-BSR) can be assessed.

The use of common criteria is useful to compare several instruments²², such as mechanisms, with each other. The OECD Guidelines emphasise the judicious use of criteria to ensure that they are appropriate to the purpose of the assessment.

In order to be able to assess the TRM-BSR according to the given criteria, questions have been defined for each so that the fulfilment of the criterion can be assessed as accurately as possible.

TABLE 3 TRM-BSR EVALUATION CRITERIA AND THEIR EXPLANATION

CRITERION	KEY QUESTION	EXPLANATION FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING
RELEVANCE	Is the mechanism doing its job? How does the TRM-BSR address the needs of the target group?	Assess the extent to which the objectives and design of the mechanism are relevant to its target group, and whether it continues to perform its tasks even if external conditions change.
EFFECTIVENESS	How effective is the TRM-BSR? Is the mechanism achieving its objectives?	Determine whether the TRM-BSR is considered effective, whether the mechanism assists in work and whether it improves the procedure for transferring victims between different countries.
EFFICIENCY	How well has the resource been used?	Determine how widespread the use of the TRM-BSR is among professionals, whether there are alternatives to the TRM-BSR and how they differ. Understand whether it is seen as a useful tool by professionals and how its utility can be improved.
IMPACT	What is the impact of the TRM-BSR?	Clarify the direct and indirect impact of the TRM-BSR on the target group, and other involved parties. Understand how the impact of the TRM-BSR can be increased, based on the respondents' previous experience in their field.
COHERENCE	What is the role of the TRM-BSR in transnational referral?	Clarify whether the existing TRM-BSR is comprehensible and whether the TRM-BSR has been established in line with the transnational referral practice of victims and with the general

²¹ OECD (2021). Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully. Available: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/applying-evaluation-criteria-thoughtfully-543e84ed-en.htm#:~:text=Relevance%2C%20coherence%2C%20effectiveness%2C%20efficiency,in%20international%20development%20co%2Doperation>

²² Ibid.

	What is the coherence with national approaches and the EU regulatory framework? How well does the mechanism align with other mechanisms?	regulatory framework of the European Union.
SUSTAINABILITY	What is the TRM-BSR sustainable? Are the benefits of the mechanism sustainable?	Determine the sustainability and future continuation of TRM-BSR activities. Assess the benefits already achieved and those yet to be achieved, analyse their capacity to continue in the long term and make recommendations to ensure and improve sustainability.

Source: SIA "Civitta Latvija" evaluation

The OECD criteria and the questions derived from them are important for the design of the interview and survey questions during the evaluation. In some cases, the OECD guidelines allow for the use of only some criteria, but for this assessment, all six criteria were used in order to make the scope of the assessment as broad as possible.

In addition to questions directly related to the criteria, respondents were also asked about their experiences, needs and observations, and about general practice in the field of trafficking in human beings in the respondent's country. In this way, the authors of the evaluation gained in-depth information on both national mechanisms and transnational cooperation.

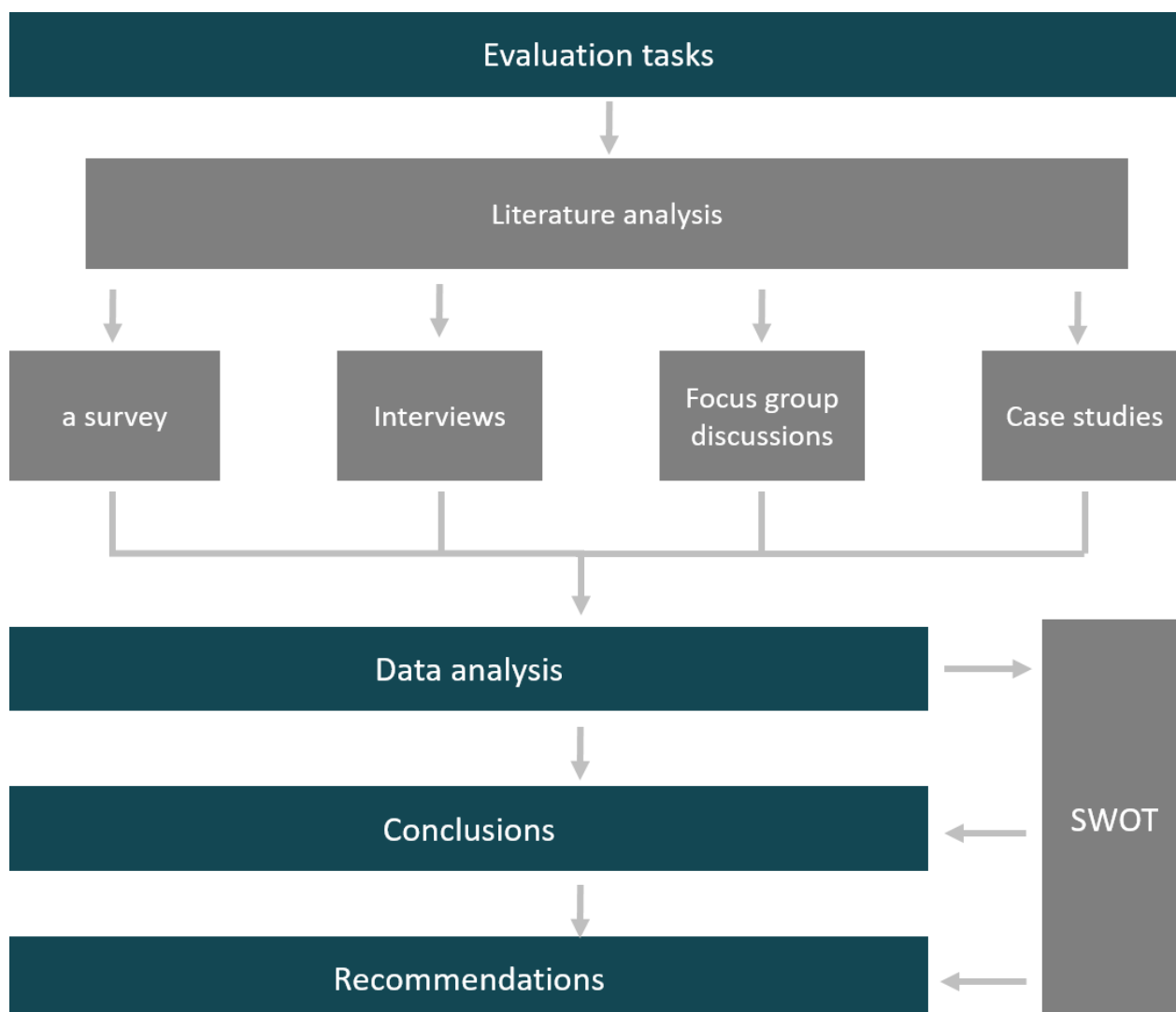
2.2. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE EVALUATION

The essence of this evaluation is the collection and analysis of various data to assess whether the TRM-BSR is fit for purpose and meets the needs of its target group, whether it is effective and efficient, and whether there is scope for scaling up. Additionally, the evaluation is used to determine the impact of the TRM-BSR on the direct target group, and its coherence and sustainability.

The design of the evaluation includes the identification of tasks, their sequence, the assessment of data and data collection methods, and a range of analytical methods used for the evaluation.

The evaluation has used reliable data from a variety of sources, properly analysed, to produce a high quality result. It includes a clear logic chain between data, analysis and conclusions. The final stage of the evaluation makes recommendations for the future of the TRM-BSR. The stages in the development of the assessment are shown graphically in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. EVALUATION FLOWCHART



Source: SIA “Civitta Latvija” evaluation

The **MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION** are publicly available documents, information provided by service providers from countries in the Baltic Sea region, interviews with experts, an online survey and focus group discussions. The evaluation is based on methodological triangulation, examining and comparing information from several data sources and using several data extraction and analysis methods. The evaluation analyses qualitative and quantitative data.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS. The evaluation has taken into account existing development planning documents and legislation to ensure that the proposals in the assessment are up-to-date. As the TRM-BSR covers 10 countries, the evaluation highlights examples of good practice from other countries that could potentially have an impact on the TRM-BSR. The assessment analyses existing studies and guidelines in this field, such

as Gregulska, J. et al. (2020),²³ ICMPD (2009),²⁴ OSCE/ODIHR (2022),²⁵ Semprebón & Johansson (2021)²⁶, as well as documents issued by the Council of Europe and the European Commission on trafficking in human beings. Previous assessments of other countries' referral mechanisms were also included in the analysis.

ONLINE SURVEY. An online survey was created for professionals in the Baltic Sea countries who work with victims on a daily basis. In total, about 200 respondents were asked to complete the survey and the average response rate was expected to be 20-30%, or about 40-60 completed surveys. The survey data was analysed quantitatively to understand users' attitudes towards the TRM-BSR. Open-ended questions contained in the survey were included in the analysis as well. At the end of the survey, each respondent had the opportunity to enter their email if they wished to participate in the focus group discussion or an interview.

FOCUS GROUP. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) with experts from the Baltic Sea countries were organised during the evaluation: one with public sector employees, the second with members of the non-governmental sector. Both FGDs addressed the same questions, the answers to which provided in-depth insight integral to the assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact and sustainability of the TRM-BSR. The groups involved representatives from different countries to ensure the widest possible scope and diversity of views. Before the FGDs, all participants were asked to visit <https://bsr-trm.com/> independently. Given the international composition of the participants and their different locations, the FGDs were held remotely.

INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS. A total of 20 interviews with representatives from the Baltic Sea countries were conducted. Qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions are mainly used in research where the purpose of the study is to better understand people's lives, experiences, behaviour, emotions²⁷. The interviews are not intended to provide data that can be analysed quantitatively. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative methods are used to answer the question "why?", to understand people's motivations, perceptions and experiences in a more in-depth way, for which questionnaires are not suitable. In such interviews, respondents or informants are seen as meaning-makers rather than merely passive sources of information, as the main purpose of the conversation is to elicit interpretations rather than concrete facts²⁸. This evaluation uses semi-structured interviews in which the respondent is asked a set of questions based on pre-established guidelines, supplemented where necessary by newly emerging relevant themes or issues highlighted by the respondent²⁹. This type of qualitative interview is an appropriate method for obtaining the facts of interest and provides more insight into the respondent's experiences, opinions and attitudes on different processes³⁰, combining the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews. The guidelines developed in advance help guide the interview, while providing flexibility to allow respondents to add to their narrative.

CASE STUDIES. Case studies are used to better understand other existing mechanisms in different countries and to identify their opportunities and risks. It allows for the identification of good practices, lessons learned and the impact of external factors on the final outcome. Unlike quantitative analysis, which seeks

²³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, Gregulska, J., Healy, C., Petreska, E., et al., Study on reviewing the functioning of Member States' National and Transnational Referral Mechanisms, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2837/697914>

²⁴ Liu, G. (2017) 'National Referral Mechanisms for Victims of Human Trafficking: Deficiencies and Future Development', in McAuliffe, M. and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners) (2017) Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, IOM: Geneva.

²⁵ OSCE/ODIHR (2022). National referral mechanisms joining efforts to protect the rights of trafficked persons: A Practical Handbook – Second Edition // https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/510551_0.pdf

²⁶ Johansson I. and Semprebón M. (2020) "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Swedish Anti-trafficking System", UNESCO Chair SSIIM, University of Venice

²⁷ Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

²⁸ Warren, C. A. B. (2001). Qualitative interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), Handbook of interview research (pp. 83, § 101. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

²⁹ Given, L. M. (2008). The sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

³⁰ Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. Management Research Review, Vol. 35, No. 3/4.

answers to the questions "who?", "where?", "how much?", analysis of case studies focuses on the questions "how?", "in what way?", "why?"³¹.

SWOT. A SWOT analysis helps to identify strengths (including differences from competitors, why one thing is better than another), weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, while opportunities and threats are external factors that are difficult to influence. SWOT is not an analytical tool in itself - it is a way of synthesising the information (analysis) on lessons learned from the assessment and using it to improve the TRM-BSR.

2.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

There are several limitations in the evaluation of the TRM-BSR. Firstly, there is a limited number of new studies in this area. For example, at the end of 2022, the only studies and statistics available were from 2018 or earlier. Exceptions are a study published in 2020 on reviewing the functioning of Member States' National and Transnational Referral Mechanisms, procured by the European Commission³² and the European Union's Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021³³, but even in these studies, the statistics are incomplete (e.g., the nationality of the victims is not available for several countries, the data in the EU report do not provide other data sources). Secondly, statistics are difficult to compare due to the lack of a common methodology (e.g., who is considered a victim and how this is recorded in national statistics). Thirdly, in-depth research on the TRM-BSR is limited by the low number of users and a lack of monitoring (no systematic records of user numbers and trends).

The authors of the evaluation encountered difficulties in recruiting the right professionals. It should be noted that the field of THB is narrow and specific, so the total number of specialists is not large. The Contracting Authority provided the necessary contact details, but some of the professionals contacted either did not reply to emails or refused to take part in interviews. The most common reasons given for opting out were a lack of time or lack of experience with the TRM-BSR.

During the planning phase of the evaluation, 20 interviews were proposed, respectively with 2 representatives from each Baltic Sea country. During the evaluation process, it became clear that not all experts were available for interview. For this reason, from some countries three representatives were interviewed and only one from others. This approach ensured the highest possible response rate.

The questionnaire developed for the evaluation contained 28 questions specific to work with victims. If the respondent had no experience in any of the situations (answered "No"), the respondent did not continue the survey. As a result, 6 out of 43 respondents, or 14% of all respondents, were able to complete the survey - this was anticipated at the time the survey was designed.

³¹ Nacionālā enciklopēdija (2022). Gadījumu analīze. Available: <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/37390>

³² European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, Gregulska, J., Healy, C., Petreska, E., et al., Study on reviewing the functioning of Member States' National and Transnational Referral Mechanisms, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2837/697914>

³³ EMN annual report on migration and asylum 2021//https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/emn-annual-report-migration-and-asylum-2021_en

3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1. 3.1. COLLETED DATA

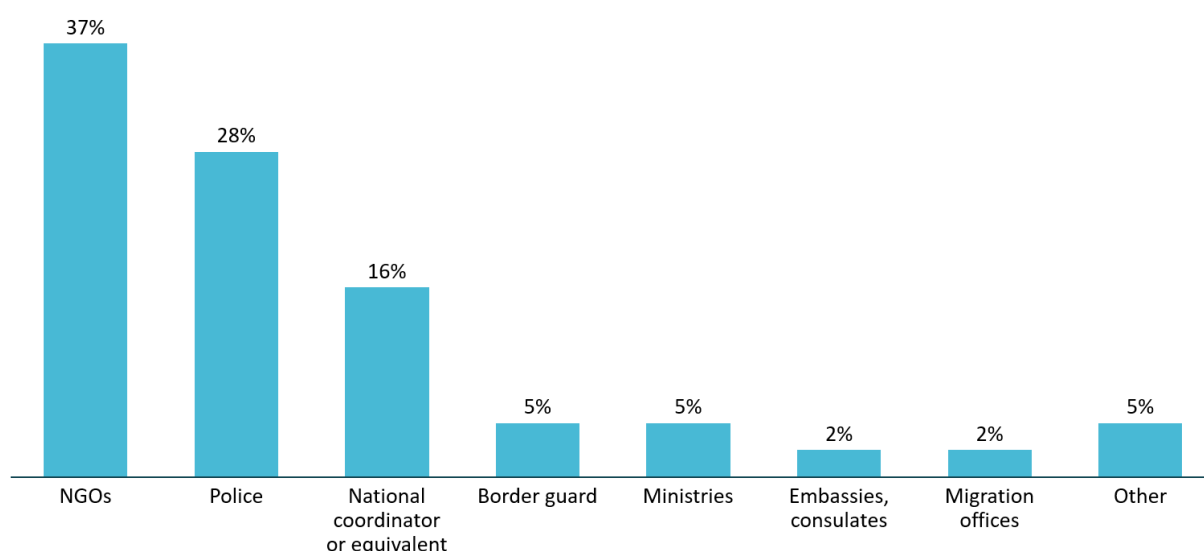
The empirical material for the evaluation consists of the following data sources: an online survey for experts from Baltic Sea countries, 2 online focus group discussions, 20 semi-structured interviews with experts from Baltic Sea countries.

3.1.1. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

For the purpose of the evaluation, a 28-question questionnaire was designed to determine respondents' experience in working with potential and identified victims of trafficking in human beings and their use of the TRM-BSR. The survey was structured to allow the respondent to answer as many questions as possible, as according to their experience in areas such as THB and use of the TRM-BSR. If the respondent had no experience in any of the areas in the last 5 years, the survey ended (the respondent was taken to the end of the survey and further questions were omitted). The survey consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, where the respondents could write in answers to the open-ended questions. A total of 43 respondents completed the survey.

In order to reach potential respondents, the survey was sent to governmental and non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea States working with anti-trafficking measures and/or victims. The largest group, 37% of respondents, represented the non-governmental sector. The second largest group at 28% of the total were police representatives and the third largest group, at 16%, were representatives of the national coordinator's office (most often the responsible ministry or subordinate authority) or equivalent (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. RESPONDENTS' MAIN PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT (%)



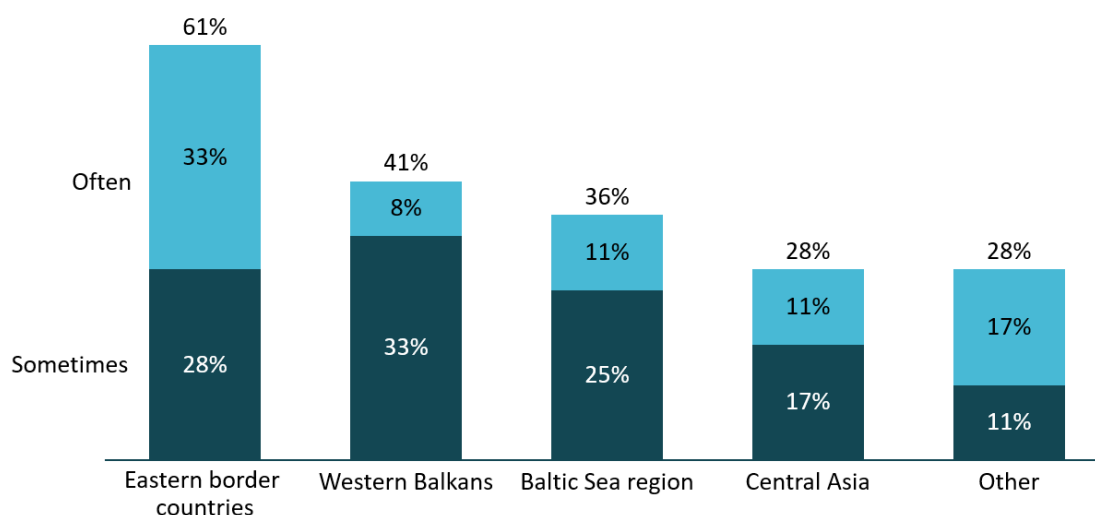
Source: SIA "Civitta Latvija" online survey conducted as part of the evaluation

Although the questionnaire was sent to all participating countries, representatives from some countries such as Lithuania, Iceland and Norway are poorly represented. Half of the respondents represent German organisations and institutions. The remaining responses are more evenly divided, with several respondents from each country. In this regard, it should be underlined that representation in the sample could lead to

a bias in the interpretation, that is, wider representation from other countries and actors could give slightly different results of the survey.

In order to determine respondents' experiences with victims, the survey included a question on the most frequent countries of origin of victims. The most frequent countries of origin of victims are those along the EU's eastern border (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine). The second most common region of origin is the Balkan region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia). The Baltic Sea countries are in third place: 11% of respondents encounter victims from these countries frequently, while 25% do so sometimes (see Figure 4).

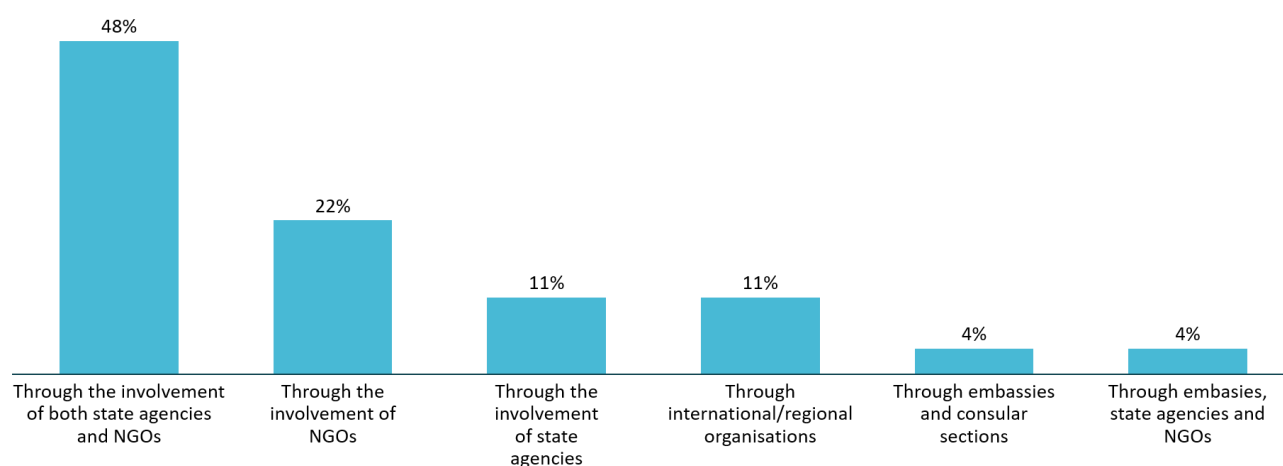
FIGURE 4. HOW OFTEN DO YOU ENCOUNTER VICTIMS FROM THESE REGIONS? (%)



Source: SIA "Civitta Latvija" online survey conducted as part of the evaluation

The survey asked whether it was important that the TRM-BSR included countries outside the Baltic Sea region, to which 72% of respondents said it was very important, with a further 17% saying it was somewhat important. Respondents were asked to identify the three most important countries for which guidelines on victim return were needed; the responses were very diverse. The countries most frequently mentioned as necessary to include in similar guidelines for victim referral were countries such as Moldova, Serbia, Russia, Hungary, Belarus, and countries in Asia (Nepal, Thailand), Latin America (Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras), and in Africa (mainly Nigeria).

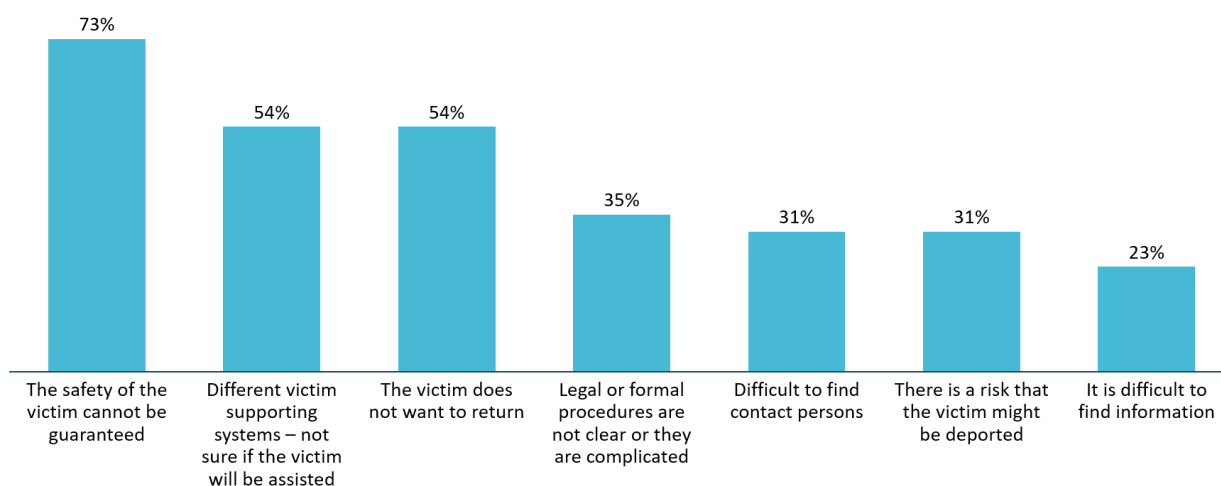
Several types of cooperation emerged from the respondents' answers to ensure the return of the victim to their country of origin: 48% of respondents said that both state and non-governmental organisations are involved in the return process, while 22% thought that NGOs are the only ones involved (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. HOW IS THE RETURN OF THE VICTIM TO ANOTHER COUNTRY USUALLY ORGANISED? (%)

Source: SIA "Civitta Latvija" online survey conducted as part of the evaluation

This highlights the importance of NGO participation and the need to involve and inform the non-governmental sector more fully. In the "Other" option of this question, one respondent specifically mentioned the IOM. Another respondent mentioned cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as the relevant embassy.

When asked about the biggest challenges in returning a victim, the most frequent responses were: the inability to guarantee safety, a lack of support in the destination country and the victim's desire not to return (see Figure 6). Respondents were able to select more than one response.

FIGURE 6. MAIN CHALLENGES FOR THE PROFESSIONAL WHEN A POTENTIAL OR IDENTIFIED VICTIM IS REFERRED TO ANOTHER COUNTRY (%)

Source: SIA "Civitta Latvija" online survey conducted as part of the evaluation

In addition to the most popular responses, some respondents identified issues such as data protection; not obtaining the victim's consent to transfer data to the next organisation, including the victim's lack of trust in public authorities; non-cooperation from the other participating country and the victim not being identified as a victim in the other participating country. Security and identification problems were also mentioned in the answers to other questions in the survey.

The need for a common system in their country or an effective national referral mechanism also emerged in the respondents' answers, e.g. it was mentioned that the victim support system in Germany is fragmented and consequently unable to function in order to provide real assistance to victims. Another

respondent points to the problematic situation in Sweden, where a victim residing in the country illegally can be deported under the Aliens Act (legal framework on foreigners' stay in the country) and the criminal investigation against the victim is dropped (legislative gap due to inconsistent laws).

3.1.2. ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Two online focus group discussions (FGDs) were organised in November 2022 to develop a deeper understanding of the use and the potential of the TRM-BSR. Slido, an online interactive voting tool, was used to measure participants' assessment of the TRM-BSR website's usefulness, impact, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and sustainability. One FGD was attended by representatives of the non-governmental sector, the other by representatives of the public sector. Participants from Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany took part in the FGDs.

Of the public sector FGD participants, none had used the TRM-BSR to date, openly admitting that *"the information is very useful but [the tool] has not been tried"*. It was indicated that institutional staff have their own internal channels, networks and procedures for dealing with cases where it was required to refer a victim. The police use their own contacts and networks, hence there has not been a clear need for the TRM-BSR, while it was acknowledged that *"it would be better if information was also shared with NGOs"*. Sweden indicated that it has clear mechanisms and tools, *"sufficient involvement of all parties"* and good cooperation between organisations, but *"other countries should be included"*. NGO representatives indicated that most of their communication is informal, through contacts they know personally and by choosing organisations they trust.

In the discussion on transnational referral and the tools and principles needed to improve its functionality and efficiency, several key points emerged.

A **VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH** is needed and more tools are needed to ensure this approach, whatever the mechanism applied in a specific case. However, during the FGDs, the specific tools of a victim-centred approach were not elaborated.

FGD participants shared their observations on how work with victims is organised. It was stressed that *"a victim-centred approach and assistance should be considered"* and that *"different groups have different needs and different routines"*. With this in mind, effective assistance should be provided to each person at an individual level.

To manage work and referral of victims successfully, the **WORKFORCE NEEDS TO BE WELL INFORMED AND FAMILIAR WITH THE SITUATION**.

To ensure quick and efficient work when dealing with victims, those who provide assistance to victims must be well-informed and familiar with the situation in order to understand what awaits the victim in their country of origin and how exactly the specialist can help the victim. Most often, the return is to a poorer country, and the assisting specialist needs to be aware of the situation in that country in order to be convinced that *"going back is a good idea"*. This requires good cooperation and communication with the country of origin, awareness and support tools for victims who return. It is important to see both the opportunities and the threats in order to be able to help when *"returning is not an option"*.

NETWORKS ARE ESSENTIAL, INCLUDING TRUST AND COOPERATION within and between networks.

A network of staff and partners is necessary, with proven channels and successful practices that are built, used and relied on by all stakeholders, including NGOs and those in public institutions. Personal experience, attitude, responsiveness, understanding of the problem, a willingness to help victims, flexibility, proactive involvement and the ability to use different approaches when needed are crucial here. This means choosing partners and *"NGOs they know they can trust"*.

It is necessary to establish a network of victims and survivors that can also support victims in the process of the referral. This network should be aware of possibilities of cooperation and assistance, know where to go if help is needed, and requires trust in the network. As an example, it was mentioned that women from the Baltic States and Russia are *"difficult to approach, they don't want to communicate"*, so communication is done very carefully. It was pointed out that, in order not to lose the trust of people in

this network, the assisting specialist will not opt for untested options, overly bureaucratic, victim-blaming systems or cooperation where the specialist has no confidence in data protection. *"These people should not be burdened; they should be helped"*.

CLEAR PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION are needed - at both national and international levels.

Given the diversity of institutions involved in trafficking cases, participants in the focus group discussions indicated that each country should have an inter-institutional cooperation mechanism at the national level, from which a mechanism at the transnational level can be further developed. It was also pointed out that the process must take account of cultural differences and different perceptions of responsibility. In order to avoid situations where an activity is not carried out because formally "it is not our responsibility", representatives of public authorities stressed the need for formalisation, to ensure that the responsibilities and duties of each party involved are clearly defined. One speaker described cases of identification of potential victims, saying *"there are many players, but not all clearly know their roles"*, and *"if there are no clear guidelines, the public authorities do not get involved"*. In the absence of clear principles, responsibilities, recommendations, indications of tasks and solutions, the provision of assistance to victims or potential victims may be delayed. At the same time, it is also important not to create overly bureaucratic processes and to maintain a certain degree of discretion and flexibility. *"Not everything has to be planned and written down, but there are situations where it is impossible to do everything as well as possible without knowing all the objectives, strategies, pathways"*.

One participant pointed out that the police use the Data Protection Regulation as an argument not to provide necessary information to the service provider (NGO). Another said the police *"could be a better partner"*, and that cooperation is rather "weak". Participants agreed that data protection in inter-institutional cooperation is very important and nuances should be addressed.

CONCLUSIONS. The general view of the participants is that the TRM-BSR is a good tool, as it allows for the *"optimisation of activities, regular sharing of information"* to complete the task faster and better, which is the overall objective. None of the staff involved know all the strategies and pathways, but the exchange of different types of information (on potential victims, on assistance needed, on possible threats, on new trends, also on changes in legislation and turnover of professionals) is essential. It is necessary to share information regularly with the national organisations and NGOs involved (both at national and transnational levels). Although this has been done before, not all stakeholders have been reached and it is good to streamline the process, which would be possible through use of the TRM-BSR.

3.1.3. ANALYSIS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

For the evaluation, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the public sector and the non-governmental sector from 10 countries, who are involved in the provision of assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and consisted of 23 questions. During the interview, respondents were asked to rate the TRM-BSR, opportunities for cooperation and other aspects on a scale of 1 to 10, and to provide reasons for their rating.

In the interviews, respondents were asked to introduce themselves and to describe the situation of trafficking in human beings (main trends and types of THB) in their represented country. According to the country profiles, there are **DIFFERENCES IN THE TYPES OF TRAFFICKING** among countries. For example, Sweden has more identified victims of sexual exploitation, while Norway has fewer. Although Germany is statistically the number one destination for victims of sexual exploitation, forced labour is the second most popular form of THB in Germany, as recruiters advertise it as a country with available jobs and good pay. While forced marriages are not common in several countries, in Finland this type of THB is still prevalent, based on the responses obtained in these semi-structured interviews. Country statistics show that the origin of victims varies from country to country (see Chapter 1). THB cases vary from one another, even within the same country, as one respondent described that *"every new THB case is different from the previous"*, an observation made by a specialist with 15 years of experience.

In terms of **GAPS THAT HINDER THE WORK** with victims in the participant's country, a lack of funding (in terms of insufficient support for victims, low staff salaries, and insufficient funding for NGOs in general) and lack of information are mentioned. The interviewees also mentioned a lack of communication and information sharing between different authorities within the country (one organisation cannot pass on information to another without the victim's consent). Sometimes information is not passed on to the other party involved because it is not a responsibility of the institution specified in its working rules. Sometimes information sharing does not take place in order not to breach the General Data Protection Regulation, as described by the respondent: *"Another authority cited the regulation and they should not call the provider to give information about the victim."* The lack of information is more often felt by NGOs, as violations are usually reported to the police, but no one is obliged to report to the service provider. An NGO representative explains that *"the police investigate the crime and it is a lengthy process, but a service provider can provide shelter and protection to a victim immediately - they are two different functions"*.

When it comes to **COOPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS** in different countries, the scores range from 5 to 9 (with 6, 7 and 8 being the most common - 5 times each). There was a tendency for respondents to want to isolate the evaluation of cooperation only within their own organisation or to evaluate separately the cooperation between NGOs and the public sector. It was also noticeable that the theoretical, written procedures do not always correspond to what happens in real life: one respondent even separated the assessment into two parts - "on paper" and in reality, where the theoretical framework was rated 7 and the actual process only 4. To reduce this gap, respondents suggested focusing more on the practical approach and what already exists - how to take what works today and translate it into legislation. Otherwise, a theoretical plan is devised and not accepted by front line specialists and not implemented in practice because the theory does not match the practice. Successful referral mechanisms do not need to be reinvented - they need to build on existing practices, regulations and service designs that are understood by all. Joint events (training, seminars, conferences) were frequently mentioned in the interviews as a way of promoting cooperation. One respondent gave the example of a training with representatives from different institutions, where the biggest benefit was that *"I finally realised the importance of cooperation between all of us, because none of us can do the job alone"*.

Most respondents could not name specific models of transnational cooperation. Most often, they took the form of **INFORMAL COMMUNICATION**, in which one person communicates personally with their counterpart, with whom they are already familiar. A few respondents referred to internal procedures and guidelines that set out how to deal with certain situations. Respondents said it is always easier to call someone they know rather than look for new contacts on the internet, i.e. to work with those who have already had good experience in dealing with a similar situation and who have created security and credibility in their work. Respondents acknowledged that there are public sectors in some countries that are difficult to engage with and are not very interested in helping their nationals, e.g. one respondent says that in one African country they ask the Salvation Army for help, but this is informal cooperation based on the "goodwill and kindness" of the other party, as there is no formal rule or regulation that requires the Salvation Army to cooperate. The respondent points out that in such cases, a framework for cooperation would be important so that it could always be relied upon and the parties involved would know what to do and would assume and carry out their responsibilities. Having trust that the partner is a professional who knows their job and also understands the *"intentions behind the guidelines"* is also important in communication. Respondents point out that THB is a complex and multifaceted topic, so it will not be possible to create a system that is valid for all cases. In such situations, a flexible approach is needed and it is necessary to *"follow the guidelines as far as possible"*.

The **UNCERTAIN AND UNPREDICTABLE NATURE OF THB** cases is cited as a major problem:

- 1) It is very difficult for staff working with victims to predict how a situation will develop: circumstances are fluid and depend on various external aspects, such as whether there are criminal proceedings, whether the victim has been/is granted a residence permit, whether other details come to light, etc. Accordingly, an employee may offer one type of assistance to a victim for a certain period, but for reasons beyond the employee's control, the situation may suddenly change, the victim's assistance may be interrupted and, for example, the victim may be deported (one respondent said that legislation

in Romania changes frequently specifically in the NGO field, making it difficult to provide long-term assistance to a victim);

2) From the perspective of the victim, there is equal uncertainty and ambiguity. This can discourage the victim from cooperating and reporting offences to the police; the victim fears what will happen and how, fears for their safety and life. Similar challenges, precisely due to uncertainty, are described in a 2017 study in Sweden³⁴;

3) When a victim moves to another country, the uncertainty only increases - the social worker or NGO cannot guarantee what awaits the victim in the other country. Due to a lack of information, social workers often find themselves unsure whether returning to the country of origin is the best option for the victim. Some countries, such as Denmark, are actively working on reintegration programmes and visit the partner country to make sure the victim is safe and supported. This transnational cooperation is very important, firstly because it ensures that the victim will be safe and supported; and secondly, because the worker can work more confidently with the victim, providing the necessary information and motivation to return home. Cooperation between countries does take place, but it is not always in their mutual interest. In the area of repatriation, there is more uncertainty and more challenges with third countries.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULATING COOPERATION MECHANISMS between countries was rated between 5 and 10 (the most frequent rating was 10, given by 9 respondents). The lowest score was 5, given by 3 respondents, all representing the public sector in different countries. Respondents who gave a lower rating argued that each THB case is individual, cannot be contained in a single procedure or regulation, that too many rules will lead to narrow accountability, and that there will be victims who will "fall through" the system and not receive assistance. On the other hand, respondents who gave a higher rating argued that a regulated procedure would impose responsibilities, obligations, including obligations to cooperate with all parties involved, to provide information about the victim to other authorities and organisations involved, to assist the victim, etc. The respondent who rated the importance of regulation as 7 pointed out that regulations can only go so far, that each institution must maintain the flexibility and scope to look at the bigger picture "without blinders". Several respondents stressed that the mechanism should be flexible and their main purpose should be to help the victim, not to "tick off a list of tasks".

Of the 20 respondents interviewed, 10 professionals said they had heard of the TRM-BSR before, but only 4 had actually used it in their practice. Respondents had not used the TRM-BSR, mainly for three reasons:

- 1) There has been no need for referral to another Baltic Sea country, Romania, Bulgaria or Ukraine;
- 2) There has been a different network and mechanism to contact the right authority;
- 3) The employee was not aware of the existence of the TRM-BSR.

Depending on the institution represented, interviewees spoke about **DIFFERENT COOPERATION MODELS AND COMMUNICATION NETWORKS**: most often this was a police network, or informal networks within NGOs, which primarily bring together offices of the same organisation in different countries, but also include partner organisations. If a professional already has access to a network of cooperation organisations, there is often no need for a new mechanism or website to search for further information. The TRM-BSR becomes useful when an organisation has no partners in a country and needs to find new contacts.

3.1.4. SUMMARY

To develop a deeper understanding of the use and potential of the TRM-BSR, a survey of experts, 20 interviews with experts and two focus group discussions were carried out. The respondents were from 10 Baltic Sea Region countries, representing both public and non-governmental sectors, and their job responsibilities included working with victims of trafficking at different stages. Respondents indicated that victims are generally not from the Baltic Sea Region countries, so the need to apply the TRM-BSR is rare.

³⁴ Norrköping – City of Immigration (2017). R.E.M.S. nr. 1. Reports from the Master of Arts program in Ethnic and Migration Studies, Linköping University.

On the positive side, three more countries have been added to the TRM-BSR - Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine. The consensus is that there are relatively fewer victims from the Baltic Sea Region countries, but the contacts from Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine included in the TRM-BSR would be more useful. Most respondents indicated that they would like to add more countries to the list. Survey respondents indicated that the most frequent countries of origin of victims are those along the EU's eastern border and the Balkans, with the Baltic Sea countries in third place. The respondents indicated that referral procedures should be developed with Moldova, Serbia, Russia, Hungary, Belarus, some countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The main reason why respondents do not use the TRM-BSR is that the organisation already has an internal network or procedure in place to contact the right authority. This is often informal communication, based on trust built up over time and advice from colleagues. To get staff up and running with a new mechanism, sufficient time needs to be invested in training and explanatory work, as well as making sure that the mechanism is convenient and efficient without adding a bureaucratic burden. The mechanism should build on procedures that already work in practice, rather than creating something completely new. Sometimes the institution has internal guidelines, but one respondent admitted that they did not know where to look for such guidelines (this shows that the materials produced are not always used in practice and points to the need to regularly inform staff about the rules developed).

Various organisations are involved in assisting in the referral of victims, and the participation of NGOs is very important in these processes. Respondents repeatedly point out that each country needs an inter-institutional cooperation mechanism at the national level or a national referral mechanism with clear responsibilities and roles for everyone involved. Rapid exchange of information between authorities is important, respecting data protection principles but without burdening staff and victims with additional bureaucratic procedures.

A strong national referral mechanism is the basis for further building international referral mechanisms. 9 out of 20 professionals interviewed consider it very important to regulate (formalise) cooperation mechanisms between countries in order to establish a clear division of responsibilities and duties for all parties involved.

3.2. TRM-BSR COMPLIANCE EVALUATION

The assessment of TRM-BSR compliance is based on the findings and information received through documents, interviews, surveys and focus group discussions.

RELEVANCE

Several sources were used to assess whether the information available in the TRM-BSR tool is relevant to the needs of the target group³⁵, as well as useful and applicable in working with victims. Both the survey and the analysis of statistical data on the number of presumed and identified victims show that in the Baltic Sea States, nationals of other Baltic Sea States rarely appear among the identified victims. It is therefore natural that the demand for victim referral actions among the Baltic Sea States is relatively lower than with other countries, in particular the EU's neighbours, and Asian and African countries. In this context, it is important to note that the TRM-BSR tool also includes Ukraine, which makes the TRM-BSR more relevant to the needs of the target group. Future additions to the tool should be planned as appropriate.

It is also evident that transnational referrals take place both formally and informally, through the non-governmental sector alone and through a combination of cooperation between the non-governmental sector and the public sector. In order to assess whether the tool is relevant to stakeholders' needs, the survey included a question on the challenges faced by stakeholders. The survey responses show that the most difficult challenges are to ensure the safety of the victim, a lack of trust that the victim will be supported, and the reluctance of the victim to return. It is important to note that the website already provides information on the authorities that can be involved in the implementation of safe referral, as well as information on the services available and identification procedures for each country. This leads to the conclusion that the TRM-BSR tool as a whole includes information that can address the most important protection and support measures. At the same time, the interviews with the experts illustrated very well the unpredictability of the whole process, as it does not follow a single standard procedure due to various formal, informal and human circumstances.

The interviews also show that the parties involved prefer a variety of informal contacts, which are likely to create a greater sense of security about what will happen to the person and accelerate the process without unnecessary bureaucracy.

In the context of the applicability of the TRM-BSR tool, the semi-structured interviews asked respondents whether the TRM-BSR was easy to use and whether they would like to change anything about it. Respondents who had no previous experience with the TRM-BSR tool were given a brief overview of the website during the interview, showing the main sections. Some respondents found the TRM-BSR an easy-to-use tool that provides the key information they need. Several respondents suggested that the very first, main page of the TRM-BSR website could be improved to better explain what the website is and what it is for. Most respondents indicated that the website should be redesigned and made more intuitive and user-friendly. One respondent who uses the site in their everyday work said that they know where to go and which button to press, but an outsider would not be able to understand it so quickly. Several respondents said that the title of the page "Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region" is too complicated and difficult to remember, adding that they usually ask colleagues for the name of the page rather than searching on the internet. If even regular users cannot remember the exact name of the TRM-BSR website, this is an important indication to change the name or to simplify it.

EFFECTIVENESS

To be considered effective, the TRM-BSR needs to help and improve the procedure for transferring victims between different countries. Neither the survey nor the focus group discussions mentioned any specific cases where the TRM-BSR tool was used to ensure the transnational referral of a victim. At the same time, the contribution of the TRM-BSR tool should also be seen in a broader context, as each time the issue is raised, for example within the HOF-BSR project, awareness among all stakeholders is also increased

³⁵In the context of the evaluation, the target group is professionals who work with victims of trafficking in human beings and are involved in the transnational referral of victims.

regarding the need for such a tool. Gradually, this also allows a search for the most appropriate form of the tool. The interviews asked, *"Do you think this international referral mechanism for the Baltic Sea Region is effective? Does it help professionals to help potential or identified victims to get from one country to another?"* Responses were rated from 1 (not effective) to 10 (very effective). When assessing the effectiveness of the TRM-BSR, some respondents refused to answer because they had not used the TRM-BSR in their work. The ratings of others ranged from 2 to 10. A respondent with a score of 4 indicated that the mechanism currently lacks a link to the actual situation, but "it is a good start". Another respondent gave a score of 10, adding that the TRM-BSR is suitable and easy to use for professionals in the field, but too complex for victims.

Several respondents argued that only a tool that is widely used can be effective, so the first step should be to raise the profile of the TRM-BSR to attract new users. The survey results showed that 61% of respondents had not heard of the TRM-BSR prior to the evaluation. Additionally, in the interviews, some respondents said they had not heard of the TRM-BSR before. A lack of information on the TRM-BSR was one of the reasons why the professionals contacted refused to participate in interviews and focus group discussions.

Other respondents argued that the TRM-BSR is effective because it provides the intended information. The vast majority of respondents to both the survey and the interviews indicated that the TRM-BSR is an easy tool to use. It is important that the information on the page can be found quickly, and that it gives a quick impression and understanding of the situation and mechanisms in each country.

EFFICIENCY

The key question in the assessment of usefulness is how well a resource has been directed. The efficiency criterion asks how efficient the TRM-BSR tool is in this sense. To assess its efficiency, questions were asked about the popularity and frequency of use of TRM-BSRs among the target group, whether there are alternatives to the TRM-BSR and how they differ. The main recommendation to improve efficiency was to add other countries to the TRM-BSR tool, in particular countries in Africa and Asia (according to the number of victims from these countries). The biggest challenge for victim referral is when it is not possible to cooperate with the IOM. Accordingly, if the TRM-BSR were to also cover less "popular" (traditional) countries, the tool's usability and usefulness would increase significantly in these cases. Respondents recommend that the website should collect information on hard-to-reach countries, publish information on how to deal with these cases, and provide examples of good practices and successful cases.

In the survey, 57% of respondents said they had never used the TRM-BSR, while 29% said they had rarely used the TRM-BSR. These responses should not be taken to imply that the TRM-BSR is not useful as a tool; most respondents had not dealt with victims from the Baltic Sea countries, again raising the issue of including other countries in the TRM-BSR. It is recommended that the experiences of countries with strong resettlement and repatriation programmes be gathered and shared, identifying local partners that are reliable and trustworthy. The efficiency of the TRM-BSR will be increased if it contains unique information that is not available in other materials.

Experts interviewed said that it is important to try to understand and make sure that returned third-country nationals are safe in their home country and would be provided with the assistance they need. In addition, the efficiency of the website is rapidly increasing in cases where it is not possible to cooperate with the IOM or other formal procedures.

Regarding other cooperation mechanisms or agreements with other countries, respondents did not name specific mechanisms, indicating that mostly informal communication and cooperation takes place between service providers. While there may be projects and mechanisms set up for a specific need, they are not sustainable in all cases.

In this context, it is important to note that during the FGDs, none of the public sector participants had used the TRM-BSR tool so far, indicating that they have their own internal channels/contacts and procedures for dealing with trafficking cases and victims. The police use their contacts and their networks, and there has not been a clear need for the TRM-BSR. This conclusion raises the question whether the TRM-BSR tool is in fact only useful for the non-governmental sector, which was not answered in this evaluation as this

was not the purpose of the evaluation. It would be important to look at this aspect in more detail as the TRM-BSR tool is further developed.

Key recommendations from respondents to improve the TRM-BSR:

- 1) More information is needed on national referral mechanisms;
- 2) Information in national languages is required;
- 3) The contact details of the country must be clearly visible and prominent;
- 4) Include case studies and examples of good practice, showing how the TRM-BSR works in real life;
- 5) Additional instructions and advice are needed on what to consider when organising support during the return procedure.

COHERENCE

Questions on coherence clarified whether the existing TRM-BSR is understandable, in line with the international practice of victim referral, and aligned with the general European legal framework. Questions were asked about the compliance of the TRM-BSR with national referral mechanisms, national and international migration policies, national criminal laws and other provisions.

These questions revealed a great deal of disagreement and diversity of opinion and showed that each country has its own understanding of how the mechanism works and to what extent the transnational framework is binding in day-to-day work. Some respondents refused to answer questions on the coherence of the TRM-BSR with national legislation, stating that they lack legal knowledge. Similarly, NGO representatives noted that this was a political question that they could not answer. Several representatives of public authorities pointed out that it does not matter to the victim which law and which provision stipulates the provision of assistance, because the victim needs help immediately, regardless of the name of the law. There was also the idea that, in an ideal world, all countries would have the same process for identifying victims and victims would receive the same help: there would be a common procedure for referring them to another country. In reality, this is an unattainable goal. At the same time, some respondents rated the importance of coherence lower, stressing the importance of national legislation. One respondent pointed out that they did not believe in harmonisation of processes between countries and did not want it, but that "bridges between countries" would be useful.

The most common consequence of the lack of coherence was that a person recognised as a victim in one country but not in the country to which the victim should be referred meant that the person would not receive the necessary support. In such cases, cooperation between the two countries is essential to explain the situation and decide together on the way forward. The support available to victims varies from country to country, depending on whether there is an active criminal case. In other countries, the statute of limitations may run out and no help is given to victims if this time has elapsed. The examples highlight the need for coherence at these interfaces so that transitions can be smoothed by reconciling national differences. It is national cooperation and open communication that will make it possible to find the best solution for the victim.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability assesses the ability of the TRM-BSR to continue to be relevant in the long-term. Most respondents agreed that THB will still be an issue in 10 years' time, adding that it is evolving and changing, and the legal framework, staff and support need to change with it. Respondents believed that the TRM-BSR tool in its current form will not be relevant in 10 years, but that the mechanism itself and the provision of assistance to victims will be relevant. Sustainability received diametrically opposing scores on a full scale from 1 to 10, but most respondents give a score of 7 or higher. Respondents stressed the need for constant updating of the website in order to ensure sustainability. For example, the refugee situation in Europe changed suddenly after 24 February 2022, and the TRM-BSR must also be adapted to the new situation.

Maintenance funding would give permanence to the TRM-BSR tool, ensure its administration and promotion. On the other hand, some respondents believe that funds can be found from existing funding. Respondents avoided naming specific sources of funding, but several argued that it should be pooled from each country and that it might also be possible to attract funding from EU funds.

To promote the TRM-BSR tool, it is recommended that:

- 1) banners/advertisements are placed on public authorities' websites;
- 2) regular reminder emails to participating organisations are sent several times a year, both reminding them of the existence of the TRM-BSR tool and asking them to update their contact details;
- 3) the mechanism is included in training programmes and information for institutional staff at conferences, including information on the TRM-BSR in the NRMs;
- 4) In the contact section of the TRM-BSR tool, hyperlinks to the necessary authority are included (relevant national page, coordinators, other platforms), assuming that the authority has updated the information on the website (while making sure that the hyperlink works);
- 5) When adding new information to the TRM-BSR tool, the date when the information was updated must be added.

IMPACT

The study assessed the impact of the TRM-BSR not only on the direct target group, but also on those indirectly involved. Both the interviews and the survey asked the question "*Do you think this website [TRM-BSR] improves the referral procedure between the Baltic Sea States?*" and asked for an additional rating from 1 (no impact) to 10 (significant impact).

Opinions on the impact of the TRM-BSR were divided, with a very wide range of scores. Respondents stressed that there will only be an impact if the TRM-BSR is used. For example, one respondent gave two ratings: 10 if people know about and use the TRM-BSR, and 0 (the respondent felt that a lower score than 1 should be given) if people do not use it. Several respondents declined to rate this criterion because they have never used the TRM-BSR. Several respondents indicated that the TRM-BSR could also be used to find out information about national procedures and national contact details. Another respondent said that the TRM-BSR helps to save time because the necessary information can be found faster. Other respondents said that the best advertising is "word of mouth".

The impact of the TRM-BSR would increase if the tool became more popular and widely used. Increasing impact requires both improving the site itself, adding new sections and promoting it to practitioners (see recommendations in Chapter 5).

The main findings for each criterion are summarised in Table 4.

TABLE 4 CONCLUSIONS ACCORDING TO THE CRITERIA

CRITERION	CONCLUSION
RELEVANCE	The information available in the TRM-BSR tool is relevant and can be used in work with victims, but some of the information should be updated to reflect the current situation. The TRM-BSR tool should be redesigned and made more user-friendly. It is difficult for users to remember the full name of the TRM-BSR, therefore a change of the name should be considered.
EFFECTIVENESS	The TRM-BSR can only be fully effective if it is widely used. To achieve this, recognition of the TRM-BSR should be increased and new users attracted, including by extending the number of countries beyond the Baltic Sea Region countries. At present, there is a lack of awareness of the existence of the TRM-BSR among professionals in different countries. If they are aware, they do not use it on a daily basis because other information resources are available (internal network, informal contacts, partners abroad, etc.).

EFFICIENCY	The usefulness of the TRM-BSR has been variously assessed, mainly because victims rarely come from the Baltic Sea Region countries and other internal networks are already in place. The TRM-BSR would be significantly more useful and used more frequently by practitioners if it covered a wider range of countries and provided information directly on countries where information is lacking and where there are no cooperation partners. It also needs to be complemented with case study examples to learn from practical experiences.
IMPACT	It is difficult to measure the impact of the TRM-BSR because it is not widely used. The TRM-BSR could have a positive impact on the victim referral procedure, but there is currently no evidence to support it. The immediate impact of the TRM-BSR can be expressed as time savings - information is clearly and concisely available in one place.
COHERENCE	Harmonising the TRM-BSR with other laws and regulations is a time-consuming exercise that could theoretically be done within the EU, while being aware of the characteristics and needs of each country. The biggest challenge is the lack of harmonisation of the victim identification process, with different conditions for detection and identification.
SUSTAINABILITY	The information in the TRM-BSR should be regularly updated and training in its use should take place regularly. Sustainability requires sustained human and financial resources, as well as the exchange of information between TRM-BSR countries to ensure up to date information on the website.

Source: SIA "Civitta Latvija" evaluation

SUMMARY

Summarising and analysing the data, it can be concluded that the TRM-BSR is viewed ambiguously. Its score varies between countries and depends on whether the respondent has used the TRM-BSR in their work. It is not possible to answer unequivocally whether the TRM-BSR scores significantly higher or lower on any criterion, but they all share the view that the scores on all criteria would increase if the number of TRM-BSR users grows, if it was more popular and better known, and if it contained additional, different information, such as examples of good practice. Improvements to the TRM-BSR should be made first and then its promotion to the relevant target groups should begin.

A SWOT ANALYSIS was carried out to assess in more depth the future possibilities of the TRM-BSR and to make appropriate recommendations.

STRENGTHS

- 1) Professionals can find all necessary information in one place.
- 2) Information is easily accessible.
- 3) A substantial amount of information has already been collected and compiled. This information is relevant and can be further used with only some changes and updates.

WEAKNESSES

- 1) The limited number of countries included in the TRM-BSR. According to the statistics and research results, there is a considerable need to have TRM-BSRs with countries outside the Baltic Sea Region, Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine.
- 2) A complicated website name is hard to remember.
- 3) There is no dedicated funding, administrative and human resources to keep the information up-to-date, to make additions and to maintain the exchange of information between TRM-BSR countries.

OPPORTUNITIES

- 1) Training, promotion of the TRM-BSR tool at conferences, seminars;
- 2) Inclusion of the TRM-BSR in annexes to national referral mechanisms;
- 3) Exchange of good practices;
- 4) Attracting new target groups (potential victims, staff not directly involved in the referrals);
- 5) Publication of information in national languages;
- 6) Build the mechanism according to victim-centred principles;
- 7) Use social networks to promote the TRM-BSR;
- 8) Create "push to use" activities.

THREATS

- 1) Other networks and communication tools exist (competition), users do not need another website if it duplicates other tools;
- 2) As the situation and the organisations involved change, there is a risk of publishing outdated information and losing the trust of users.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. CONCLUSIONS

The human trafficking situation is uncertain and fluid. Various socioeconomic factors change, as do forms of exploitation, countries of origin and destination. The situation of human trafficking is also different among the countries of the Baltic Sea region: different forms of human trafficking are prevalent, victim profiles are varied, as are countries of origin and destination. Accordingly, victim assistance systems and measures, and the support culture itself varies between Baltic Sea Region countries. All these factors shape national referral mechanisms and transnational referrals. Given the uncertain and changing situation, it is essential that the tools available to professionals are flexible and updated according to needs.

The victim-centred approach is a key word that appears in all data sources. Overly complex regulatory or bureaucratic pathways must not obscure the victim, or delay or deny necessary assistance because of formal obstacles. Cooperation between institutions and between countries should be regulated to a certain extent, leaving room for flexibility and adaptation to individual cases. It is important to separate and clearly define the responsibilities and duties of the professionals involved.

The TRM-BSR tool has been developed within the framework of the HOF-BSR project and there are no resources to update and promote the TRM-BSR on a regular basis. Interviews reveal that some of the contact information is already outdated. The lack of promotion of the TRM-BSR tool results in a low number of users, which reduces its usefulness and effectiveness. Keeping the tool active requires human and financial resources.

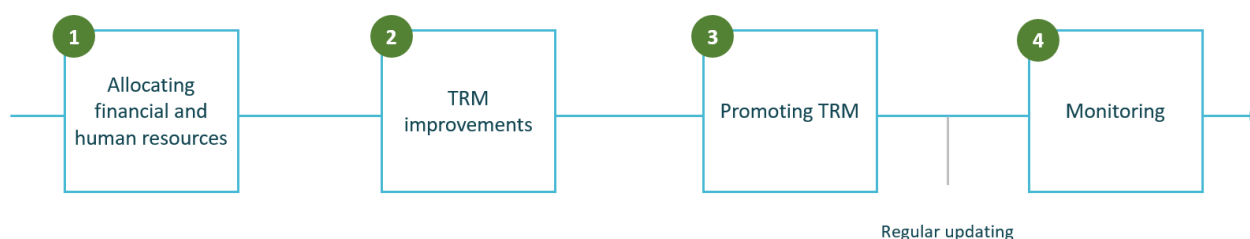
Strong national redirection mechanisms are needed to build an effective TRM-BSR. Initially, inter-institutional cooperation within a single country needs to be resolved so that a functioning and coherent TRM-BSR can be built. Building that mechanism has to start from a practical approach - using and building on what already works and adapting formal guidelines or regulations accordingly. There is also a need to train and inform staff about the TRM-BSR, and to share good practices (both nationally and internationally).

It is concluded that the TRM-BSR has the potential to be an effective tool with a positive impact on both direct and indirect target groups. The biggest challenge at the moment is the lack of information about the existence of the TRM-BSR, which has resulted in a low number of users. Experts in the field have already found their own solutions and established networks of contacts that they use when working with THB victims. Regular and substantial work is needed to promote the TRM-BSR. One possibility would be to include a banner promoting the TRM-BSR tool in materials on national diversion mechanisms. Adding new sections and other information to the TRM-BSR can attract new users, widening the range of TRM-BSR users.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Based on the analysis of the collected data, the authors of the evaluation have developed recommendations to improve the applicability of the TRM-BSR. In line with the objectives and recommendations, and following the sequence of work, improvements to the TRM-BSR tool should be made, following which work to promote its use must be done (see Figure 7). Regular updates of the tool are important to ensure that it contains the most up-to-date information on both the sequence of actions and the contacts. Monitoring must then also be carried out to assess whether the TRM-BSR has achieved its objectives within a given timeframe.

FIGURE 7. SEQUENCE OF TASKS FOR FUTURE TRM-BSR ACTIVITIES



Source: SIA “Civitta Latvija” evaluation

ALLOCATING FUNDING AND HUMAN RESOURCES

- 1) Identify the areas and number of people needed to keep information up-to-date and to maintain necessary IT developments
- 2) Allocate funds for staff remuneration and IT developments

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE TRM-BSR TOOL

- 1) The purpose of the tool, its application, direct and indirect target groups and their needs should be clearly defined. For this, it is useful to formulate an answer to the question: *how is the TRM-BSR better than other available tools?* It is also necessary to complement the information in the TRM-BSR with general principles and mechanisms of referral that can be applied by all, regardless of the country, so that it can be used not only by professionals, but also by staff of other institutions and organisations, members of the public and victims themselves.
- 2) Based on the literature review and the empirical part of the evaluation, the following possible improvements should be considered:
 - 2.1. The TRM-BSR tool should be extended to new countries, primarily EU neighbouring countries;
 - 2.2. Content explaining how to ensure the safety and protection of THB victims during and after referral should be made more visible and enriched with various examples and good practices;
 - 2.3. Content sections on how to ensure that the victim receives the necessary support should be made more visible and enriched with various examples and good practices;
 - 2.4. Practical advice (case examples) should be given for non-standard situations, such as how to make sure that return is the best option and what to do if the victim does not want to return;
 - 2.5. Given that the TRM-BSR tool is considered more useful in cases where referrals cannot be made through the usual channels (e.g. police, consulates, IOM, permanent NGO partners), there is a need to better target this segment of the TRM-BSR and gradually strengthen it.
- 3) Usability must be improved, the site design must be modernised and made more interactive. For example, in the TRM-BSR tool, a forum can be created for professionals with a login function to

exchange information and share news and updates. The TRM-BSR has the potential to become a communication tool or a platform for professionals in the participating countries.

- 4) Information must be differentiated in a way that the user quickly accesses the specific information relevant to their case, e.g. a breakdown by type of THB: for sexual exploitation, for forced labour, for begging, etc. can be introduced. A separate section on children would be particularly important, as minors are subject to other laws and regulations.
- 5) The number of countries in the TRM-BSR tool should be expanded, and information on cooperation organisations and local partners in different countries should be added. This information could be obtained from countries that already have their own networks in place (sharing contact details as far as the parties involved agree).
- 6) Contact details must be updated regularly (at least 1-2 times a year) to make sure the information on the website is up to date.
- 7) The page title should be edited and the hyperlink address should be simplified - respondents who use the site for their daily work also reported difficulty remembering both. Several respondents indicated that the word "mechanism" has a different meaning, and that this tool would be better referred to as "guidelines" or literally "contact information", e.g. *Guidelines to assist victims*.
- 8) A mobile version of the TRM-BSR tool should be created in a cascading format, where the user selects the option that fits their situation and leads to the next one:
 - 8.1. Is the victim an adult? yes/no
 - 8.2. Does the victim have a residence permit? yes/no
 - 8.3. After a series of questions, the user arrives at the final result: *Your best option is to contact the authority in this country - here are their contacts and a link to their website.*
 - 8.4. This can also be addressed by an algorithm scheme on the first page, where the user visits the section indicated by the arrow after the answer choices.

PROMOTING THE TRM-BSR TOOL

- 1) Regular training for all stakeholders and in all countries, sharing good examples of how the TRM-BSR can help and in which situations is imperative. If the idea of a forum for experts is implemented, sharing can also take place virtually.
- 2) Working visits and experience exchange visits to find local partners in hard-to-reach countries should be conducted (suggestion from the Danish experience).
- 3) New users and target groups should be attracted:
 - 3.1. A section on prevention with information in local languages and pictograms (information in plain language on how to identify a CTU - to make sure it is understandable for people not involved in the field and for the less educated);
 - 3.2. Information for potential and identified victims;
 - 3.3. A description of each country's national mechanism in the national language.

MONITORING

- 4) A specific timeframe should be selected, within which set targets with specific indicators (e.g. increase in unique visitors to the website, number of presentations of the TRM-BSR tool in trainings, number of posts on social networks) are achieved, during which the appropriate evaluation, e.g. an anonymous questionnaire, can be conducted periodically with professionals to get their opinion and make improvements according to their needs.
- 5) Regular exchange of information on the most frequently identified victims - gender, age, reason, country of origin, and new trafficking trends is necessary to ensure that the TRM-BSR can be adapted to needs in a timely manner.

OTHER MEASURES NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE TRM-BSR

- 1) Precise definitions of what constitutes a victim, a potential victim, a person considered a victim must be added.
- 2) Statistical data on the groups in the Baltic Sea States mentioned in the previous paragraph should be collected and added; consensus must be reached on which cases are counted and how they are counted; a responsible person in each TRM-BSR Member State should be identified or delegated to collect, verify, compile and publish the data.

ANNEXES

1. ANNEX

ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

- 1) By clicking on the “Agree to Participate” button, I indicate my agreement to take part in this study.
- 2) Where do you work? Please, choose the workplace you consider to be primary for you.
- 3) How long have you been working against trafficking in human beings”?
- 4) Which country are you currently working in?
- 5) In the past 5 years, have you encountered presumed or identified THB victims who come from other states?
- 6) According to your experience, how often do you (or your country) encounter victims from these regions? Please answer only about foreign victims in your country, not your country nationals.
- 7) In the past 5 years, have you assisted presumed or identified foreign THB victims to leave your country for another country, for example for safe return and reintegration?
- 8) How is the return of the victim to another country usually organised?
- 9) According to your experience, what are the main challenges that professionals face when transferring presumed or identified victims to another country (for example country of origin, permanent residence or transit)?
- 10) If you want, you can describe the challenges and the situations that you or your colleagues have faced further here:
- 11) When assisting victims in returning or being transferred to another country, where do you find necessary information to help the person?
- 12) What information do you usually search for in order to help presumed or identified THB victims to return to another state?
- 13) In the past 5 years, have you been involved in the return (or entry) of presumed or identified THB victims to your country from another country?
- 14) In your experience, what are the main challenges that professionals face when receiving presumed or identified victims to your country from another State?
- 15) If you want, you can describe the challenges and the situations that you or your colleagues have faced further here:
- 16) What information do you usually search for when you need to support presumed or identified THB victims to come to your country (or return) from another state?
- 17) In case of returning/incoming THB victims from other states, where do you find necessary information to help the person?
- 18) The Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea region includes three countries outside the Baltic Sea region: Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania <https://bsr-TRM-BSR.com/>. In your opinion, is it important that this mechanism includes states outside the Baltic Sea region?
- 19) What other countries should have a guideline to support referral of a THB victims with your country? Please name 3 countries with the highest priority.
- 20) In your opinion, how important is it to have a guideline for assisting presumed and identified victims between Baltic Seas states?
- 21) Before this survey, have you heard about the webpage Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region (<https://bsr-trm.com/>)?
- 22) Have you used the information from the webpage on Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region (<https://bsr-trm.com/>) to assist the victim to another Baltic Sea state?
- 23) Did the information on the webpage on Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region (<https://bsr-trm.com/>) help in the situation?
- 24) How would you improve the website on Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region (<https://bsr-trm.com/>)?

- 25) From a user point-of-view, is the Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region (<https://bsr-trm.com/>) website easy to use?
- 26) Do you think this website improves the referral procedure among Baltic Sea States? Please score the impact of the Baltic Sea States transnational referral mechanism with a rank between 1 (no impact) and 10 (high impact)?
- 27) If you have any other comments or feedback relating Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region (<https://bsr-trm.com>) or the survey, please write it here:
- 28) The evaluation will include two additional parts – online focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. If you are willing to participate in focus group discussions and/or semi-structured interviews, please leave your contact details here:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) In your experience, how would you describe the work with presumed or identified victims of trafficking in human beings in your country? What are the strengths and weaknesses?
- 2) If you had to assess the coordination and cooperation mechanism among different institutions in your country to protect and assist the victim of THB, what grade would you give (e.g. rank between 1 (poor cooperation mechanism) to 10 (well established cooperation mechanism)) and why?
- 3) In your experience, how would you describe the work with presumed or identified foreign victims of THB in your country? What are the strengths and weaknesses?
- 4) What are the main steps that must be taken to improve the cooperation and coordination of different institutions in your country in order to provide necessary support to foreign presumed and identified victims of THB?
- 5) Have you had a case when presumed and/or identified victims of THB with foreign nationality leaving your country for another country or coming to your country from another country? Can you describe such cases e.g. is there any formal or informal cooperation between countries to ensure safe travel and reception of the victim in the destination country? What are the main challenges in these situations?
- 6) In policy documents a guidance on cooperation and coordination in order to ensure safe travel and reception of presumed or identified victims of THB from one country to another is called transnational referral mechanism. In your opinion, how important it is to formalise such referral from one country to another? Please give a rank between 1 (not important at all) to 10 (very important)? Please explain your answer.
- 7) There is the Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region which provides information of referral mechanism of THB victims between countries of the Baltic Sea region, as well as Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine. Have you heard of it? If yes, do you think it encloses all information necessary for frontline professionals that are assisting victims in referral from one country to another.
- 8) Is the Transnational Referral Mechanism of the Baltic Sea Region easy to use? What would you change and why?
- 9) Do you think such Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region is effective? Does it help professionals to assist presumed or identified victims to refer from one country to another? Please give a rank between 1 (not effective at all) to 10 (very effective)? Please explain your answer.
- 10) How to make Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region more effective?
- 11) In your opinion, when frontline professionals are assisting presumed or identified victims of THB, where do they search for information and help, e.g. on the internet, colleagues from their networks or counterpart organisation? Is the communication usually done informally or formally?
- 12) Do you know any other Transnational Referral Mechanism that is used by your country, for example, mutual agreements or special referral mechanisms between two states? Please name other referral mechanisms you know.
- 13) Do you think the Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region comply with national referral mechanisms to assist presumed or identified victims of trafficking in human beings? Please explain your answer.
- 14) Do you think the Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region comply with national and international migration policy, national criminal laws or other regulation? Please explain your answer.
- 15) What should be done to make the Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region more coherent with national systems, laws and policies?
- 16) The Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region was developed in 2018 in the project "Paving the Way for the Harmonized Operational Framework in the Baltic Sea Region" (HOF-BSR)? Is it relevant currently and would it still be relevant in 10 years? Please score the sustainability of

the Baltic Sea States transnational referral mechanism with a rank between 1 (no sustainability) to 10 (high sustainability).

- 17) Currently there is no funding allocated to promote and administrate this Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region. Do you agree that there should be special funding to administrate and promote Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region? What should be the funding source?
- 18) Except for funding, are there any other ways how to make the Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region more sustainable? How?
- 19) What difference does the Transnational Referral Mechanism of Baltic Sea Region make? Does it have any impact, e.g., does it help to assist victims of THB to travel from one country to another by ensuring necessary security and support services?
- 20) Do you think this website improves the referral procedure among Baltic Sea States? Please score the impact of the Baltic Sea States transnational referral mechanism with a rank between 1 (any impact) and 10 (high impact)?
- 21) And what you would recommend to do to make the Baltic Sea States transnational referral mechanism website more commonly used among you and other practitioners, e.g., change the information, 24/7 consultation, advertisement and regular advocacy etc.
- 22) We are closing the interview, is there anything else you would like to ask or comment?

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 **Thank you for your cooperation!**