

Written interview with LEFÖ – IBF, Intervention Center for Trafficked Women



1. Austria's national referral mechanism formally mandates LEFÖ–IBF as a specialized victim protection organization, ensuring systematic cooperation with law enforcement, ministries, and service providers. How does this integrated approach strengthen victim protection and your ability to support trafficked women?

Our integrative and cooperative approach enables us not only to effectively identify victims of trafficking in women*, but also to raise awareness among a wide range of stakeholders. Through joint trainings with other NGOs and government authorities, we actively address the issue of trafficking in women*, while also expanding our knowledge through the exchange of information and lessons learned with ministries, the police, and other organisations. Our strong national and international cooperation and networks further empower us to carry out effective prevention and protection work.

2. What kind of victim protection support does your organisation provide? Which of these services do you find most crucial for victims in the initial stages of support, and why?

LEFÖ-IBF offers unconditional support to trafficked women and girls from the age of 15, regardless of their residency status or their willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. Our victim protection services are confidential, anonymous, and free of charge, and include the following:

- 24/7 accessibility for trafficked women
- safe accommodation in protection shelters, with socio-cultural mediation
- independent living apartments with initial psychosocial support
- psychosocial, psychological, social, health, and life counselling, including psychotherapy
- ensuring access to medical care
- counselling and advocacy on residency and employment rights
- accompaniment to police interviews
- psychosocial and legal support during legal proceedings
- support for detainees pending deportation in suspected trafficking cases
- online outreach for early identification and support of vulnerable groups
- referral (on request) to German language courses, further education, and integration programmes
- buddy programme for social inclusion and peer support
- assistance in finding employment and housing, or preparing for safe returns, including risk assessments in cooperation with partner organisations in countries of origin



In the initial stages of support, psychosocial support in legal proceedings is especially important to help alleviate the emotional burden carried by trafficked women - a burden that often intensifies in the course of criminal investigations and trials.

3. Exploitation takes many forms - from sexual and household exploitation to forced marriages and other labour-related abuses. How does LEFÖ-IBF adapt its interventions to address these different forms of exploitation effectively?

LEFÖ-IBF conducts individual assessments together with each woman or girl to evaluate specific needs and priorities based on the situation at hand. Rather than applying a generic, one-size-fits-all approach to different forms of trafficking, we ensure that immediate needs are addressed first, and that comprehensive, ongoing support is provided throughout the recovery and empowerment process.



4. According to your 2024 data, the most frequent countries of origin for trafficked women include Colombia, Nigeria, China, Hungary, and the Philippines. What specific challenges or needs arise in working with women from such diverse backgrounds?

Every trafficked woman or girl has her own specific needs, and circumstances can vary greatly, regardless of country of origin. Our socio-cultural mediators, many of whom have migrant backgrounds themselves, are multilingual and play a crucial role in identifying and addressing these needs, while also building a cultural bridge between the country of origin and Austria. Their involvement is essential in providing culturally sensitive support, fostering trust, and ensuring effective communication and mutual understanding - all of which are key to overcoming these challenges and delivering support that is both tailored and respectful.

5. Online outreach work is an important tool for early identification of victims and vulnerable groups. As you are working since 1998, could you share how this method has evolved in recent years and what impact it has had on your work?



With the rise of modern technology, we are witnessing an increasing number of women and girls being recruited online. LEFÖ-IBF continuously develops new approaches to adapt to the evolving strategies of traffickers. We provide low-threshold, multilingual information across a variety of social media and online platforms, ensuring accessibility for those affected. Online outreach and counselling play a particularly crucial role in contexts where there is little or no police presence, such as in private households. Reaching women and girls behind closed doors is especially important for early identification, as it often allows us to connect with them while they are still in a trafficking situation.

*LEFÖ defines women to include both trans and cis women, affirming that “trans women are women” and emphasizing equal recognition, rights, and support for all women regardless of gender identity.