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Organized crime in Europe
Free movement and human trafficking inside
EU borders

Master of Science in European Affairs

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“Let us all unite to fight injustice and oppression; Let us raise our voices together and say: No to violence, yes to peace, no to slavery, yes to freedom, no to racial discrimination, yes to equality and to human rights for all. No to exploiting women and children, yes to providing a decent and independent life to them, no to impunity for criminals, yes to holding criminals accountable and to achieving justice.”

– Nadia Murad Basee Taha, Yazidi survivor of human trafficking and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

This study is dedicated to all victims of human trafficking and to those who work hard every day to give assistance and support to them and eradicate this scourge, hoping that someday these crimes will cease to exist.

Abstract

Despite the fact of being considered as one of the safest regions in the world, the EU reports a wide number of cases of human trafficking every year in its Member States. Moreover, free movement of persons that EU membership grants makes it easier for human trafficking criminals to transport and exploit victims within Member States. The country that has shown by far to have the largest number of nationals falling victims of human trafficking during the last few years was Romania, and the goal of this thesis was to find what are the main reasons for it. In order to do so, this thesis consists on a study on the phenomenon of human trafficking in Europe, and more specifically, in the levels of development and gender equality in Romania on the basis of a theoretical framework composed by theories on international political economy and gender to determine to which extent they influence on the prevalence of human trafficking. The analysis has shown that, in this specific country, development and migration have a broad impact in human trafficking, as Romania is one of the least developed countries in the EU and high youth unemployment rates, low wages and unequal income distribution make women more vulnerable to be deceived and recruited as victims of human trafficking. However, gender has surprisingly shown to have a smaller influence that expected.

Keywords: human trafficking, EU, sexual exploitation, Romania, development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Human trafficking: a global problem

Human trafficking is an appalling violation of human rights and human dignity, yet one of the richest illegal markets. This form of organized crime deprives human beings from their very fundamental right to freedom. It is the most contemporary form of modern slavery. It implies the action of illegally transporting people from one country to another, usually forced, by fraud or after abduction, and typically exploited for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced labor, arranged marriages, begging, criminality, organ removal or other sort of non-legal forced practices are usual for victims of human trafficking.

An estimation from the International Labor organization (ILO 2005) indicates that human trafficking profits every year around 32 billion dollars in the world and affects over 2.4 million victims. Trafficking of persons is the product of the still important inequalities that exist in the world. Although any human being can be a victim of it, young women and children are the most vulnerable to fall victims of human trafficking, as these two groups, especially women, are highly demanded for sexual exploitation, cheap labor or forced marriages (Shelley 2010). In addition, individuals coming from less developed or developing countries, with high unemployment rates and very low chances of stable job opportunities, are at high-risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, as they are normally unaware of the recruitment methods of human traffickers and thus are more prone to accept job offers out of their country that often end up being frauds. Furthermore, those coming from areas that are affected by armed conflicts or wars or natural disasters also find themselves in greater danger of falling victims of human trafficking, due to the lack of security, certainty and reliability that places in state of emergency normally have. In fact, trafficked human beings are also quite demanded by armed or terrorist groups to be used in a wide range of activities, going from forcing individuals to combat or perpetrate terrorist attacks to use women as sexual slaves, wives or domestic workers for combatants (UNODC 2018).

Furthermore, another reason for certain countries reporting considerably more human trafficking activity than others is related to their judiciary systems. The 2014 Global Report on Trafficking in persons by UNODC (2014) shows that even though the vast majority of countries on Earth include severe punishments for human trafficking-related offenses, there were still a very few that did not referred human trafficking as a specific offense at the time of the publication of this report. Moreover, countries with

specific legislation against it, in not all cases they compel with the Palermo Protocol or cover all categories of human trafficking, leaving many victims unprotected by the law. Moreover, despite of including regulations to prevent human trafficking and sanction offenders in their national judiciary systems, various countries are still far from fully implementing them (UNODC 2014). This report by UNODC (2014) also shows that recorded convictions for trafficking in persons remain relatively low worldwide, which evidences the difficulties of the justice systems to address human trafficking cases, and also, how many countries still fail to a great extent to implement regulations against this form of organized crime.

Human trafficking is a highly complicated phenomenon with many steps and activities involved on it. It normally starts with the recruitment or abduction of the victim, which then is smuggled into another country or region. The movement of trafficked persons can be legal or illegal (also known as smuggling), however, even though the movement can be legal, as it is carried out against the victim's will or by fraud it is still considered a serious crime. In fact, when human trafficking occurs inside EU borders, for instance, victims holding EU citizenship, a valid Schengen visa or permanent residence permit in an EU country are transported from one state to another one in a legal way. Once in the host country, victims are finally exploited for various purposes. These are usually confined in inhuman and harsh conditions, with no freedom and under coercion, fraud or threats, in order to ensure that they will not escape and report their captors to the police. Traffickers of human being can easily carry out their criminal activities individually or in small groups, exploiting their victims domestically or on short-distance trafficking flows. They can also operate in large organized crime networks, as it usually happens with transnational trafficking flows. Evidence also shows that recruitment is mostly carried out by citizens of the same country of origin as the victims (UNODC 2014).

Even though human trafficking and slavery practices have always existed, it only globally became a matter of public concern a few decades ago. It was not so long ago that international organizations and state governments began to pay attention to the problem of human trafficking and took action in order to prevent and counter it. In fact, the Palermo Protocol (UN 2000), which nowadays is the most important international guiding instrument to prevent and combat human trafficking was only created in 2000. Since then strong and great effort has been put into countering and preventing this form of organized crime. However, due to its complexity and the vast number of agents involved in it, it still remains a large-scale problem. In fact, the number of detected victims of human trafficking have progressively increased over the last decade (UNODC 2014). However, this does not necessarily mean that human trafficking activity have increased, instead it could evidence that the interception and prosecution of human

trafficking offences have become more common. In the affirmative, that would be a positive outcome of the efforts in the fight against human trafficking and organized crime.

Although there is considerably more human trafficking activity in certain regions of the world, especially those that are the less developed and with very high numbers of individuals living under the poverty line, no person from any country is absolutely free from falling victim of it. In fact, developed countries with high living standards and the best socioeconomic indicators in the world sometimes still report human trafficking convictions (UNODC 2014). In fact, there is a relatively high activity within EU countries, partially due to freedom of movements inside the EU. In this region, victims are typically exploited for the trade of sex services and, to a smaller extent, forced labor, often in agriculture or domestic work (Shelley 2010). Data has shown that within the EU, victims of human trafficking are usually trafficked from Eastern European Member States, with Romania being the one that has reported the largest number of victims in the recent years.

2. Purpose and aim of the study

2.1. Research puzzle

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the reasons why Romania is such an important country of origin for victims of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation. This country is recently new to the EU and finds itself among the less economically developed states of it. However, there are other relatively new EU member states such as Bulgaria, Poland or Hungary with similar socioeconomic conditions and a common Cold War past, which, even though are vulnerable to human trafficking do not report as many human trafficking cases as Romania does (Europol 2016). The intriguing question here is why human trafficking especially affects Romanian citizens. A possible reason for it could be the great diaspora that the country has experienced since the old of Cold War, with human trafficking networks being established in different countries and easily operating transnationally.

Lastly and based on the obtained results, this thesis will offer policy recommendations at an EU-level to this major problem that poses a great threat to EU citizens' security, especially to those that are the most vulnerable to it. The aim of this study is to bring some new light to the factors and reasons contributing to Romania being an origin country of human trafficking victims that are exploited within the EU and contribute to the research on the subject. The results obtained could hopefully be helpful for police-makers, both at an EU-level and at a national level in Romania to tackle human trafficking and organized crime.

Therefore, the research question of this thesis is posed as:

What are the main reasons behind Romania being such a major source country of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation?

In order to join the EU, potential candidate countries must fulfil what it is known as the *Copenhagen criteria* (European Council 1993). These criteria comprise a series of standards that all EU Member States must fulfil with and they include certain socioeconomic conditions, respect for the rule of law and human rights and a democratic system. Therefore, since Romania has been, for more than ten years now, an EU member state, it is reasonable to assume that it possesses economic and social standards quite similar to those that the most developed countries in the world currently enjoy. Even though that is not absolutely incorrect, Romania is still one of the less developed EU Member States, and still suffers from quite high levels of unemployment, individuals

living under the poverty line, unequal income distribution and political and police corruption (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017. World Bank Group, 2014. Transparency International, 2017).

2. 2. Scope of the study

Firstly, it is important to clarify that this study is limited to EU borders and the victims that will be object of study are EU nationals. Human trafficking is normally linked to illegal migration or smuggling, however, in this case it does not imply it, and this is where free movement of persons that is guaranteed by the belonging to the EU comes into play. Victims of human trafficking are not smuggled in this case, they move across EU member states on a legal basis; however, they are still part of a complex process that, among others, includes recruitment, fraud, abuse of power and control from one person (the trafficker) over another one (the victim); all of them elements that characterize human trafficking as defined above.

In addition, this thesis will be focused in human trafficking with Romania as country of origin of victims. The reason for this is that, as seen before, the vast majority of the victims of human trafficking originally come from this country (Europol 2016). Furthermore, a vast number of them falls into the category of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, so this study will also be limited to that.

According to EU regulations (Treaty of the European Union 2008), as Romania does not belong to the Schengen area, individuals need to show a legitimate identity document when travelling into the Schengen area or another EU state that does not belong to it. ID control is usually sufficient for individuals to enter into Schengen states, with no further security checks. Thus, with the lack of exhaustive assessment and background checks that visa applications or customs controls normally require, victims move easily within EU states, which can pose an obstacle for authorities to intercept them and prosecute possible cases of human trafficking.

2.3. Literature review

Even though human trafficking and slavery have existed since the beginning of times, it was not until a few decades ago that it globally became a matter of public concern, in fact, the Palermo Protocol, that is the most important international guiding instrument to prevent and combat human trafficking was created in 2000. There is a considerable amount of available literature on the causes why human trafficking does happen, the population sectors that are at the most risk to fall victims of it and on its relationship with migration, poverty and under-development. Moreover, it is important to note that the vast majority of the research carried out on this area is relatively new and especially prominent since the end of last century, even though human trafficking it is a quite old practice.

Furthermore, international organizations and agencies such as ILO (2009) the IOM (2005), UNODC (2009, 2014, 2018) or Europol (2016) regularly produce documents with the current trends on human trafficking and develop guidelines for governments and national institutional bodies to address this reality of global concern. These documents contain very concise data on human trafficking activity both in EU Member States (as this thesis will be focused on) and worldwide.

By the end of 2018 a bibliometric study by Sweileh (2018) showed that of the 2044 articles published till date about human trafficking, about a third were specifically focused in sexual exploitation and the 74,7% of those were in social science and humanities related fields, even though human trafficking it is also related to other disciplines, such as law, international security and global health. Likewise, the majority of these documents were produced by institutions, media or conventions related to international migration. And finally, this study concluded that the countries that are affected the most by human trafficking are the ones that produce the least literature in relation to this global problem (Sweileh 2018).

Moreover, there are very few quantitative researches on human trafficking. However, in 2015, a comprehensive study was carried out using solely quantitative data to examine the causes for human trafficking to happen in Europe (Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015). This study led to significant findings regarding how movement of people, institutional quality and incidence of crime have a significant impact on human trafficking. It implied a significant new addition to the existing literature on human trafficking until the date.

There is also significant research based on an economics and business perspective of human trafficking and organized crime. These studies are primarily focused on the businesses models of human trafficking and on how the important demands for cheap

labor, sexual services or any other kind of product or service that might be illegal, non-abundant or with low availability create a great market opportunity for criminal networks or organized crime groups (Shelley, 2010). There is also considerable research on the perspectives of prostitution regularization or banning from sociologic perspectives, with some of them dating from the 80s and 90s. There is some research as well on how the effect of prostitution legalization in human trafficking (Cooper 1989. Raymond 2010) on which parts of this thesis have been based upon.

There are very few studies on the problem of human trafficking particularly in Romania and other Eastern European countries. However, there is a comprehensive study on the dimension of this phenomenon in Romania as well as the factors that enable and facilitate human trafficking in the country. The study is from 2012 and was carried out by scholars Caunic and Tulica (2012).

3. Human trafficking in Europe

Despite judicial and police efforts, human trafficking still occurs within the EU to a large extent. It is important to distinguish between two categories of human trafficking that occur inside EU borders depending on the country of origin of the victims. In one of those categories, only EU citizens are victims of human trafficking and transported within countries located inside of EU borders. However, the other category includes non-EU citizens as well and implies the smuggling and irregular entry of them into EU borders, where in many cases they do not have a valid permission to stay. In this last case, traffickers typically take advantage of the illegal status of victims and, as a way of coercion to exploit them, they threaten them with reporting their illegal residency status in the country where they have been trafficked, and victims normally succumb to these threats.

Due to the large share of high-qualified professionals in the EU and low birth rates during the last few decades, there is a high demand for unqualified labor that is not completely met by EU nationals. Human trafficking networks have seen this situation as a great opportunity to make large profits at the expense of exploiting other human beings. The textile industry and agriculture are just a few examples of economic activities in which trafficked individuals are forced to work, so the benefits of these businesses get maximized by employing a quite cheap work force. Trafficked individuals come from quite diverse regions such as Asia, Latin America, Africa or former Soviet countries. (Shelley 2010). Most of these victims escape poverty and come to Europe attracted by the welfare and high living-standard conditions that characterize European societies and typically fall victims of work offers fraud. Other individuals flee from war and conflicts and put their lives in the hands of smugglers who promise to transport them to Europe and end up exploiting them. And lastly, some are even recruited by relatives or acquaintances that are already settled in the host country.

One of the major achievements of the European Union (EU) is the suppression of borders within EU members states and thus, the free movement of persons, goods and services within EU borders and without the need of a visa or a travel permission. EU nationals benefit from it every day. However, free movement of persons, goods and services inside EU borders has a dark side too, and that is that it provides a breeding ground for human trafficking, as well as other type of organized crime illicit activities that imply the smuggling of any sort of illegal good or service, such as drugs or weapons. Without the need of visas (or even a valid ID within the Schengen area) or being subject to customs declarations, smugglers can easily transfer their goods and services from one

country to another one. In case of human trafficking, the fact of being in a common area without borders makes the whole recruitment, transfer and exploitation steps much easier when it comes to trafficking EU nationals.

Between 2004 and 2007, various Eastern European countries joined the EU, with Romania and Bulgaria being the last ones before Croatia joined in 2013. Even though not all of these countries are part of the Schengen area yet, they do benefit from the free movement of persons, one of the fundamental principles of the Treaty of functioning of the EU, and coincidentally, some of those countries are the ones from which most human trafficking victims do come from and are smuggled into other EU countries (EC 2018). These Eastern European relatively new EU member states have the lowest socioeconomic indicators, with the largest unemployment rates and lowest minimum wages, of the whole of the EU (UNDP, 2018), which is a reason why many individuals in them are more prone to fall victims of human trafficking. The country that has by far the largest number of victims of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation (as well as with other purposes, such as forced labor) is Romania, with more than the 50% for the whole EU (Europol, 2016).

3.1. Human trafficking: how does it really work?

Trafficking of persons has always existed, even though it has not always been considered as an offence. In fact, in Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, slavery was legal and constituted a substantial part of these societies economic systems, and it was not until various centuries later that this practice was abolished. However, slavery kept existing to a great scale and today has taken form of what we know as human trafficking with the purpose of any forced lucrative activity. Like any other economic activity, legal or illegal, human trafficking exists because, unfortunately, there is an important demand of cheap or free human capital to global scale. In this way, those involved human trafficking organized crime networks take advantage of individuals vulnerabilities and needs to make large profits.

Victims of human trafficking often find it really hard to escape their captors, as well as to report them to the authorities. In fact, there are still many countries in where police and judicial authorities are corrupt and not easily reliable. Moreover, human traffickers and exploiters use diverse tactics such as the following ones to have control over their victims, as recorded in the Anti-human trafficking manual for criminal justice practitioners developed by UNODC (2009):

- The use of violence, both physical and psychological. Furthermore, traffickers use in many cases the victims' families as a means of coercion, threatening the victims to cause harm on even kill their relatives.
- The use of fraud and deception in relation to the possible legal consequences of the irregular statuses of the victims in the host country practicing illegal activities, such as prostitution, urging the victims to believe that they could be convicted for it.
- The use of debts. Traffickers very often charge housing, food and other living expenses with very inflated interests. In this way, victims are forced to work in order to pay these debts to their exploiters. However, criminals keep increasing victims' debts, so victims are never able to fully pay it.
- Abuse of drugs and alcohol. Traffickers often give toxic and addictive substances to victims to keep them sedated and under control (UNODC 2010).

Organized crime networks can recruit their victims in many ways in order to exploit them later. Criminals can use abduction, which usually takes place in armed conflicts and is used by violent groups to spread terror among certain communities, or fraud, which is the most usual and may be of many kinds (UNODC 2018) with digital communication playing an important role in it. Commonly, criminals attract potential victims by the use of false attractive job postings abroad. In case of conflict areas, apart from abduction, traffickers also use deception by offering to smuggle potential victims wishing to fear from war to safer locations and they end making them captive or using coercion to exploit them in a new a country. Even when criminals aim to obtain organs to sell them illegally, they offer to buy the victims organs (usually organs without which is possible to live, such as eyes or one kidney), and transport them to other countries in order for the victims to undergo surgeries to have their organs removed. Later on, the victims never receive any amount (or much lower quantities than agreed) for their organs (UNODC 2018).

A very common recruitment method used in Europe, especially in the Eastern part of it, is what it is known as the *loverboy modus operandi*. This recruitment method is usually targeted to girls or young women. In it, criminals often fake loving relationship with potential victims in order to gain their trust and later convince them to move abroad, and once there they ultimately exploit them (EUROPOL 2016). This recruitment method plays with the victims' emotional attachment. In it, the recruiter would normally date and show an important romantic interest in the victim. After the victim's trust is gained, the criminal known as the *loverboy* would convince her to go on a trip or move abroad together. Finally, after having reached their final destination, the recruiter would sell the victim to another trafficker or force her into labor, sexual exploitation or other kind of illicit practice. Therefore, even though victims normally move from one country or region

to another one on their own will, they do it after being deceived in order to be exploited afterwards, which falls as well in the UN's (2000) definition of human trafficking.

A recent matter of important concern in the last years in Europe was the considerable amount of cases of trafficked teenage girls by the extremist group DAESH to the territories dominated by it in Middle East. These girls were mostly recruited through social media and the internet, they were offered a quite attractive life in the territory of the unrecognized Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as the wives of the combatants of the jihad, therefore, they decided to travel there with the prospective of settling. However, once in there, these recruited young women see that their lives in the territories controlled by DAESH differs to a great extent to what they had been fraudulently promised, as in reality they end being forced to sex or labor, lack fundamental rights and suffer from violence, among others (Binetti 2015). Unfortunately, once in there, they are not allowed to freely leave and, just like in many other human trafficking cases, it is extremely difficult for them to escape.

3.2. Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation

As showed by the global reports on trafficking of persons by UNODC (2014, 2016), sexual exploitation is the most common destiny for human trafficking victims. According to this United Nations Office, approximately a 79% of victims of trafficking in persons are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation (UNODC). As a matter of fact, it happens to be the most common exploitation form in every region in the world except from South-East Asia and the Pacific. In this last one, adults and children are often trafficked for the purpose of forced labor (UNODC 2014). Sexual exploitation normally refers to forced prostitution, however, it can also include other lucrative activities related to the sex industry, such as pornographic material production. Many countries have a vast demand for sexual services that is not met by a proportional offer, as very few individuals would like to engage in prostitution for a living. All EU Member States have high demands of sexual services (Europol, 2016), and therefore human trafficking criminals have seen a market niche in the high demand but low offer of sex workers. According to a report on child labor by ILO (2009), around the 98% of victims of human trafficking are women and girls.

Similarly, sexual exploitation is also the most usual purpose of trafficking of persons in Europe, with the vast majority of the victims registered coming from Central and Eastern Europe, more specifically Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania and Slovakia. At the same time, there are many other non-EU victims trafficked to EU countries. While these last ones frequently use false identity and travel documents, EU nationals normally have genuine and legitim documents (Europol 2016).

Inside the EU, nearly all victims of human trafficking coming from Eastern and Central Europe are female, normally young and in some cases, they have not even reached legal age. In fact, out of a total of 570 intercepted victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation 5% were underage (Europol 2016).

In some cases, trafficked women that are offered very specific jobs in the entertainment industry, nightclubs or massage parlors know that mostly likely they will have to render sexual services to clients occasionally. However, they are still victims of fraud as they do not know beforehand the conditions in which they will work (UNODC 2010, pp: 44-47).

3.3. Human trafficking and legalization of prostitution

The prostitution industry is quickly growing and expanding. In accordance with the ideas of a free market economy, more and more countries have progressively decided to legalize the trade of sexual services, while a few others penalize the purchase (and even sometimes the sale) of prostitution (Ekberg 2004). However, there are still many countries in the world in where the legal status of the trade of sexual services is not recognized in national judiciary systems. This legal limbo leaves a large space for criminals to exploit their victims for prostitution, as the legal consequences that they would face if convicted would be minor than in countries where the purchase or sell of sex is forbidden.

Far from adopting a common policy regarding it, EU member states have very diverse regulations when it comes to prostitution and purchasing sexual services. Whereas in most EU countries we can find a *legal limbo* within this area, others like the Netherlands have legalized the purchase of sexual services and sexual workers enjoy the same working rights and conditions as any other legal worker. And other countries, such as Sweden or recently France, prosecute the purchasers of sexual services and consider individuals exercising prostitution as victims. In relation to this, there is a wide range of

opinions and arguments on the banning or legalization of prostitution as a tool to eradicate human trafficking.

According to pro-legalization arguments, the problem with prostitution is not the commercialization of sexual services itself the problem, but rather sexual abuse and gender violence (Showden 2009). Some defenders of the regulation of prostitution consider that legalizing this practice would contribute to the eradication of sexual violence and abuse in sex trade, and hence, with would help to combat human trafficking. They believe that with the regulation of it, sexual workers would have access to the same working conditions and rights as professionals from any other legally-recognized occupation, as well as better healthcare and sanitary conditions that would prevent them from contracting sexual transmitted diseases, that is something that victims of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation are often vulnerable to. Furthermore, employers and sexual workers would have legally-binding contracts that would support the last ones from being victim of exploitation or any other form of abuse. (Wagenaar 2006). Other pro-regulation arguments are related to freedom and sexual liberalism, and they regard the sale of sexual services is an individual and free choice, which it is not necessarily abusive to women. In fact, Milton Friedman, one of the most prominent neoliberalist economists of the 20th century has stated that both prostitution and pornography should be legalized and applied the same market rules as other economic activities (Jeffreys, 1990, Jeffreys 2009). Some countries, such as the Netherlands or Germany, have made the purchase of sexual services legal and prostitution has the very same conditions as any other occupation.

On the other side, there is the abolitionist perspective, which believes that illegalizing and criminalizing the purchase of sexual services is the only way to completely eradicate human trafficking. This theory is based on the concept of structuralism. Supporters of this theory often argue that prostitution is the result of many structural patriarchal inequalities and women's oppression, as prostitutes are usually women or girls coming from socially disadvantaged and impoverished backgrounds. In addition, according to a study by medical researcher Leseuer (2018), sex workers often have highest mortality rates and suffer from alcohol and substances abuse. Additionally, defendants of the banning of prostitution also discuss that sex industry enhances the objectification of women's bodies, as females are usually the ones offering sex services while men purchase them. However, opponents to abolitionism refute this theory by arguing the exact opposite. According to them, prostitution businesses do not really disappear by penalizing the purchase of sexual services, but instead it goes underground. This ultimately makes women and girls considerably more vulnerable to fall victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

An exhaustive study by scholars Cho, Dreher and Neumayer (2013) on whether the legalization of prostitution increases or decreases human trafficking has shown that the legalization of prostitution does not contribute to the eradication of human trafficking. Even though economic theory suggests that the substitution effect (i. e. the much larger offer of legal sex workers that compel with labor national regulations that would develop as a consequence of the legalization of prostitution) would decrease the demand for trafficked prostitutes as clients would fear being prosecuted for engaging in human trafficking activities, it also shows that the expansion of the sex trade market gives room for more human trafficking activity, as the study has concluded. This work has analyzed data from three countries with different prostitution regimes (Denmark, Germany and Sweden) and has shown evidence of the positive effects of the penalization of sex services purchasers for the eradication of human trafficking (Cho, Dreher and Neumayer 2013).

3.3.1 Swedish case vs Dutch case

As mentioned before, Sweden is one of the few countries in Europe (and the world) in where prostitution is illegal. In January the 1st of 1999 Sweden becomes the first country in the world in penalizing the purchase (but not the sale) of sexual services on an attempt to address in an effective manner prostitution and human trafficking. This policy was included among many other provisions aimed to address gender inequality and violence in an act known as *Kvinnofrid* (Ekberg 2004). The judicial provisions behind the banning of prostitution in Sweden make it illegal to purchase sexual services, criminalizing and prosecuting anyone who would buy them. However, prostitutes are never penalized, in fact, they are considered as victims, as stated by the Swedish government:

“The government considers, however, that it is not reasonable to punish the person who sells a sexual service. In the majority of cases at least, this person is a weaker partner who is exploited by those who want only to satisfy their sexual drives. (Ministry of Labor 1998:55 in Ekberg 2004)

The Swedish model on the illegalization of prostitution punishes clients but never sex workers, as it is based on the premise that those engaged in prostitution are just victims of gender inequality, poverty and lack of opportunities, and far from being

penalized, they should be granted assistance to reintegrate in society and have access to equal job opportunities and decent living conditions (Ekberg 2004).

Due to the severe sanctions that potential buyers of sexual services could face if found guilty of buying them, Sweden is not a very attractive market for human traffickers, as apparently there is not much of a demand in the purchase of prostitution due to the sanctions that buyers could face if caught purchasing sexual services. After the Swedish model was put into practice, data have shown a relatively low numbers in human trafficking cases in the country, especially in comparison to other EU member states in where prostitution is legal or in a legal limbo (Brå 2018).

After the results that the Swedish model has showed in the past decades, other European countries, such as Norway or France, have been inspired to what is known today as the Swedish model, and have also implemented abolitionist measures or other similar policies that limit to a great extent the purchase of sexual services. In fact, after Sweden, Norway has also seen a considerable drop in street prostitution and adverts for sexual services (Raymond 2010).

However, there are few other EU Member States in where prostitution is not just legal, but also regulated, with its labor provisions, working unions and taxes, and considered as a legitimate work choice. This model is based on the assumption that persons decided to work in the sex industry on a voluntary basis. The best well-known example of this legal status of prostitution is the Netherlands, but countries such as Austria, Germany or Switzerland have also regularized sex trade (Sex Work Law 2018). In this model, known as the Dutch Model, due to the Netherlands having acted as a pioneer in this legal status, prostitution is recognized as a legal occupation. The Netherlands made it legal the purchase and sale of sexual services in 1989, with brothels achieving the status of legal and licensed businesses ten years after. This system considers the purchase of sexual services as any other entertainment industry, and as so, it must play by the same rules (Ekberg 2014). Furthermore, it is important to note that this legalization model of sex trade is supported by the vast majority of the Dutch population, according to polls carried out during the time when prostitution became legal (Weitzer 2000:178). The approval of the Dutch population shows a quite significant contrast with the Swedish public opinion on the issue, as around 70% of the surveyed citizens in Sweden showed their agreement with the ban on the purchase of prostitution back in 1999 (Raymond 2010).

In this model, individuals (mostly women) employed in prostitution must have a license and need to pass a licensing test in order to practice what it is considered by law as their occupation. When selling sex without a license, sex workers can face sanctions and be arrested. To some extent, this might pose an obstacle to human trafficking with

the purpose of sexual exploitation, as traffickers would lose a significant amount of profits if the persons that they exploit get intercepted and forbidden to practice prostitution (Lee, & Persson 2015).

The legalization of prostitution is closely related to sexual liberation and self-determination of women, defending that they should have the right to use their bodies to make profits and satisfy the market needs. This position arises from the premises of a liberal individualist approach, which relates individuals' dignity to autonomy, and thus the right to choose from different existing options (Cooper 1989). In this case the freedom to decide how to use one's body.

However, far from protecting women by giving them working permits and regularizing the sex industry, evidence has shown that there has been a considerable increase in criminal activity related to sexual exploitation. In many cases, instead of exercising their profession in the sex trade services as self-employed freelance workers, they end up working for procurers, whom in many cases employ them in exploiting and unfair conditions. Furthermore, there has also been a concerning rise in human trafficking activity in the Netherlands since the regularization of prostitution. Evidence from the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking of Human Beings (2013) shows that from year 1992 to 2010 there has been a total of 6.385 human trafficking victims in the Netherlands, with most of them being employed in the sex industry. Victims, usually female, mostly come from inside the EU, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe, and in some cases, they can also be of Dutch origins. Moreover, human trafficking activity has shown an exponential growth since 1989, which puts into question the argument that the legalization of prostitution is an effective tool to prevent human trafficking, especially if compared where countries that penalize the consumption of prostitution.

Lastly, apart from the Dutch and the Swedish model, there are other legal regimes for the buy and sale of sexual services. The most restrictive one is the Prohibitionist model, which penalizes both the sale and purchase of sex services, as it assumes that any aspect of prostitution is morally wrong and infringe individuals' dignity. Sanctions vary greatly from country to country. The only EU member state with a prohibitionist model is Croatia. (Sex Work Law 2018). Many other countries in the world lack a comprehensive legal system that regulates prostitution. They can include provisions on the sale of sexual services, but they are often vague and general (Sex Work Law 2018). Due to this, prostitution is often found at a legal limbo in many countries, which makes it harder to tackle human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

3.4. Human trafficking problem in Romania

Romania is a relatively big state located in Eastern Europe. With around 21.4 million inhabitants (BBC, 2018) it is the 7th country in terms of populations in the EU. Romania holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU since January 2019 and there are currently 32 Members of the European Parliament from Romania (EU, 2019). After World War II, the Communist Party took power in this Eastern European state, abolished monarchy and established a republic after an election that was not free of fraud and irregularities. The Communist Party took control of the country until the end of 1989, mostly under the rule of Nicolae Ceausescu. However, Romania kept relatively distant from the Soviet Union, although Romanian-Soviet relations still were mostly friendly and prudent, and Romania was part of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) during the rule of the Communist party. The scarcity of food and services and the economic downturn that affected most Eastern bloc states during the Cold War during the 80s, as well as the people's discontent, stirred up many protests in Romania, which far from being controlled by the government, ended in a large popular revolution that deposed and subsequently executed Ceausescu and opened the way for the transition to democracy and a free-market economic system, mostly led by former President Ion Iliescu (Hitchins 2014).

Since then, Romania has experienced a progressive growth and strengthening of its democracy during the last few decades. Moreover, together with other former Eastern bloc countries, it joined the NATO in 2004. This symbolically represented the total break-up of the country with its communist past. Romania also became a member of the EU in 2007, after negotiations that had been taking place since 1993 (Hitchins 2014, EU, 2018). Romania has experienced a considerable economic growth and development and a considerable rise in people's living standards in the past decades, furthermore, all people have access to clean water and electricity, both in cities and rural areas. Most of the population has access to internet and almost all households have at least one mobile subscription (UNDP 2019).

Nevertheless, there are still serious problems affecting the country, such as an alarming 25.4% of the population living below the national poverty lines and an average salary of 2,936 RON (the equivalent to 618€) (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2019, World Bank Group 2019). In addition, Romania is one of the countries within the EU with the highest levels of corruption (only surpassed by Bulgaria) (Transparency International 2017).

These facts make Romanian citizens vulnerable to fall victims of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labor and other illegal lucrative activities. Romania is not just a source country for human trafficking victims, but also of

transit and destination. Its geographic location makes it quite easy for human trafficking criminals to smuggle their victims from former Soviet neighbor countries, such as Moldova or Ukraine, or the Balkans. These victims are often smuggled to other EU member states with more attractive markets for sex purchase, such as Spain, Italy, United Kingdom or the Netherlands, however, some of them remain in Romania and are exploited in there. Human trafficking also occurs to a great extent within the country's territory, with victims usually being trafficked from small villages to larger cities, such as Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca or Timișoara (Shelley 2010). The great demand at EU level for sexual services, cheap labor outside the legal requirements and the rise of criminality have encouraged the supply "market" from this country. The relatively low living standards and socioeconomic conditions in which many individuals survive in Romania makes them to be at an extremely high-risk situation. In addition, there is a rather large Romani community in Romania. Evidence has shown that women and children of Romani origins are in great danger of becoming victims of trafficking in human beings due to various factors, such as social exclusion, poverty, ethnic discrimination, domestic violence, lack of education and, in some cases, even the involvement of families in trafficking and other criminal activities. Romani human trafficking victims are often forced to beg in the street for money, particularly in other EU Member States, but also exploited for prostitution or arranged marriage (European Roma Rights Centre 2011).

Romania has signed the Palermo Protocol, which is today the most important international public law guiding instrument in the fight against human trafficking and, by virtue of its membership of the EU, it is obligated to compel with the Community Directives in terms of prevention and countering trafficking in persons (UNODC. European Commission 2019). Since the signed of the Palermo Protocol, Romania has made considerable progress in combating human trafficking and exploitation inside its territory. It started by prohibiting and establishing sanctions for human trafficking criminals right after the signature of the Palermo Protocol (European Commission 2019) and nowadays human trafficking is addressed in Chapters VII and VIII of Title I of the most recent version of Romania's Criminal Code (2012), which is more in line with EU and international instruments to which Romania is a party, and it is notably more comprehensive and less ambiguous than former laws related to trafficking of persons. These updated regulations include 3 to 10 years prison sentences for human trafficking offences as recognized in the Palermo Protocol. They also include more severe sanctions to trafficking offences with various aggravating circumstances, such as offences being committed by family members or relatives of the victims, public officials in the performance of duties or abusing their recognized position of authority against the victim. Offences against minors are also an important aggravating factor. The most recent Criminal Code of Romania also includes convictions for smugglers (Criminal Code of

the Republic of Romania 2012) and according to it exerting prostitution is no longer an offence.

Other instruments and institutions aimed at preventing and combating human trafficking inside Romania are (European Commission 2019):

- the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons within the Minister of Internal Affairs. This agency comprises an inter-disciplinary team made of police-officers, sociologists, policy analysts, psychologists and social workers and has units all over the country. It has developed various programs to tackle the problem of human trafficking with quite positive results. Its fields of action consist in police and judiciary cooperation to intercept cases and prosecute criminals, to prevent human trafficking activity and to give assistance to the victims of it.
- The National Action Plan for the period 2012-2016. This Strategy is focused in various areas, such as discouraging and reducing demand for cheap labor or prostitution, education and awareness campaigns aimed at the most vulnerable groups in order to prevent them from falling victims of traffickers, collection and interpreting of data in order to carry out further research on the issue or developing standardized information guidelines to provide information about particular areas or for agents or institutions engaged in countering human trafficking activities.
- A National Referral Mechanism, which was created in 2007 and entered into force in 2008 with the goal of adopting a coordinated and unitary response to human trafficking situations.

Moreover, Romania has developed and strengthened bilateral relationships in terms of judicial and police cooperation with other Member States and third countries that report vast numbers of human trafficking victims of Romanian origin. Furthermore, it has also transferred its expertise on the issue and provided training to other countries such as Albania, Croatia, Moldova, Serbia or Turkey (European Commission 2019). Also, apart from governmental agencies and public authorities, there are various NGOs and other independent organizations involved in human trafficking prevention and giving assistance to the victims.

Nevertheless, human trafficking still remains an important problem in Romania with a large number of victims intercepted both within Romanian borders and in other EU member states every year (UNODC 2018. Europol 2016. Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking of Human Beings 2013).

4. Theoretical framework

4.1. Definitions and concepts

Even though it does not exist a universal consensus on the definition of human trafficking, the definition of the form of organized crime that is used by the most international organizations, agencies and researchers is the one that arises from the United Nations (2000) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Doc. A/55/383). The definition included in this protocol is the most updated one of this form of organized crime. It is also known as one of the Palermo Protocol. It defines human trafficking as follows:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal, manipulation or implantation of organs;” (UN, Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 2000)

Many states, including Romania in its national judiciary and the EU in its regulations on the issue, have been guided by this protocol to address human trafficking in their national judicial systems. 117 have signed this protocol, while other 60 parties that are also part of it have accepted it with some reservations and have declared to not consider themselves bounded by some of the articles of it (UNODC).

The prevailing theme of this study relates to the main reasons why human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation still remains a major problem within EU borders and the reasons behind Romania being the greatest provider of victims for sexual exploitation in the EU markets. Therefore, it is important to clarify a few essential concepts on the area, as well as to set the limits and the parameters around which this study will revolve.

Smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings are closely related. They are both illegal according to the regulations of International Law, and, in many cases, they occur simultaneously. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that they are two different and separate concepts. The main difference between human trafficking and

smuggling is the consent of the person who is being a victim of it. As defined by the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000), smuggling of migrants shall mean:

“the procurement, in order to obtain directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.”

As said before, one of the things that characterize human trafficking is that victims never had given their consent to be smuggled or transported from one country to another, and, if done so, it would have been after being deceived. In the case of smuggling, victims do consent being smuggled from one territory to another one. If being victims of fraud and, once smuggled to a new territory, migrants are held in captivity and exploited for any purpose, then they would be victims of human trafficking as well.

4.2. Free movement and human trafficking within the EU

Free movement of persons is one of the keystones to EU citizenship. Not all EU member states find themselves included in the Schengen area, which is a non-border space composed by 22 EU member states plus Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein within which individuals can freely move without the need of going through border controls or ID-checks. However, as established in the Treaty on European Union (2008), to travel from those EU countries that do not belong to Schengen area to a Schengen or EU Member State, EU citizens are only required to show an ID card or passport.

Human trafficking is normally linked to illegal migration or smuggling, however, in this case, as trafficking takes place inside EU borders, it does not necessarily imply the illegal movement of individuals. This is where free movement of persons that is guaranteed by the belonging to the EU comes into play. Even though victims of human trafficking are not smuggled in this case, they are still part of a complex process that, among others, includes recruitment, fraud, abuse of power and control from one person (the trafficker) over another one (the victim); all of them elements that characterize human trafficking as defined by the Palermo Protocols.

4.3. Theories

The first theory that this thesis will be based on is Political economy of human trafficking, as, in one hand, this form of organized crime is solely motivated by lucrative purposes, and in the other one, victims of human trafficking usually come from impoverished backgrounds in less developed countries with high levels of unemployment and a large number of individuals living below the poverty line. Secondly, this study will be also approached by gender perspectives on human trafficking, as particularly human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation is directly related with the purchase of sexual services and it particularly affects women.

4.3.1 Political economy of human trafficking

Scholars like Cohn (2012) have argued that the evolution of organized crime, and more specifically, illicit trade of human beings, has evolved accordingly with the international global order in the last few decades.

Critical theorists have stated that liberalization, freedom of movement of goods and persons, such as it is granted by the EU, deregulation and the growth of international trade greatly hampers the ability to intercept and prosecute transnational criminal activity (Cohn, 2012). Additionally, immigrants are often exposed to vulnerable situations in host countries, not only because they tend to come from less developed and wealthy backgrounds and are initially in a lower economic status than nationals, but also because they normally subject to different legal status than those who are nationals and, in many cases, they are unaware as their rights and obligations (Jones, Engstrom, Hilliard & Díaz 2007).

Furthermore, although international security organizations such as INTERPOL or, at an EU level, EUROPOL, can help when it comes to data collection and information sharing, criminals are still object to prosecution in a single national system (Cohn 2012).

Additionally, the factors involved in the phenomenon of migration, as well as in the occurrence of human trafficking, are mostly linked with low-standard living conditions and lack of employment in origin countries and the chances of having a well-paid jobs and much better living conditions in destination countries. Low-income countries often show higher criminality rates than higher-income ones (Cohn 2012).

However, other less well-known factors, such as corrupt authorities, oppressive systems or authoritarian governments also play an important role in *pushing* individuals to migrate to other countries and therefore, to be more prone to fall victims of human

trafficking (Jones, Engstrom, Hilliard & Díaz 2007), as they are usually hesitant to return to their home countries due to fear of reprisal.

Lack of education and, within the EU, lack of knowledge on their rights as Community citizens, also poses an additional vulnerability for individuals to fall into the hands of human trafficking networks. Human trafficking usually implies the transfer from one country to another one. Even though EU membership grants all EU member states' citizens the right to work and stay in any of them, there are still many individuals that are still not aware of this right, especially those from countries that have recently joined the EU, such as Romania or Bulgaria. In this way, human traffickers often use as an oppression tool the fact that victims are not aware of their *migration legal status* after they have been trafficked from an EU country to another one, and thus, make them believe that they are illegally staying in the host country and could be prosecuted for it (Jones, Engstrom, Hilliard & Díaz 2007).

In addition, it is important not to forget that human trafficking, as well as any other type of illicit market, exists as a consequence of the law of supply and demand. Wheaton, Schauer and Galli have argued that the human trafficking market acts as a monopolistic competition model (2010). Scholars have explained that, even though there are many suppliers in this sort of illegal market, they commercialize their products in very similar ways, and the fact that there is such a large *product differentiation* (many varieties of the product among purchasers can choose from) gives suppliers a high level of negotiation power.

The price of the product (trafficked human beings) set by traffickers is dependent upon its characteristics and availability. With the trafficker's costs remaining unchanged, an increase in the price of their product will lead to an increase of their profit and therefore an increase in the number of trafficked persons supplied. (Wheaton, Schauer and Galli 2010). Also, costs for human traffickers tend to be really low, as their victims are employed under slavery conditions and do not receive any salary for their services. Therefore, employers willing to employ sexual workers legally are at great disadvantage compared to human trafficking networks.

4.3.2. Gender perspectives on human trafficking

It is difficult to discuss about human trafficking without relating it to a gender perspective, as figures prove that the vast majority of victims of human trafficking are women and girls (Europol 2016. UNODC 2010, 2014. ILO 2009). Furthermore, when it comes to victims of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation, as this thesis focuses in, almost all victims are female (UNODC 2016). Thus, apart from the economic theoretical perspective, it is essential to also analyze this phenomenon under a gender perspective.

Since gender studies involve a very broad variety of theories and approaches, this thesis will be limited to two of them, radical feminism and socialist feminism, as they have been considered to be the ones that can relate better to human trafficking. These two theories have certain common characteristics and sometimes are even confused; however, they are essentially different.

4.3.2.1. Radical feminism

Nowadays, radical feminism and its premises are overly misunderstood and distorted. This concept is often confused with other ones with similar characteristics but still essentially different, such as cultural feminism or even socialist feminism (Thompson 2001).

Radical feminism is a theoretical and broad theory of gender that holds that social inequality in all societies has been caused by the domination of men among women. It argues that power relations have been developed through history according to both female and male biological differences and roles in human reproduction and have established what is known today as male supremacy (Thompson 2001). It arose in the late 60s in the United States of America within what is known as the second wave of feminism. It emerged as a political movement to end with women oppression in all areas of society, including the economic and market systems, the workplace and also households. In fact, radical feminism introduced the problem of women's oppression at home, emphasizing that even though most women are employed and, just like men, have a job outside their homes, a quite significant part of the housework falls on them, instead of being equally distributed among all family members (Millet 1970). Radical feminism also questioned other matters that had never been called into question before, such as if beauty ideals for women, together with their fantasies and desires were completely real or a product of a power relations system that oppresses women.

Radical feminism is a broad theory to which many authors have contributed. Some of them are Kate Millet, Betty Friedman, Germaine Greer or Shulamith Firestone. Millet's most prominent work was *Sexual Politics* (1970), which was very much influenced by De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and introduces and addresses women's oppression in sexual relations. *Sexual Politics* is one of the most representative works of radical feminism.

The study broad theory introduced concepts and definitions that are quite present and used in contemporary social studies of gender. One of them is patriarchy, which refers to an unequal distribution of power among both sexes and in which men have predominance over women. Another one is gender, that refers to the different behaviors and characteristics that society has traditionally assigned to men and women and that are entirely dependent on their biological sexual characteristics (Thompson 2001).

Radical feminism has taken a standpoint in relation to prostitution and sex industry. It fiercely opposes to it. On the basis that it is mostly women (and very rarely men) those engaged in sex trade and services, radical feminism recognizes the obvious male dominant nature of this type of business. As so, it also argues that the engagement of women and girls in prostitution is never an absolute free choice, as many of them are victims of human trafficking and exploitation, and those ones that are not they decide to offer sexual services as the last resort for those in extremely difficult socioeconomic situations to survive. MacKinnon (1993), another important author of radical feminism argues that if prostitution was a completely free and uncoerced decisions why are the women with the fewest options the ones most often engaged on it. Andrea Dworkin (1987), another important author of radical feminism who is known by their critiques and opposition to pornography, has stated that prostitution, pornography and other categories of sexual entertainment legitimate the view of women's bodies being objects for men's entertainment and abuse. Radical feminism also argues that prostitution reinforces the idea of women's role to serve and satisfy men's needs, while pornography normalizes abuse and harm to women, among others (Dworkin 1993, 1995)

4.3.2.2. Socialist feminism

Socialist feminism is a theoretical perspective of gender that, similarly to radical feminism, recognizes and criticizes the patriarchal system that is present in today's societies. However, socialist feminism relates the patriarchal system to capitalist market

systems governing most of the world countries and defends that gender equality can only be achieved by tackling the existing economic differences among individuals.

It emerged in the late 19th century and developed during the early 20th century, very much influenced by Marxism and the concept of class conflicts and historical materialism, and then it arose again on the late 60s, together with radical feminism.

Two representative authors of socialist feminism are Clara Zektin and Clara Fraser. Zektin, who was a Marxist theorist and activist, published her work during the 19th century and the early 20th. She was one of the first authors in history linking socialism and class struggle to patriarchy and made a clear distinction between socialist and bourgeois feminism. She believed that socialism was the only way to liberate women and encouraged them to participate in work unions and other workers rights' organizations to demand equal conditions for men and women (Zektin1875). Fraser produced her work during what is known as the Second Wave of Feminism (between the 60s and 80s). In her work "Revolution, she said" she defends that the oppression of women cannot be understood without taking into account the oppression of the lowest classes, and just focusing on equality among women and men without taking a perspective of other oppressed collectives, such as lower socioeconomic social classes, ethnic minorities, etc. would result in a system dominated by white upper-class women from developed Western countries who would mistakenly think that they are represent all women in the world (Fraser1998). This concept is currently described as intersectionality, and today it represents an essential concept in gender theories.

Christine Delphy (1975) was the first one to refer to the concept of material feminism. This concept establishes gender as a social construct that establishes specific roles for women, such as educating children or taking care of the household work. Materialist feminism's ideal society is one in which both men and women are treated the exact same way socially and economically without gender playing a role in it.

Another important work on socialist feminism is the Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism by Eisenstein (1978), which compiles and discusses various prominent texts on this theory. In it, Eisenstein carries out a class conflict analysis from a feminist perspective to develop a theory about the intersectional natures of gender and class, both of them being systems of inequality (Eisenstein 1978).

There is no a specific standpoint on prostitution and the sex industry by socialist feminism. However, the relationship that it establishes between gender and socioeconomic classes and how the current economic differences that are still quite present in society play a role in gender inequality can be extrapolated to the study of human trafficking. As different studies and political economic theories explain, poverty and lower socioeconomic conditions make individuals more prone to fall victims of

trafficking. Socialist feminism argues that liberal market economic systems foster and perpetuate a patriarchal system in where women are oppressed and dominated by men. If so, women and girls would inevitable be more vulnerable to fall victims of exploitation and trafficking of persons, among others.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research design

The goal of this thesis is to determine the main reasons is it that the vast majority of victims of human trafficking do come from Romania, especially since there are other member states of the EU with similar characteristics (former communist regimes during Cold War, located in Eastern Europe, with similar socioeconomic indicators, recently new to the EU, etc.) which differ to a great extent in terms of nationals becoming victims of human trafficking. Likewise, after having established the reasons for the important human trafficking activity that currently takes place in Romania, this thesis plans to carry out what it is a constructive analysis part and to propose possible solutions geared to decrease human trafficking activity in Romania, hence in the EU as a whole.

Therefore, the method how this thesis is planned to be carried out is a case-study, which consists in deeply analyzing a phenomenon in order to come to one or a few conclusions. Scholars such as Gerring (2011) or Crasnow (2012) have stressed the importance of case-studies in fields such as political science and sociology, especially, when it comes to politics, in order to reframe the existing policies or to design a new approach to address an existing problem. Case-studies aim to understand how variables affecting a specific situation interact and exert an influence in such situation, and in this specific case, with the objective of developing possible solutions to the reoccurring problem of human trafficking.

Likewise, in order to find an answer to the question “what are the main reasons behind Romania being such a major source country of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation?”, this thesis will be based on a case study in which three areas will be analyzed: development, gender and migration. The major reason for having elected these three categories is that they are the ones that relate the most to the theories studied in theoretical framework. As seen before, there is evidence that countries with the lowest development conditions report the highest numbers of human trafficking victims. Furthermore, since human trafficking majorly affects women and girls (UNODC 2014 and 2018. EUROPOL 2016. ILO 2019) and, according to the gender theories in previous sections of this thesis, human trafficking, as well as the entertainment sex industry and prostitution, exist as a product of the gender inequality that still exists in the world societies. Lastly, since human trafficking implies the movement of persons and Romania is a country with a very large diaspora (UN DESA 2015), it could be interesting to find the relation between Romanian migration and vulnerability to human trafficking.

5.2. Collection and analysis of the data

The data analyzed in this thesis will be collected majorly from primary sources, such as statistical data from official institutions and agencies, but also from secondary sources such as reports, or material produced by scholars on the basis of other primary sources. Secondary sources will be mostly used to analyze and relate the information obtained from primary sources to the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The data collection and analysis will be divided in three sections and will be conducted as follows:

For the development part of the study, socioeconomic and human development indicators will be used. Under the section “Development indicators” there will be the following categories: Human Development Index, education, income distribution, inequality, poverty, employment and work. These data are mostly collected from the United Nations Development Program Human Development Reports, which every year publishes these data for all countries. In combination, these will also be collected from the World Bank or EUROSTAT. Afterwards, these data will be scrutinized and analyzed on the basis of the theories mentioned before in order to study better Romania’s level of development and how it affects the prevalence of vulnerability to human trafficking amongst the country’s nationals.

For the part of the study that comprises the effect of gender equality on vulnerability to human trafficking, data from gender indicators of Romania will be analyzed. These data will also be obtained from the UNDP Development reports and other similar sources. Afterwards, they will be analyzed on the basis of the gender theories as well as on other information on human trafficking obtained from other secondary sources or reports. With this, this analysis aims to conclude what is the impact of gender in human trafficking in Romania.

And thirdly, migration statistics will also be collected analyzed in order to find if there is an existing correlation between emigration from Romania and human trafficking.

The assessment of the data obtained will be analyzed on the basis of the theoretical framework previously developed and all the information on human trafficking obtained from the literature in order to find an answer to the initial question and the research puzzle of this thesis.

5.2. Limitations

Human trafficking is a quite complex phenomenon in which many factors and agents are involved and have an influence. Due to word and time limits, this thesis does not plan to find the ultimate solution to the problem of human trafficking in Romania, but to find some of the main reasons for it to happen and, in relation to them, develop policy recommendations that could contribute to find solutions to this problem. Furthermore, this thesis could also open the possibility of future research on the reasons behind Romania being the largest source of human trafficking victims in the whole EU.

The data scrutinized in this thesis dates from the past two years, as there is very little available data from 2019. However, even though certain statistics might not be absolutely up to the date, they are quite recent, and the difference does not expect to pose significant changes for the outcomes of this thesis.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore other possible factors affecting the phenomenon of trafficking of persons and exploitation in further future research.

6. Analysis and discussion

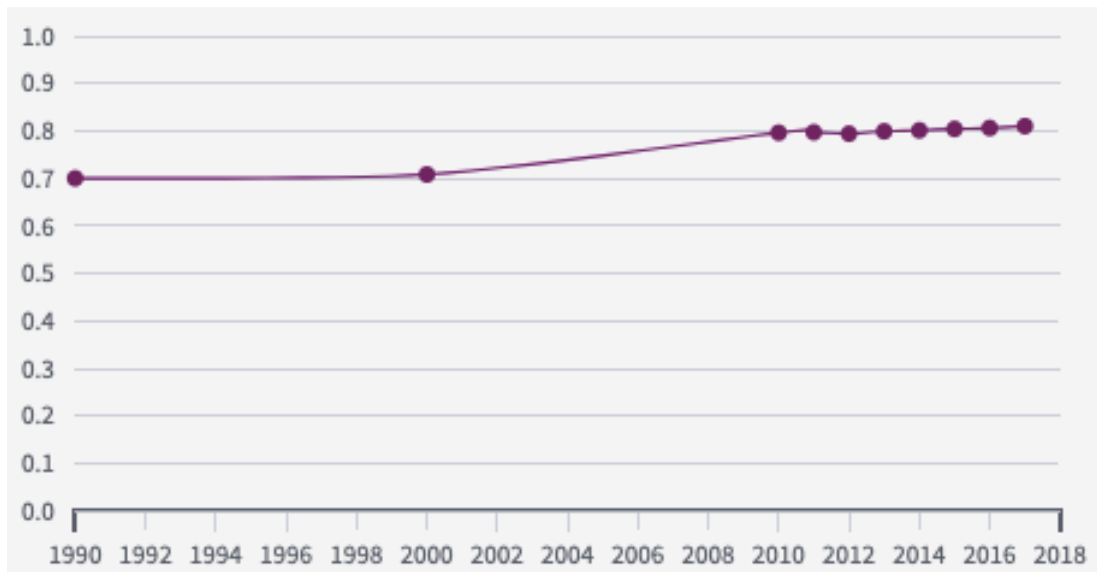
6.1. Development indicators

6.1.1. HDI

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which publishes every year a report measuring every country's development since 1990, defines human development as "a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical ones are live a long and healthy life, to be educated and enjoy a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights..." (1991). UNDP has created an indicator to measure development levels on a country known as the Human Development Index (1990). This index is composed by other socioeconomic indicators such as life expectancy, education and per capita income and classifies countries into four categories according to their level of development.

According to the last UNDP report released, which has published statistics until year 2017 to the present date, Romania has an HDI of 0,811, placing it in the 52th position within all world countries and in the category of the most developed countries in the world (UNDP 2018). This seems quite positive for Romania, as it could be considered to be among the most developed countries in the world. However, in comparison to the other Member States of the EU, Romania is actually the one with the lowest HDI of the EU. As seen before in the theoretical part of this thesis, migration, smuggling of persons or goods and human trafficking activity are specifically higher in countries with low-standard living conditions and less developed (Cohn 2012). Therefore, being the state with the lowest HDI within the EU could partially be a reason for Romania to be the most important country of origin of victims of human trafficking.

Nevertheless, the HDI itself is insufficient to find a solid explanation for the research question of this study. In addition, as mentioned before, the HDI index it is composed by various social indicators that combined together provide a specific value from which an approximated idea of a country's development situation. If scrutinized individually, these social indicators can give specific information about a certain aspect of the country's development or socioeconomic level. Therefore, the following sub-categories of the HDI will be analyzed as follows: education, income, inequality and socio-economic sustainability.



Source: UNDP (2018) Human Development Index for Romania from 1990–2018

From 2000 to 2017, the HDI in Romania has shown a slight increase in the past two decades, passing from 0,709 in 2000 to 0,811 in 2017. Within this period, the highest increase took place from 2000 to 2010, going from 0,709 to 0,797. However, during this same period, the number of victims of human trafficking of Romanian citizenship has also increased (EUROSTAT 2016. Ministry of Interior 2007. Dutch National Rapporteur, 2013), which contrasts with the proportionality between organized crime and human development seen before. However, the cases of prosecution of offenders for human trafficking related crimes have also increased. The possible reason for this could be that in the last few years, judicial authorities and police forces have been more successful in prosecuting human trafficking, as well as the possible positive impact on the newer policies, strategies and guidelines on preventing and combating human trafficking.

6.1.2. Education

What is known as the Education Index can be extracted the HDI. The Education Index is nowadays measured by combining average adult (over 25 years old) years of schooling with expected years of schooling for children (UNDP 2018). Other data related to a country's education level are the gross enrollment ratio, the literacy rate or the population with primary, secondary or tertiary education.

Similarly, to the HDI figure for Romania in 2000 to 2017, the Education Index for this country, which is 0,762, has shown an overall increase during this period. This is a high index in comparison to the rest of world countries. However, inside the EU it is among the countries with the lowest Education Index (UNDP).

The gross enrollment ratio for preschool, primary and secondary age groups falls between 87.89%. which means that, even though the vast majority of children and teenagers attend school in Romania, there is still a significant number of them who will remain uneducated and illiterate. These children will be more prone to fall victims of human trafficking, as those less-educated are normally more vulnerable to be exploited or frauded, as seen before (UNODC 2018). An explanation for it could be the extremely social exclusion that Roma groups face in a wide range of fields in Romania, including education, with many children from these communities not being having access to an education or being forced to work to support their families (European Roma Rights Centre 2011). Coincidentally, many individuals from Roma minorities have been reported victims of human trafficking.

In the other hand, the adult literacy rate is 98,6%, quite high but not absolute yet (UNDP 2017). Also, among the adult population with at least some secondary education, men represent a considerable higher number than women (92,7% vs 86,5%), meaning that there is wider number of men able to perform qualified jobs than of women. This might not only lead to less job opportunities for women and girls, but also to a greater female workforce supply for unskilled jobs, which are quite demanded in more developed countries and in many cases covered by victims of human trafficking due to the cheap price that they cost to employers (Shelley, 2012).

It also draws attention how low government expenditure in education is in Romania, especially if we compare it with other EU countries. Romania's government invests only a 3,1% of the country's GDP in education (UNDP, 2017). Belgium share of GDP in education is 6,6%, Sweden's is 7,7% Portugal's 5,1% and Spain's 4,3%. Even Hungary and Bulgaria, also located in Eastern Europe and with a common historical belonging to the Eastern bloc during Cold War and relatively new members of the EU have a significantly larger share of their GDP in education, with a 4,6% for Bulgaria and a 4,1% for Hungary.

6.1.3. Income distribution

The total GDP of Romania for the 211.884 billion USD (World Bank 2019). The GNI per capita of Romania, as for 2017, was of 22,646 USD PPP (World Bank 2019) which makes Romania an upper-middle income country. Together with Bulgaria, is the only EU member state belonging to this category, as the rest of the countries are considered to be of high income. However, even though this figure is important to study the monetary value of all the goods and services produced in a country, it is not always representative of a country's development level, since it mostly depends on how distributed this value is.

The average salary of Romania in 2019 is 2,936 RON (equivalent to 618€) (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2019), which is among the lowest within the whole EU, only followed by Bulgaria (World Bank Group 2019) and with a significant difference in relation to other EU member states.

This gives evidence of the still large existing wage gap among EU member states and explains the migratory flows from certain countries, such as Romania, to other states within the EU where salaries and buying power are much higher. According to many scholars and researchers on human trafficking and to the official reports on the issue (Shelley 2012. UNODC 2016 and 2018), a common method for human trafficking offenders to recruit their victims is by posting false online jobs scams in employment search websites and offering to potential workers well-paid jobs abroad. Thus, given the differences in the average salaries among EU countries, is not uncommon for job-seekers to be deceived when offered a job in another EU member state. On the basis of Romania being one of the countries with the lowest wages, many individuals will feel attracted by better-paid job offers in other EU countries. Also, as shown by an UNODC (2011) report on *The Globalization of Crime*, many women are actually offered jobs at modeling agencies, entertainment nightclubs or massage parlors and sometimes knowing that they will sometimes have to offer sexual services to customers, nevertheless they are not informed about the real conditions in which they will work. In other cases, they actually working at these places but without knowing beforehand that they will have to render sexual services to clients, or even being abused or raped by their employers under the threat of losing their job.

6.1.4. Inequality

UNDP has developed what is known as the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), in contraposition to the HDI. According to UNDP (2018), this index combines a country's average achievements in health, education and living standards and how they are distributed among nationals by deducting each section's average value depending on its level of inequality. Romania's IDHI is 0.717, which makes it to be number 52th of the world rank (UNDP 2018). Just like it happens with the HDI, this figure makes Romania to be in a fairly good position if compared to the rest of the world, but low within the EU.

Income inequality is quite an important component when analyzing a country's level of inequality. There are various ways to examine the extent of the differences among individuals share of income of a country.

The Gini Index is a common method that was developed at the beginning of the 20th century to determine the distribution of income across income percentiles in a country, a region or the world as a whole. The numeric value of this number ranges from 0 (absolute equality) to 1000 (absolute inequality) (UNDP 2017). This means that if all individuals of a population have the exact same income, the Gini coefficient of it would be 0, while if all the income was owned by just one individuals while the rest of them had no share of it, the Gini Coefficient would be 1. It is important to keep in mind that even though the Gini coefficient can provide very useful information about a country's income distribution, it is not indicative of a country's general wealth.

The Gini Index for Romania for the year 2017 was of 33,1 (EUROSTAT 2017). If compared to the rest of the world, Romania's GINI coefficient tells that there is a relative high level of equality among its population. Within the EU, this value for Romania also ranks it as a rather highly unequal country if compared to other member states. However, the value GINI coefficient in Romania has shown a progressive decrease within the last years. Its value was of 38,1 in 2007, when the country joined the EU (EUROSTAT 2017).

6.1.5. Poverty

In 2016, there was a share of 23,6% of people living under the national poverty line in Romania, which made a total number of 4,6 million individuals (World Bank 2019). In 2015 (there is no more updated available data as for April 2019) the number of

people living the international poverty threshold, which is 4.1 Romanian Leu or US\$1.90 (per day per capita was 1.1 million, making a total share of 5,7% of the whole population of Romania (World Bank 2019). In the other hand, in the same year there was a 25,6% of the population living under what it is considered to be the standard poverty line for upper-middle income countries, that is the category to which Romania belongs (World Bank 2019).

The vast majority of the people in Romania living under the national and international poverty lines are based in rural areas. In these areas, access to markets, education or other employment opportunities is more limited, since most companies, education institutions and business opportunities tend to be concentrated in larger cities (World Bank 2019).

Romania has seen a decrease in the number of individuals living under international and national poverty lines in the last few years, especially after having risen during the global financial crisis. However, the share of population living under poverty lines still remains significantly large (World Bank 2019).

In addition, Romania currently has a working poverty rate of 16,9% (ILO 2019). The working poverty rate, also known as in-work poverty is a situation in which the income of employed households or individuals falls under the poverty line. Romania is the country with the highest share of working households with an income below the poverty line. has a quite significant higher rate of in-work poverty. Furthermore, in comparison with other EU member states, Romania has historically had a largely high in-work poverty rate, sometimes even being double than the EU average (Eurostat 2018).

The large number of individuals living under the poverty line, even if employed, together with unequal income distribution as seen in the previous section, is a quite determinant factor for a country's citizens to fall victims of human trafficking (Shelley 2012. UNODC 2016. Europol 2015). Likewise, in the search of better employment conditions and wages that can provide a decent life, individuals tend to look for better opportunities abroad, in many cases being victims of frauds that lead to trafficking or exploitation situations.

6.1.6. Work and employment

As seen in the theoretical of this thesis, high unemployment rates and little opportunities of having stable jobs are very risky factors for individuals to become victims of human trafficking, as they often are unfamiliar with the recruitment methods of human trafficking criminals. Therefore, they are more vulnerable to be victims of trafficking of humans and exploitation as they more easily tend to accept job offers out of their country that often end up being frauds (Shelley 2010. UNODC 2018).

The share of skilled labor force in Romania (individuals in working age with a secondary or advanced education) was 80% in 2017 (UNDP 2019). Unemployment rate among the whole labor force in Romania, skilled and unskilled, as for year 2018 was of 4,19%. This includes all individuals older than 15 (the working age in Romania) that are not employed but available and qualified to do so (ILO 2019). This is a relatively low figure, especially if we compare it with other EU countries, like Spain, where the unemployment rate is of 15,25%, or Italy, in where it is of 10,61% also for the year 2018 (ILO 2019). Coincidentally, these two last countries are some of the main destinations for human trafficking victims from Romania, especially for sexual exploitation but also for other forms of forced labor (UNODC 2018) and they report significant lower human trafficking activity among their nationals.

However, it is important not to forget that the great majority of victims of human trafficking are quite young. The share of young individuals (from ages 15–24) who are neither employed, in training or studying for year 2018 in Romania was of 14,52%, (ILO 2019) which is quite high in comparison to other EU member states in where youth unemployment is not a major problem. Therefore, even though the general unemployment rate is low, the unemployment rate among young individuals is relatively high. This fact, together with low wages plays a significant role in the vulnerability of young citizens in Romania to fall victims of human trafficking. Moreover, Romania had a vulnerable employment rate of 25% in 2017 (UNDP2019). This rate is composed of those individuals or households that are employed but on precarious conditions that often deny workers their most fundamental rights. Some examples of these are less formal work contracts, less decent working conditions, no social security or representation by trade unions or other organizations. This figure is highly related to the working poverty rate, seen in the previous sub-section. It is not uncommon for individuals employed within precarious conditions to have very low salaries, which causes them to under the poverty threshold.

Low wages and a high youth unemployment rate could also make individuals more prone to engage in organized crime and criminal activities that might bring to them better profits, and that could be a possible reason contributing to Romania reporting that

many human trafficking victims, as in many cases, recruiters are from the same country of origin as victims (Europol 2016. Shelley 2012).

6.2. Gender equality indicators

Gender is a quite determinant factor when it comes to victims of human trafficking. As explained before, young women and girls are the most vulnerable groups to fall victims of human trafficking, as these two groups are highly demanded for sexual services, unskilled cheap labor, forced marriages and others (Shelley 2010). Evidence also shows that the vast majority of victims of trafficking of persons and exploitation are female (UNOD 2014 and 2018. EUROPOL 2016. ILO 2019). In fact, a report on child labor by ILO (2009) has shown that approximately the 98% of victims of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation are women and girls.

The prevalence of the gender factor when it comes to trafficking and exploitation for the purpose of sexual exploitation could be explained by the theories studied in one of the previous sections of this thesis. One of the reasons for radical feminism to oppose prostitution and pornography is the argument that the sex industry is highly dominated by men, whom normally run these type of businesses, illegally or legally (in the case of countries in where prostitution is regulated and legally recognized as an economic activity), while women are the ones selling their bodies and offering sexual services to clients. Likewise, radical feminism scholars have also discussed that prostitution reinforces and normalizes the idea of women's role to serve and satisfy men's needs, while pornography normalizes abuse and harm to women, among others (Dworking 1993, 1995). This may also explain why so many women and girls are victims to human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation and why many individuals keep contributing to it by pursuing and consuming the sexual services of trafficked or exploited women and girls. Also, according to socialist feminism the existing economic differences at global and regional levels, as well as within a country, contribute to perpetuate a patriarchal system in where women are dominated by men. Thus, women would be more prone to fall victims of exploitation and trafficking of persons, especially on an industry that is mainly dominated by men.

In a similar way to the previous section of this thesis analysis, this part will consist on a study on gender equality in Romania, comparing it with other EU Member States

with the purpose of concluding the relation between gender equality and human trafficking in this specific country.

6.2.1 Gender development index

The GDI is a one of the multiple parameters that all combined give the value for the HDI, seen in the section before. The GDI measures differences between men and women in the three basic dimensions of human development according to UNDP: health (measuring the life expectancy at birth for both men and women), education (measuring literacy rate in adults and gross enrollment rates in primary, secondary and advanced education) and living standards (measured by an estimation of incomes for men and women separately). After combining the data from these three areas, the GDI gives a value that is the equivalent to the ratio of females to males in those analyzed dimensions. Romania had in 2017 a GDI of 0,985 (UNDP 2019), this means that per one man there are 0,985 women with his same values for health, education and living standards. A figure higher than 1 would mean that on average, women in this country enjoy better conditions in those three areas. This value means that women are still slightly disadvantaged in three basic categories of human development. However, this difference is not too significant, and Romania's GDI is relatively high within the whole world and quite similar to other EU countries.

As the GDI is a value that, combined with others, gives the result of the HDI, and should be combined with it in order to be understood. As stated in the previous section, Romania had a HDI of 0,811 in 2017, this HDI can be divided in female and male, with values of 0,804 for females and 0,817 for males. Related to it the GDI, Romania shows a slightly lower HDI for women than for men, however, the difference it is not too significant.

6.2.2. Employment

The GNI per capita of Romania, as for 2017, was of 22,646 USD PPP (UNDP 2019). However, the GNI per capita for males was significantly higher than for women, with a 18,217 GNI per capita for females and a 27,358 for males. Likewise, in 2016, the

total share of female workers employed in senior and middle management was 30,2% and the percentage of seats in the national parliament hold by women for year 2017 was 18,7%, which relatively low in comparison to other countries both at the EU-level and globally (UNDP 2019). This means a larger proportion of men in leadership and high-level decision-making positions at businesses, politics and public life. Furthermore, legislation in Romania does only two parties, the Partidul Democrat and the Partidul Social Democrat have adopted gender quotas, being of 30% for both of them (IDEA 2018).

As stated before, the female to male ratio of unemployment for Romania in the year 2017 was of 0,76, which means there is a larger number of men than of women unemployed. However, female unemployment shows an important increase among 15 to 24-year-old females, with the female to male ratio of youth unemployment rate becoming 1,04 and showing that there are more young women than men unemployed. Even though this value does not evidence an important difference between both genders, it tells that there is still a slight larger number of young women unemployed than men. If larger, it could be an additional factor explaining the vulnerability of women to fall victims of human trafficking, however, the value of this figure is still too low to lead to any significant conclusions.

In the other hand, only a 11% of women work part-time, in comparison to 9% of men. This is a relatively low gender gap if compared to other Member States (European Institute on Gender Equality 2018). A reason for it could be the unequal share of household chores or care responsibilities among both genders. 1,9% of women and almost no men have reported to be forced to work part time or not to work at all due to care responsibilities (European Institute on Gender Equality 2018).

Similarly, there is a visible evidence of gender segregation in the labor market in Romania. In sectors like education, social work and health there is a total share of 16% of women within the whole female work-force employed, while within the male workforce there is only a 3.5% of men employed in these sectors. Furthermore, in engineering, technology and science there is a total of 30% of men employed and only a 9% of women working in this sector (European Institute on Gender Equality 2018). Even though this represents a gender gap in the labor market, this reality is not exclusive to Romania, as other EU Member States have similar or even higher values of gender segregation in their labor markets. In fact, EU countries have a relatively small share of women employed in technology, engineering or science compared to other world countries (UNDP 2019). This is a repeated common pattern in other EU countries in where individuals are rarely victims of human trafficking, which leads to the conclusion that there is no correlation between gender segregation in the work market and human trafficking.

As seen, even though there is still an existing gender gap in employment, this factor might not be relevant to human trafficking, except from the fact of youth unemployment rate slightly affecting more negatively women than men.

6.2.4. Gender violence

A 24% of the female population in Romania have experienced violence of any kind from an intimate partner in year 2017, while a 2% of the female population have reported to experience violence from a non-intimate partner in year 2018 (UNDP,2019). Even though these figures, especially the one referring to gender violence from an intimate partner, are relatively high, they still remain low in comparison to other EU Member States. At a first glance this might lead to the conclusion that there is less gender violence in Romania than in other EU countries. This fact might seem somehow surprising, since human trafficking is indeed a form of gender violence.

6.3. Migration data

In 2017, Romania had a total 37.080 international migrants out of a total of 19.6 million people living in the country's territory (UN DESA 2017), which makes a share of 1,9% of the total population. Furthermore, the estimated total number of emigrants living outside the country in 2017 was 3.7 million (UN DESA 2017), which is a relatively high number if compared with the country's total population. Furthermore, according to the World Bank (2018), the remittances received from emigrants made a 2,2% of the country's GDP in year 2018. As evidenced, the number of Romanians living (studying or working) outside the country is quite high.

Furthermore, the two countries with the largest share of emigrants from Romania are Italy and Spain (UN DESA, 2014). This last country had a total of 593.532 of Romanians living in its territory in 2018 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2018). Coincidentally, those two countries are some of the countries to which the largest share of victims of human trafficked are exploited in (UNODC 2016. Europol, 2016). In addition, since the end of Cold War until today, emigration from Romania has increased in absolute terms, even though it showed a slight decrease between 1990 to 2000 (UN DESA 2017). However, after the country joined the EU in 2007, the number of Romanians emigrating to other EU member states highly increased. The main reason for this is that after Romania joined the EU, its citizens could easily relocate to other Member States and work in there under the same conditions as their nationals and without the need of any work permits or visas.

As seen before, human trafficking activity can be carried out by a single individual or by a criminal group that can be composed of a few people or larger number. When it involves a wider number of people, it is common for it to be transnational and to find some of the criminals in the country of destinations, while others are based in the place of origin to recruit and traffic the victims (Shelley 2010). Being established within countries of origin and destination, human trafficking networks can operate more easily.

In the other hand, given the figures, it is not uncommon for Romanian citizens to move abroad in the search of job opportunities. Therefore, when looking for job offers abroad from home they can be more prone to become victims of frauds which could lead them to being trafficked to another country and exploited in there.

Therefore, the fact that the Romanian diaspora is so wide might be another reason that contributes to so many individuals from this country becoming victims of human trafficking.

7. Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to find what are the main causes why Romania is the largest source of victims of human trafficking in the whole EU. The analysis was carried out from a development and gender perspective. The reasons for it is that after having become familiar with the background of human trafficking in general and more specifically inside the EU and after having studied the evidence that shows that Romania is the country from which the majority of victims of human trafficking inside EU borders come, it was decided that carrying out an assessment of the levels of development and gender equality in the country through the lens of the theories of political economy and gender studied and then established in a comprehensive theoretical framework would be the most suitable approach to find an answer to this thesis research problem.

The EU has shown to have some of the best living and safety standards in the whole world. However, a high number of cases of human trafficking are reported every year in Member States. This shows that despite being one of the most developed regions in the world, the EU does not escape the threat that organized crime poses for its citizens, as no individual is immune to it, although there are certain groups that are more vulnerable to fall victims of human trafficking. In addition, the free movement of persons that EU membership grants makes it easier for human trafficking criminals to transport their victims to member states where there is a larger demand for prostitution, child labor or other forms of exploitation.

Romania is a relatively new member to the EU and it was only three decades ago that the country abandoned its Communist authoritarian past and started its transition to democracy and from an absolutely state-planned economy to an open free market one. Taking these factors into consideration, it is understood that Romania is less developed in comparison to other EU member states with different political, economic and social conditions. There are other EU countries such as Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria or even Croatia, which was part of a conflict that lasted until 1995, have a similar past and relatively new democratic systems. However, even though they report significant numbers of human trafficking, their figures are relatively low compared to Romania.

Therefore, the initial puzzle of this thesis was why is it that Romania, that is not that different to other Member States in Eastern Europe, reports a significantly higher human trafficking activity than others.

In order to find an answer to it, an exhaustive analysis on the phenomenon of human trafficking was carried out, including a focus in the region of Europe, and more

specifically in the EU area. Consequently, a theoretical framework was developed, which included theories on international political economy and gender (radical and socialist feminism). The election of these two theories are two: firstly, human trafficking, as well as any other type of organized crime, exists because there is a demand of it in the market, and its transnational character is related to the current globalized nature of the world.

Afterwards, in order to respond to the research question, a large number of data was collected from official development and gender indicators obtained from international organizations reports (such as United Nations, the World Bank, Eurostat and others), national statistics agencies and reports on gender and development from institutions engaged specifically on those topics. Afterwards, these data were scrutinized and analyzed from the theoretical perspectives of gender and international political economy.

The main findings, which constitute a response to this thesis research question are presented as follows:

Firstly, even though Romania is an EU member state, having had to fulfill certain socioeconomic, legal and political conditions to join the Union, it is the country with the lowest Human Development Index of it. However, it is considered a developed country within the whole world.

Even though the general unemployment rate is low, there is a lot of unemployment among young people. Furthermore, the analyzed data has also shown that many individuals have precarious jobs that do not pay well enough to have a decent living. Various studies have shown that one of the factors that have showed to have favored the incidence of organized crime and exploitation in many areas is unemployment, together with the prevalence of precarious jobs and low salaries. Thus, high youth unemployment, together with poverty-risk working conditions may be a reason for young women in Romania to be prone to fall victims of human trafficking.

Similarly, statistics have shown that, despite its belonging to the EU, there is still a large number of individuals living under the poverty line in Romania. Areas that are affected by poverty report considerably more cases of human trafficking and other crimes, therefore, the major number of persons that live in poverty in Romania may also explain why this country reports so many victims of human trafficking.

Another finding has been that there is still a large number of persons in the country that are illiterate, including children and young persons. Also, when it comes to adults with some sort of secondary education or professional training, males has shown to represent a relatively higher number than females, with a wider number of men able to perform qualified jobs than of women. This fact leads to less job opportunities for women than for men, but also to a greater female workforce supply for unskilled jobs. These sorts

of jobs are actually quite demanded in certain countries with a largely skilled workforce, and in many cases are provided by victims of human trafficking due to the cheap price that they might cost to employers.

Most of the findings on gender inequality in Romania have shown not to be determinant to draw any consistent conclusions on human trafficking. If larger, the figures obtained could be an additional factor explaining the vulnerability of women to fall victims of human trafficking. Therefore, even though the fact that almost all victims of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation in Romania are women cannot be denied, most of the gender-related data analyzed in this thesis might be insufficient to lead to any explanations.

Lastly, the vast number of individuals that have emigrated from Romania to work abroad might also be related to the vulnerability of this country's citizens to fall victims of human trafficking, giving its transnational nature and how they operate in both countries of origin and destination of the victims.

Additionally, it is not unusual for individuals to fall victims of human trafficking when looking for job offers abroad, especially if they are less educated or unfamiliar with how human trafficking networks operate and recruit their victims.

7.1. Policy recommendations and possibilities for future research

As just seen, one of the reason for Romania being such a major source of victims of human trafficking has to do with the poverty and under development that still affects the country today, being the least developed one of the whole EU. Therefore, it would be interesting to do a comprehensive study to find out the intrinsic reasons for this lack of development and find ways and possible solutions to contribute to the improvement of it. The EU as a whole might consider the possibility of new ways of investing in the social development of the country and monitoring where these financial resources are allocated, as it has been shown that Romania still experiences government corruption to a large extent.

In addition, high youth unemployment, together with precarious jobs has shown to be a possible reason for young women in Romania to be vulnerable to human trafficking. Therefore, creating of employment programs with stable and decently paid

jobs for young people should be one of the priorities in the prevention of human trafficking in the country. Apart from giving the opportunity to young women to have jobs that would enable them to have a decent living, the creation of employment would also stop many individuals from wanting to leave the country. This could also have a positive impact in the fight against human trafficking, as the findings in this study suggest that there is a correlation between migration and vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation.

Similarly, many victims of human trafficking in Romania fall into it because they are not familiar with the *modus operandi* of human trafficking criminals or have never heard about this form of organized crime and the fate endured by victims of it, and that is why social awareness must play a key role in combating human trafficking. For this to be effective, the government and authorities of Romania, with assistance for the EU, might consider the possibility of designing and implementing an awareness comprehensive action plan with information and awareness campaigns as its key element. These campaigns could specifically target certain sectors of the population that are particularly vulnerable to fall victims of human trafficking.

And lastly, Romania should also promote and establish cooperation agreements with other countries with regard to the fight of human trafficking, as victims of it are often exploited in other EU Member States. Furthermore, border control authorities in Romania and its neighbor countries must seize the opportunity provided by not belonging to the Schengen area to carry out more exhaustive border controls and intercept more effectively human trafficking attempts.

7.2. Critical reflection

This thesis is considered to have found an answer to the proposed research question. The thesis was composed of a comprehensive analysis on specific factors that, after having found in various source of literature that they could be determinant for human trafficking to happen, have been decided by this thesis' author to be studied in the specific case of Romania. In this way, the analysis has achieved conclusions that suggest that the lack of development in the studied country has indeed an effect in the vulnerability of individuals, especially young women and girls, to fall victims of human trafficking.

It is important to take into consideration that human trafficking is a quite complex phenomenon with many factors involved in it. Likewise, this study has decided to just focus on two of them, development and gender, has they have shown to generally have a

great influence in trafficking of persons and other forms of organized crime. However, the author would like to emphasize that there are other factors involved in human trafficking.

Likewise, with the policy recommendations proposed at the end of this thesis do not expect to provide the ultimate solution to human trafficking. As just seen, organized crime, and more specifically trafficking of humans, is a very complex phenomenon with many agents involved in it and that involves huge sums of money. Preventing and combating it requires of a wide number of resources, efforts and a huge legal and political will, among others. However, these recommendations seek to contribute to making the existing guidelines against human trafficking more efficient and to help to find possible new ways to prevent and combat it.

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