

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0379-0738(17)30447-4

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2017.10.036>

Reference: FSI 9035

To appear in: *FSI*



Please cite this article as: Obertová Zuzana, Cattaneo Cristina, Child trafficking and the European migration crisis: the role of forensic practitioners, Forensic Science International <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2017.10.036>

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Child trafficking and the European migration crisis: the role of forensic practitioners

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Highlights

- Child trafficking is on the rise in Europe
- Migrant children and children with history of abuse are at risk of being trafficked
- Forensic practitioners can contribute to counter-trafficking efforts
- Forensic expertise in identification of child victims and gathering of intelligence

Abstract

Trafficking in children is one of the worst forms of human rights violation and is categorised as a serious crime. Children at high risk of becoming victims of trafficking are runaways, children with a history of abuse, and migrant children. Internationally, cases of child trafficking are increasing the most in Europe, which is likely the result of the current migration crisis. In crises, preventing and combating human trafficking needs to be prioritized, considering that the aims of humanitarian action include saving lives, easing suffering and preserving human dignity. The involvement of forensic practitioners in investigations of cases of child trafficking mainly concerning the identification of victims may save lives and certainly alleviate suffering of the child victims and their families searching for them. Moreover, by aiding the prosecution process through thorough documentation and expert reporting forensic practitioners may contribute to the protection, rehabilitation and possibly compensation of the child victims, and thus to the restoration of their rights and dignity. So far, forensic practitioners were rarely specifically mentioned as actors in the counter-trafficking efforts in the multitude of policies, regulations, guidelines and recommendations concerning different aspects of child trafficking. This seems surprising considering that the expertise and experience of practitioners from forensic sciences including cyber forensics, document analysis, forensic biology, anthropology, and medicine can be utilised for gathering intelligence in cases of suspected human trafficking, for identifying the victims as well as perpetrators, and for securing evidence for legal proceedings as this paper shows. While this article mainly discusses the role of forensic pathologists and anthropologists, with a specific focus on the identification of child victims of trafficking in the context of the European migration crisis, the notions regarding the contribution of forensic sciences to the counter-trafficking efforts can be adapted to other geographical and sociopolitical contexts.

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