

FIVE-YEAR REPORT ON THE WORK WITH SWEDEN'S UNRECOGNIZED VICTIMS
OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Safe Havens Trafficking Center

— A civil response to a government commitment





“One day, I want to stand in front of people and tell them how you helped me off the streets.

30-YEAR OLD MAN, EXPOSED TO LABOR TRAFFICKING/EXPLOITATION



Preface

On a January afternoon in 2018, alongside a busy street in the heart of central Stockholm, Safe Havens opened its doors to a unique service to help victims of human trafficking. This took place during the same time as the refugee wave swept across Europe and the new legislation against human exploitation was being enforced in Sweden. The purpose of the new legislation was to redress the exploitation that had emerged in the shadows of Swedish society: the exploitation of vulnerable individuals in the Swedish labor market. An issue that threatens our welfare, where individuals are forced into work around the clock, without pay, without safety equipment and without a semblance of dignity.

In 2017, the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) investigated the migration flow across the Mediterranean and estimated that approximately two thirds of migrants were at risk of exploitation along the migration routes. Tens of thousands of individuals, many women and unaccompanied children, arrived in Sweden during the refugee wave. Many of them refrained from registering at the Swedish asylum center and disappeared into the shadows of society.

Between the years 2018 and 2022, 300 cases of human exploitation were reported to the Swedish police. Out of these, only seven cases, (2.5% of initiated investigations), have led to prosecution. Additionally, the police authority states in its annual status report that a significant number of cases are likely unreported. For quite some time, The Salvation Army has emphasized that the majority of those facing difficulties hesitate to approach authorities, resulting in their exclusion from published statistics. The exact number of such individuals remains uncertain. However, they do exist, and they need a safe space that they can turn to.

These individuals are entitled to their rights and deserve to be heard. Their lives are just as valuable as ours, whether they are undocumented, asylum seekers, disabled, unable to speak Swedish, without a bank ID, registered address, or any other criteria seemingly essential to access protection, support, and justice within the Swedish system. Ensuring fundamental rights for individuals whose peace and freedom have been taken, shouldn't be as challenging as finding a needle in a haystack. It is in this context that Safe Havens acknowledges the necessity to stand by those who need us the most.

A special thank you to all who contributed to this report and to everyone who is a part of Safe Havens' support network. Safe Havens wouldn't have had the same impact without you. Together, we make this work possible!

Stockholm, January 2024

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Veronica Algerstam, researcher and social worker



The Salvation Army was founded by William Booth in the United Kingdom in 1865 and is an international Christian church with a broad focus on social work and a dedication to social justice. Today, The Salvation Army exists in 133 countries and has nearly 90 facilities throughout Sweden. Our mission is to translate our faith into action and, without discrimination, meet the needs of humanity.

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Safe Havens Trafficking Center

– A civil response to a government commitment

Introduction

Human trafficking is modern slavery. It is a violation of human rights and must be prevented and fought. Human trafficking is a reality in Sweden, with victims being exploited for various purposes, including sexual exploitation, forced begging, forced labor, and forced criminal activities. Human trafficking costs the state millions threatening the very foundations of our welfare state.

As part of The Salvation Army's efforts to fight human trafficking, Safe Havens Trafficking Center was created to provide support in areas where society falls short. Safe Havens strives to advocate for the voices of the most vulnerable so that they can access their human rights. The fundamental rights for victims of human trafficking are outlined in the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the subsequent directive from the European Parliament. Safe Havens notes that access to support and protection for the vulnerable is scarce. This alarming situation must be changed and improved.

Since our establishment, we have encountered 588 potential victims of human trafficking and exploitation. Men, women, and children. Unfortunately, hardly any of them have received restitution through the Swedish legal system. Yet, alongside these individuals, we walk side by side, often for years. We can see the difference we make. Day by day and step by step, the individual gains access to a better understanding of their rights. Some individuals we encountered have been given the opportunity to legally remain in Sweden, while others have been offered a safe return to their country of origin. Yet, there is a need for more. Where the Swedish state fails or falls short, we, in partnership with others, aim to provide the support and protection that exploited individuals are entitled to. Fanny Ljungholm, who was part of the establishment of Safe Havens, argues that "it is irresponsible of Sweden not to help these victims. There must be tangible ways for everyone to get access to their human rights".

Many of those exploited today are foreign workers. This is a consequence of more migrants fleeing from economic crises, conflict, oppression, and discrimination. Therefore, there must be low threshold access to rights-based support from operations who can identify and provide initial support and access to the Swedish support system for victims of trafficking, in order to prevent further exploitation.



“Safe Havens Trafficking Center in Stockholm provides legal and social support to potential victims of human trafficking or exploitation. We receive requests from all over Sweden, and we see a significant need for similar services in other locations, but currently, we have limited resources to expand our work.

LOVISA LANDÄLV, MANAGER, SAFE HAVENS STOCKHOLM

Purpose and Method

The purpose of this report is to account for The Salvation Army Safe Havens Trafficking Center's work up until today and to present the influence our efforts have had on both individuals and society. The purpose of the report is also to highlight the needs that must be addressed in order to drive the work forward for each victim of human trafficking.

By uniting resources and expertise from both civil and state sectors, synergies can be generated thereby maximizing the impact of efforts and collectively addressing a societal issue.

The report seeks to emphasize that further efforts are required from the government and authorities in order to practically and financially support the rights-based initiatives carried out by civil society in this particular area. This is based on the fact that Safe Havens is the only actor in Sweden of its kind, offering effective social support and cost-free legal advice for its target group of potential victims of all forms of human trafficking.

The report is based on interviews with Safe Havens' current and former clients and staff, The Salvation Army's data collection, information and experiences collected from collaborative partners such as authorities, civil society, and several international organizations.



Safe Havens Trafficking Center

Safe Havens – A part of The Salvation Army's work against human trafficking

The Salvation Army's mission is to meet human needs without discrimination. Human trafficking is a priority for The Salvation Army, both in Sweden and on an international scale. The Salvation Army in Sweden comes into contact with around 300 potential victims of various forms of human trafficking each year. Out of these, around 60 percent receive continued protection and support at one of The Salvation Army's specialized units. Since 2020, we have noticed a rising trend with a growing number of individuals being exposed to labor exploitation.

Since 2013, The Salvation Army in Sweden has been actively involved in national coordination against human trafficking. This involves coordinating preventive, practical, and reintegrative efforts, with a specific focus on ensuring the right to protection and support for those affected by crime. The Salvation Army in Europe has a 24/7 response network and has participated in several EU projects to further develop methods in addressing the issue. In Sweden, The Salvation Army has been involved in shaping the Swedish National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and co-founded the Civil Platform Against Human Trafficking, contributing to the establishment of the National Support Program. This work revealed distinct gaps and shortcomings in identifying and ensuring the right to protection and support for potential victims of human trafficking. The Salvation Army's hope was therefore to establish a service that could provide early intervention and support for the 'unknown victims of human trafficking' who lack access to Sweden's national protection system.

“Our experiences point to significant vulnerability within the shadows of Swedish society, where the majority avoid contacting authorities out of fear of deportation. We need a more comprehensive victim-centered perspective on the rights of those exposed. Sweden's responsible authorities cannot allow this issue to pass unnoticed.

MADELEINE SUNDELL, THE SALVATION ARMY'S NATIONAL COORDINATOR AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING



Target group – Sweden’s unrecognized victims of human trafficking

Safe Havens is a place open for individuals who have experienced any form of human trafficking or exploitation, regardless of background, gender or legal status. Safe Havens’ main focus is on individuals aged 18 and above, including accompanying minors, although there have been instances where support has also been provided to unaccompanied minors.

Every person carries their own journey, background, circumstances and future aspirations. Many who have come to Safe Havens have been in desperate situations, enduring physical and psychological trauma with shattered life stories. In every encounter with these individuals, Safe Havens has sought to create purpose, be attentive, and offer perspectives on rights to improve the individual’s situation.

Since the beginning, Safe Havens has had a steady increase of clients each year. The majority seeking help were initially women exposed to sexual exploitation. However, in the last two years, the gender distribution has become more balanced, with an increase in cases related to labor exploitation. Safe Havens registers each person we have assisted as part of our core mission. This involves regular meetings at the center, contact during assistance and interventions, or digital communication with larger groups. Collectively, Safe Havens in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö have met 588 individuals.



Safe Havens Trafficking Center has met with 588 individuals since start.

“I accompanied a friend to Safe Havens, who had been threatened and exploited by her employer. I was just there as support. When I spoke to the staff, they informed me that I could also receive help. We worked for the same employer, and I had the same problems as my friend.

SOFIA FROM VENEZUELA, EXPOSED TO LABOR EXPLOITATION



At our centers, we have provided face-to-face support to 262 individuals.

At the center in Stockholm, 208 individuals have received support. These individuals have been registered as clients and received an individual needs assessment and an action plan. Each client is given an extensive support package and offered long term support according to their needs. Alongside the other centers across the country, Safe Havens has provided in-depth individual face-to-face client support to 262 individuals. Since a client can stay at the center for an extended period, there is a possibility that certain clients may be included in multiple annual reports.

A client may have anywhere from 3 to 30 meetings over an extended period of time. Trained volunteers, typically law and social work students, serving as “legal buddies”, maintain direct contact with the clients, and the center’s staff ensures they have the correct information. When a client is enrolled, it is essential that we follow through with what we have started. This means that a year at Safe Havens could involve around fifty clients with an effort of around 300 unique meetings, including preparations and follow-up efforts by staff, volunteers, or core partners.

“They have done a lot. They have helped us file a police report with all the evidence. They have supported us, shown moral support, and listened. They have done everything they could. We got to speak with a lawyer and received information about our situation. It helped.

VASIL AND MYKOLA FROM UKRAINE, EXPOSED TO LABOR EXPLOITATION

To meet the needs where they arise, Safe Havens also operates a mobile team. This allows us to support authorities during raids or follow-up operations, as well as manage cases remotely, especially when clients are no longer in the country which requires digital communication. Through these specific efforts, we have encountered and supported an additional 326 individuals, out of which 80 were during interventions by authorities. Most of these cases have not been registered for further client support or legal buddy assistance.

In addition to our primary operations, Safe Havens has occasionally offered guidance to individuals who are already in touch with other support services provided by other NGOs. These cases are not included in our statistical data since these individuals already have a primary contact elsewhere. Our main contribution has been offering fundamental advice or linking them with legal professionals.



Our mobile teams have engaged with 326 individuals, including 80 during governmental interventions.

“They have always offered me help, they have an accommodating and welcoming culture. Each time I’ve needed help, they’ve not just provided help but exceeded my expectations. Safe Havens truly lives up to its name – a secure harbor. It has always felt like home, and they have helped me through difficult, hopeless, and sad moments in my life. My hope is that more people get the chance to come here and learn about this safe place.

EVY FROM NIGERIA, EXPOSED TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The majority of our clients come from other EU countries or are third country nationals. A significant number of the individuals we encounter lack legal right to stay in Sweden. These individuals are particularly reliant on our support as they are hesitant to contact Swedish authorities. Safe Havens have also encountered minors. In these situations, we contact the regional coordinator directly regardless of consent. We also evaluate the level of safety of the children accompanying individuals exposed to human trafficking when the situation arises.

“Safe Havens is a qualified actor in Sweden when it comes to human trafficking and exploitation. They are equipped to handle the entire range of support and protection for the victims of human trafficking.

DANIEL ÅMAN, GÖTEBORGS RÄDDNINGSMISSION (SWEDISH NGO)

Working Method – Perspective on Rights

Our approach is to provide perspective on – and access to – the human rights of those in vulnerable situations.

Safe Havens' working method – Perspective on Rights – has been developed by The Salvation Army in the Netherlands. It was developed for operations carried out in Amsterdam's Red Light District, where they came across undocumented third country nationals subjected to sexual exploitation. These individuals lacked access to, or were quickly expelled from, the Dutch support system. With a clear vision, The Salvation Army in Sweden has customized and developed the model to fit our Swedish context. The purpose is to assist the authorities in the support and rights work that potential human trafficking victims need to exit exploitation and enter a support system where they regain control of their life.

Safe Havens' work is based on the method "providing perspective on – and access to – rights". The work involves preventive, practical, and reintegrative efforts with a focus on legal and social support for the affected individual. Trust is established through specialized lawyers in asylum and criminal law, along with personal support from the legal buddies. This creates an opportunity for the affected individual to gain perspective on, and access to, their rights. The entire operation is human rights-based, focusing on the individual's needs and preferences, with the intention of being as trauma-informed as possible.

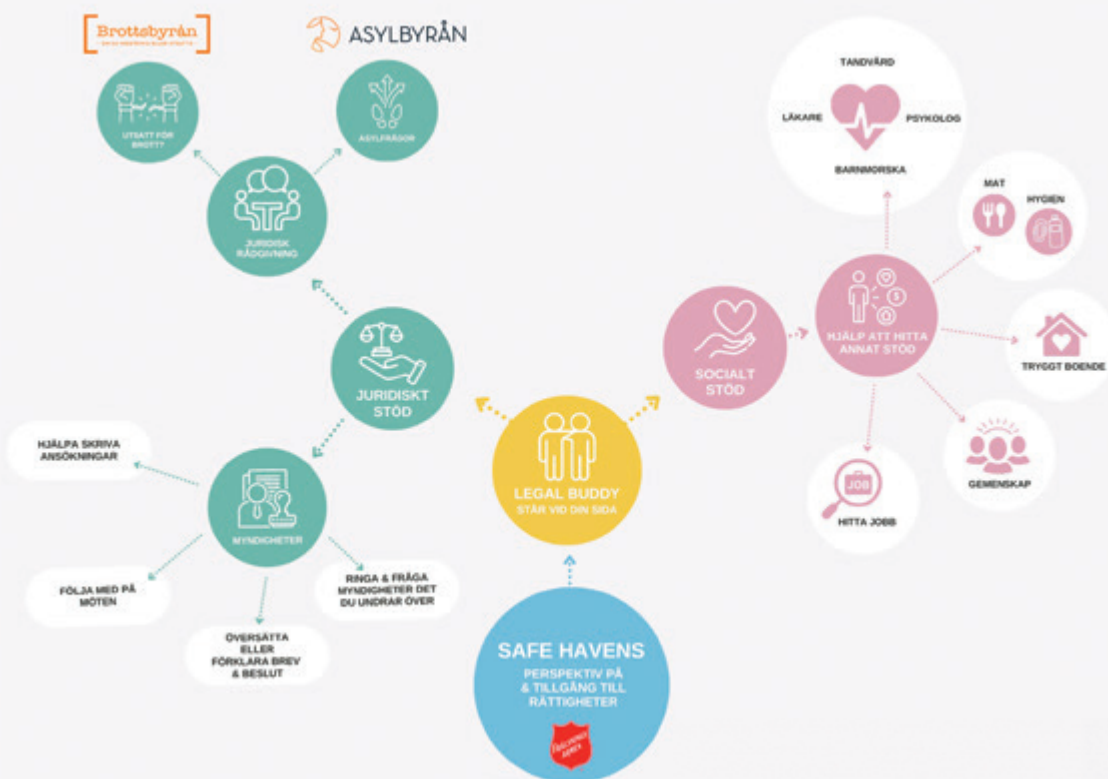


ILLUSTRATION: SARA LUUKKANEN

◆ This image breaks down the practical application of Safe Havens' approach, named "Perspective on Rights".

Examples of how we interact with clients

A regional coordinator refers a woman subjected to sexual exploitation to Safe Havens when she urgently needs asylum counseling. During the initial assessment, counseling is scheduled, and other needs are clarified. The woman wants to visit the MIKA clinic for a physical examination. As part of her legal counseling at the center, she is paired with a legal buddy who is present during the conversation with the lawyer and can be contacted via text for questions. They work together to prepare relevant documents and paperwork for the upcoming meeting. The legal buddy assists the client in finding their way to the MIKA clinic. The client feels lonely, so the legal buddy helps her to the Akalla Women's Center. The client stays for eight months before voluntarily returning through the repatriation program operated by the United Nations' International Organization for Migration (IOM). A total of 23 unique meetings were conducted with the client, in addition to communication through text messages and phone calls.

In another case, the Syndicalists refer an individual (client 1) in need of asylum counseling to Safe Havens. When client 1 arrives at the center, he is accompanied by a friend who shows signs of exploitation (client 2). We schedule a separate meeting for client 2. We pair both of them with their respective legal buddies. Client 1 meets with Asylbyrå, where it becomes evident that a special application for a work permit must be submitted due to the individual breaking ties with their perpetrator/former employer. The staff applies for funding from the National Support Program (NSP) to enable the lawyer to draft the application. The legal buddy accompanies client 1 to the EU center to seek guidance on employment opportunities. Client 2 meets with Brottsbyrå for information on reporting the crime. The legal buddy assists in compiling a police report and accompanies client 2 during the process. With the clients' consent, the staff at Safe Havens engage the regional coordinator for both individuals. An investigation is initiated for client 2, and he is granted a temporary residence permit for six months as he is now involved as a witness in a criminal investigation, and his previous work residence permit has expired. After 3 months, the investigation is dropped, and future alternatives are explored.

“Authorities can never replace the unique work and approach that civil society and Safe Havens provide for the target group. Providing a secure environment where individuals receive private legal advice along with social and sometimes financial support is crucial for the target group to assert their rights.

ANTON KANTOR, LAWYER AT ASYLBYRÅN

Approach – trust, safety and accessibility

Safe Havens aims to offer individuals who are potentially exposed to human trafficking perspective on and access to their human rights through trust, safety, and accessibility. Our primary focus is always on directing those affected by human trafficking to Sweden's social protection system, in accordance with guidelines set out in the Manual for Suspicion of Human Trafficking (MMM). However, The Salvation Army's experience indicates that there should always be complementary approaches that prioritize the specific needs of each individual rights holder.

TRUST – Staff and volunteers build trusting and supportive relationships by listening and walking alongside the individual. Trustworthy relationships are a cornerstone of the working method and create a foundation for change.

SAFETY – Provided through the drop-in center as a secure place to turn to, or through a hotline/support phone, and through attentive social support via networks and care chains, including referrals through life-area support to authorities and civil society.

ACCESSIBILITY – Access to free of charge and efficient legal information and individual consultation with some of Sweden's leading lawyers in the area.

Trust

Experiencing trust for the individuals who provide support, advice, and companionship establishes the foundation for change. To become a so-called legal buddy, volunteers need to have recently completed their education in, or currently study to become a lawyer, social worker, or police officer. Following their introductory training, the legal buddies are paired with clients, and get the opportunity to receive guidance and work alongside some of Sweden's leading lawyers and legal experts in criminal- and asylum law. This approach combines social support with precise legal expertise.

The combination of access to specialized expertise in asylum law and criminal cases, along with trauma awareness and processing of vulnerability, provides the client with the opportunity to gain a better overall perspective on their life situation. The goal is for the affected individual to regain control of their own life.

“I’ve noticed that clients who are in contact with a legal buddy or have had such contact prior to their asylum process often tend to commu-

nicate more openly with the asylum officer at the Migration Agency. Negotiations in court also become more constructive when a client has had this contact and guidance. I think it has a lot to do with the client finding it easier to focus on the legal aspects when we meet, as they receive assistance with the other, more social aspects of life, at Safe Havens.

KARIN GYLLENRING, PARTNER, ASYLBYRÅN

Safety

A place to feel welcome, to know that there is an open door one day a week, a secure place, where the client – beside from meeting with a lawyer – can have social interactions with staff and legal buddies. This is what Safe Havens offers through its drop-in center in the central part of Stockholm.

Through partnerships, specialized methodological support, financial resources and assistance from various social services within The Salvation Army's network, Safe Havens has been able to offer clients what we have chosen to name "life-area support". This involves addressing basic needs such as providing help with



► Building trust and safety is the foundation for continuing conversations. This is achieved by creating a safe space. Safe Havens always provides refreshments and has volunteers available for conversations. This makes it easier for the client to engage in discussions with the lawyer.

There is no national hotline in Sweden for either victims or the general public to address questions about human trafficking. In its place, Safe Havens' accessible point of contact may be the closest and most easily accessible contact to turn to for questions on these matters.

necessities like food, shelter, medical care, psychological support, application for identification documents and so on. Examples of this include directing individuals to safe houses such as Skogsbo, Lyktan, and Halvvägshuset, as well as offering job coaching through the EU Center, which potentially could lead to self-sufficiency. Individuals with health-related issues are often directed to Läkare i världen (Doctors of the World), while others who are looking for language training and daily activities receive help in reaching out to Akalla Women's Center.

Even when the drop-in center is closed, Safe Havens can be reached for support and advice by email or phone. There is currently no national hotline or support line for victims of human trafficking in Sweden to address questions about human trafficking. In its place, Safe Havens' email and phone may be the closest and most easily accessible contact to turn to for questions and advice on these matters. On average, Safe Havens receives one new contact per week through these channels.

Former Executive Director Fanny Ljungholm recalls receiving a phone call on Safe Havens' line one Christmas Eve and how she immediately had to step in. With a background as an experienced social worker from a safe house, she could listen and navigate the individual well. She also noticed the fragility and the importance of both structure and flexibility: "Those who are in need don't follow a schedule/arrive at a scheduled time; they come when they come, and we need to be ready. We might only get one chance so we have to take it."

Cecilia Nilsson, deputy manager and client coordinator at Safe Havens Stockholm, attended the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), a conference on human trafficking in December 2023. At the conference it was made clear that having a hotline for addressing questions related to human trafficking is extremely important.

Dr. Kari Johnstone, OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Human Trafficking, stated that "A hotline is the first way to reach out for help". However, in this aspect Sweden is still not meeting this standard.

Accessibility

In the latest GRETA report (2023), Sweden received criticism for shortcomings in the legal support available for individuals who are victims of human trafficking. GRETA highlights the importance of being able to receive and offer legal support to victims of human trafficking at an early stage in order to ensure that the person's rights are met. Safe havens is a place where that is possible, a place where potential victims can be encountered at an earlier stage than at the government agencies.

“Safe Havens ensures the rights to information and support, regardless of whether there is an ongoing investigation or not, which I would say is unique. The support provided by the authorities is, in that sense, not as extensive, which is problematic considering the EU directive.

JUNI LIVION, LAWYER, BROTTSBYRÅN

“Safe Havens identifies potential victims of human trafficking long before authorities in Sweden ever do, and many times without authorities ever coming into contact with them. The authorities are not equipped to handle, or even to come into contact with victims who live in the shadows of society associated with human trafficking. (...) Much of this is due to the fact that the target group, as undocumented individuals, often are seen as illegal rather than recognizing them as victim of a crime.

KARIN GYLLENRING, FOUNDER, ASYLBYRÅN

GRETA states that Sweden needs to take further action to ensure accessible and effective legal support for individuals subjected to human trafficking. Based on this, GRETA highlights the importance of ensuring that non-governmental organizations offering free legal advice receive enough funding to carry out quality work.

“Safe Havens plays a vital role for many victims of human trafficking, as there is a very high barrier in Sweden to get initial legal advice and help with expressing their victimization. Safe Havens addresses a crucial gap in Sweden by providing unconditional and cost-free legal advice to crime victims who have been subjected to human trafficking.

SUSANNE LINDERED, COORDINATOR AT THE NATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME,
THE SWEDISH CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The international conventions on human rights

Safe Havens' work is based on the legal rights of potential human trafficking victims, according to international conventions signed by Sweden. It primarily revolves around the Council of Europe's Convention on Combating Human Trafficking (Anti-Trafficking Convention), which came into effect 2010. This also includes the so-called Anti-Trafficking Directive (2011/36/EU) from the European Parliament and Council.

Our working method, Perspective on Rights, is fundamentally based on rights, as they describe the foundation that should be provided to a potential victim as soon as there is a reasonable ground/indication of exploitation. Safe Havens' ambition is therefore, to apply this rights-based work with a focus on trauma awareness, access to support, protection and justice.

“You made me realize that I am someone who deserves to be listened to and taken seriously, that I haven't done anything wrong.

A MOTHER OF THREE FROM COSTA RICA, EXPOSED TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Safe Havens' work is based on international conventions that Sweden has ratified.

Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2005

Article 12 – Assistance to victims

1. Each Party shall adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to assist victims in their physical, psychological and social recovery. Such assistance shall include at least:
 - a standards of living capable of ensuring their subsistence, through such measures as: appropriate and secure accommodation, psychological and material assistance;
 - b access to emergency medical treatment;
 - c translation and interpretation services, when appropriate;
 - d counselling and information, in particular as regards their legal rights and the services available to them, in a language that they can understand;
 - e assistance to enable their rights and interests to be presented and considered at appropriate stages of criminal proceedings against offenders;
 - f access to education for children.

Article 13 – Recovery and reflection period

1. Each Party shall provide in its internal law a recovery and reflection period of at least 30 days, when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person concerned is a victim. (...) During this period it shall not be possible to enforce any expulsion order against him or her.
2. The persons referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article shall be entitled to the measures contained in Article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2.

Anti Trafficking Directive (2011/36EU)

(18) It is necessary for victims of trafficking in human beings to be able to exercise their rights effectively.

Therefore assistance and support should be available to them before, during and for an appropriate time after criminal proceedings.

Member States should provide for resources to support victim assistance, support and protection. The assistance and support provided should include at least a minimum set of measures that are necessary to enable the victim to recover and escape from their traffickers.

The practical implementation of such measures should, on the basis of an individual assessment carried out in accordance with national procedures, take into account the circumstances, cultural context and needs of the person concerned.

A person should be provided with assistance and support as soon as there is a reasonable-grounds indication for believing that he or she might have been trafficked and irrespective of his or her willingness to act as a witness.

In cases where the victim does not reside lawfully in the Member State concerned, assistance and support should be provided unconditionally at least during the reflection period.

The point is that all individuals subjected to these crimes have certain rights regardless of their country of origin, where they are from or their legal status in Sweden. Safe Havens' work isn't limited to a specific group; but extends help to anyone when there is a suspicion of human trafficking. Safe Havens serves as an alternative to engaging with the authorities but also acts as a bridge that can help individuals connect with them. This position, being a bridge, allows us to provide accurate information about Swedish regulations and the rights of victims of human trafficking to our clients, who then feel empowered to file a police report and contact the authorities.

“Our unique role is to meet individuals that aren't identified in other ways, the ones who do not dare to make their presence in Sweden known to authorities. The support under ratified conventions should be unconditional for those who are exposed, but in practice it becomes limited to those who dare to contact social services and police authorities.

HANNA BRANDVIK, MANAGER SAFE HAVENS 2019–2021



Core partners

Safe Havens' main partners, Asylbyrå and Brottsbyrå, have been involved since the start. Asylbyrå is a Swedish lawfirm specialized in asylum and migration law, while Brottsbyrå is a Swedish lawfirm focused in criminal law. Having access to specialized expertise in both of these areas is essential in order to operate Safe Havens and to provide our clients with the right legal support.

Our choice of these partners was driven by the fact that many of our clients need both immigration law support and assistance in criminal proceedings. These processes are often kept separate, and the focus on asylum-seeking is often delayed until it's too late. Instead, Safe Havens and its partners argue that these issues in each individual case benefit from being addressed together and at the earliest possible stage. The lesson to be drawn is that the Swedish criminal justice process is rarely a viable path. Instead, evaluating clients' chances of remaining in Sweden often involves exploring alternative grounds.

Asylbyrå

Asylbyrå was founded by lawyer Karin Gyllenring in 2006. She is one of Sweden's foremost experts in migration law, deeply committed to securing each person's right to a future defined by freedom and security away from war and persecution. Karin possesses extensive knowledge of legal security and human rights within asylum and migration law.



PHOTO: ASYLBYRÅ

“My colleagues at the Asylbyrå and I are very grateful for our partnership with Safe Havens. This is because we have seen how it has contributed to a more secure asylum application process for the individuals we help in their efforts to stay in Sweden. We have often guided clients to contact Safe Havens since it fulfills a role that our law firm is unable to provide. Having a legal buddy who is there to listen and offer guidance is an invaluable support for many individuals in this vulnerable client group. (...) I dare say that within our society, only Safe Havens truly provides victims of human trafficking with the effective means to exercise their rights, as outlined in, among others, Article 18 of the Council Directive. It is clearly stated that member states are obligated to provide means for assistance, support and protection to crime victims.

KARIN GYLLENRING, FOUNDER ASYLBYRÅ (SWEDISH MIGRATION LAW FIRM)

Brottsbyrå

Brottsbyrå was founded in 2017 and specializes in criminal cases. Silvia Ingolfssdotir Åkermark is a co-founder and partner with over 20 years of experience of the

Swedish legal system. She is a former prosecutor and has held various key roles in numerous significant cases related to prostitution and human trafficking. Since 2017, she has been working as a lawyer and specialized victim representative where her primary role is to advocate for crime victims and ensure that their rights are being met.

“Through Safe Havens, we’ve come to understand how insufficient the protection is for the most vulnerable individuals in our society, with the state relying entirely on the efforts of civil society and safe houses. Our commitment to Safe Havens makes a difference. In our role as victim lawyer, my colleagues and I notice that we often are able to step into the process at an earlier stage where we can have a decisive impact on providing crucial information and guidance about the rights of the affected individual. Without the victims participation, we are not able to achieve convictions, leaving perpetrators free to exploit and harm others without facing consequences—a situation that should not be tolerated in a welfare state such as Sweden. A well-functioning partnership among all actors combating human trafficking is crucial in order to guarantee the fulfillment of the victims’ legal rights. It also helps them feel secure and confident when involved in legal proceedings.

SILVIA INGOLFSDOTTIR ÅKERMARK, FOUNDER BROTTSBYRÅN (SWEDISH CRIME LAW FIRM)



PHOTO: BROTTSBYRÅN

Volunteers

A cornerstone of the Safe Havens model and approach is the ability to provide qualified and trained volunteers who take the time to restore the client’s confidence and build trust. As part of the Safe Havens model, volunteers are recruited and trained as legal buddies. Since Safe Havens’ inception, a total of 67 volunteers have been trained. However, there is also another aspect to educating future professionals. The GRETA report highlights the lack of knowledge about human trafficking among many lawyers and professionals.

Safe Havens is actively recruiting students in fields like law, social work, and police studies, while also welcoming students from related areas such as human rights and social sciences. Recruitment typically occurs once a year, and the selected volunteers receive necessary training through lectures, trainings and group supervision.

Volunteering is meant to be a mutual exchange between the client and the volunteer, as well as between the volunteer and Safe Havens. Apart from the important



“To work with volunteers is something that I find as a great societal investment, especially when it comes to social rights aspects. By training volunteers and providing them with insight and experience in working with individuals exposed to human trafficking, a ripple effect is created. Raising awareness about human trafficking is crucial. Working through future professionals serves as a vital instrument in addressing this issue.

CECILIA NILSSON, DEPUTY MANAGER AND CLIENT COORDINATOR, SAFE HAVENS

Volunteers should feel that they have grown and gained valuable experiences to carry with them when they conclude their time as legal buddies.

client-focused tasks, volunteers should experience personal growth and gain valuable knowledge to carry with them as they finish their time as legal buddies.

In addition to learning about human trafficking and legal procedures, volunteers have shared that Safe Havens has given them important hands-on experiences, enabling them to engage with clients and find solutions to various situations. Several volunteers also highlight that they have gained tools and experiences to better engage with individuals who have faced trauma, or are struggling with conditions like PTSD or depression.

“I learned how to communicate with individuals who have experienced trauma, how to navigate and respond in challenging situations. I have also learned about processes outside of the legal field and how it all applies in practice. This has helped me understand how everything works together.

ALICE SUNESSON, LEGAL BUDDY

“Another way in which I will be able to use my knowledge is when it comes to interacting with clients. I have never before had a role where I had to take care of a client on my own. The role involves gaining further legal knowledge, practicing law, and helping the most vulnerable members of society. It is also a valuable merit for future job opportunities!

LAILA ISAWI, LEGAL BUDDY





Safe Havens' journey of development

Transitioning from a pilot project to regular operations

Safe Havens was initiated as a pilot project in 2018, within the framework of an EU project that took place from 2016 to 2018. At this time Safe Havens' Trafficking Center in Stockholm worked alongside The Salvation Army's EU Center on Kungsholmen, where assistance was provided to marginalized EU migrants. This was an effective way to connect with potential victims of human trafficking. Shortly thereafter, a close collaboration was established with the law firms Asylbyrå and Brottsbyrå. In the initial stages, they not only provided legal advice to those in need but also developed the volunteer manual that serves as a guide book for client care. During the first year, Safe Havens operated at the intersection of engaging with victims of human trafficking and building a functional support and referral network. There was collaboration with both the civil society and public authorities. The expertise available in Amsterdam was also very helpful.

“What made the Safe Havens model stand out was its engagement with a variety of other expertise. Everything from dedicated students at the beginning of their careers to stringent lawyers.

FANNY LJUNGHOLM, ONE OF THE FOUNDERS WHEN SAFE HAVENS WAS ESTABLISHED

Safe Havens became a regular operation in the autumn of 2019 after a positive evaluation and an approved budget. This was supported by funding from The Salvation Army and other supporters, such as Gållöstiftelsen in Stockholm. Since that time, the Trafficking Center has continued to share space with The Salvation Army's EU Center and, except for the time during the pandemic, has consistently provided drop-in services one afternoon each week. The Trafficking Center continues to be a safe gathering spot, offering an environment where individuals are acknowledged and listened to. In this space, individuals in vulnerable situations can connect with legal buddies and lawyers for discussions on legal matters or simply enjoy a coffee break.

Since Safe Havens was established, it has expanded its services. Initially there was a 25% project management position and a 40% fixed coordination role in Stockholm. By 2023, the team includes three part-time employees totaling 115 percent. However, the funding for 2024 is more limited.

Outreach work and specific actions

During the startup in Stockholm, the focus was to establish Safe Havens through networking and engaging in locations where potential target groups were present. As part of our outreach, we collaborated with organizations that had already established contact with the target group, such as The Salvation Army's Women's Center and an organization dedicated to supporting vulnerable youth in Vårby. To this day, Safe Havens continues to send out volunteers to other Salvation Army organizations whenever we recognize vulnerable groups are more prevalent. In those cases, the volunteer can identify potential victims of human trafficking and refer them to the center. Upon request, Safe Havens has also participated in governmental interventions. In those instances, we have offered on-site legal and social support and throughout these special initiatives, we have interacted with a total of 80 individuals.

Our experiences show that strong teamwork with various competencies is crucial for functional work.

Teamwork is the key to sustainability

Based on our experiences, a functional work environment is dependent on strong teamwork with various competencies. This brings stability and predictability in handling clients and enables effective volunteer guidance. This also creates space to work with societal development information, education, and targeted lobbying and influence.

Extending to additional cities

As our work has become more and more established in Stockholm, regional coordinators, civil society and others across the country have started reaching out to Safe Havens Stockholm. After numerous on-site visits and advising clients remotely, there is now a clear desire to expand Safe Havens to other cities.

“We have seen good examples of when housing has been arranged in various locations through the Salvation Army, with support provided by Safe Havens. We want to establish Safe Havens in northern Sweden, placing a special focus on offering legal support to those facing labor exploitation. Attending a meeting and gaining information about one's own options is a vital right.

EVA NORLIN, REGIONAL COORDINATOR AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Safe Havens Malmö

In the fall of 2019, a pilot initiative was launched in Malmö through the safe house Noomi – Hela Människan. In partnership with the Salvation Army in Malmö, the project received support in terms of facilities and certain social assistance. Paulina Bolton, the founder and director, noticed a need for a new initiative at the safe house Noomi. After previously receiving remote support from Safe Havens Stockholm, the current focus is on creating an independent program that provides legal guidance to women at the facility who have experienced sexual exploitation. Many of those individuals have experienced difficulties in healing from their traumas due to unresolved legal issues.

In relation to this project, Safe Havens provided more of a specialized service of “add-on” character (to Noomi) than the operations of identifying vulnerable individuals that are carried out in Stockholm.

Participating law firms were Paola Uggle and Jasmina Jusufovic. The volunteers were primarily legal students and the clients were onboarded primarily from Noomi’s safe house and through outreach efforts. However, some clients were also identified through coordination with regional coordinators and The Salvation Army’s social operations. In total, 39 clients were assisted.

“Our work together with Safe Havens made us more aware of the need to identify not only victims but also individuals at risk in our broader social initiatives. When we were able to advocate from a human trafficking perspective, it became easier to seek support from donors, such as Evonhuset in Malmö. It also encouraged our clients, many of whom are asylum-seeking African women and victims of sexual exploitation, to open up and seek help when they realized that there were perspectives and tools available for support.

CARMENZITA BOU EZZ, THE SALVATION ARMY MALMÖ

Safe Havens in Malmö operated from 2019 to 2021, but due to the pandemic and economic difficulties, the center had to be closed down.

Safe Havens Gothenburg

Despite the setback in Malmö, Safe Havens recognized the need to expand to other locations. Gothenburg was a city where the need was growing. Through collaboration with the Law Program at the School of Business, Economics, and Law, and in partnership with Gothenburg’s Rescue Mission, Safe Havens Trafficking Center was able to open in Gothenburg in 2022. The project is still in its early stages and is currently overseen by the Salvation Army in Gothenburg. During its first year of operation, they have collaborated with a few volunteers and received legal support through the law firm Fridh. So far, support has been provided to seven individuals.

The executive director, Emilia Fagerholm, shares that Safe Havens has received a very positive response in Gothenburg. Many stakeholders have pointed out that they lack legal expertise and emphasize the need for both the legal and social support that Safe Havens can offer. Emilia is excited about expanding the operations. However, achieving this requires sustainable funding and collaborative teamwork. This is needed for increased flexibility, better support, and greater availability as the operation grows.

The Gothenburg unit receives support from Safe Havens Stockholm and shares a strong sense of community with them but operates as an independent entity.

Certified Service provider

In 2016, on behalf of the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, the Salvation Army led the development of a complementary national support program (NSP) to potential victims and other vulnerable individuals whom authorities were unable to reach.

After the program was quality assured, it was taken over by the Civil Platform against Human Trafficking (the platform). Funding has been provided by the Gender Equality Agency since 2020. Over the course of a few years, the platform applied to expand its activities from its core operations – providing access to protection and support in safe houses – to also include basic initiatives related to commitments under the trafficking conventions that Safe Havens normally manages. After several years of advocacy, and a diligent review and examination, Safe Havens was finally certified as a certified support provider through the NSP in April 2023. Now, Safe Havens finally serves as a legal advisory center for human trafficking in Sweden and qualifies for specific funding in this area.

Through NSP, the organization can now apply for reimbursement for services such as legal support and interpretation. Unfortunately, the funds are limited and the administrative process is difficult. As a result, Safe Havens constantly needs to pursue external funding in order to meet the needs.

“Safe Havens plays a crucial role in NSP, offering support to victims of human trafficking who have their own housing but need additional assistance to have their rights met, especially legal guidance. By certifying Safe Havens the National Support Program can reach more individuals and enable personalized support.

SUSANNE LINDERED, COORDINATOR AT NSP

In April 2023, Safe Havens was certified as a service provider eligible to receive funds from the national support program.





The influence of Safe Havens in shaping individuals and society

What has happened to the people we met during the period 2018 to 2023?

Over the course of five years with Safe Havens, we have gained a clear understanding of Sweden's unknown victims of human trafficking. The 588 individuals we have met have left a significant impact on us, motivating us to continue our work. Each case is unique. Certain efforts are short-term and less extensive, such as an immediate referral to a protected residence. Other efforts take time as we first need to build trust. Some clients tend to express their frustration towards volunteers or staff when their case does not result in prosecution. Even in such situations, we try to see the positive aspect in providing a space where the individual can express their frustration.

Regardless, one consistent factor for everyone we encounter is that individualized care and validation are essential for the person's future. It is uncommon for individuals in this target group to be heard in a holistic way. We listen to the past, present alternatives for restitution, review existing basic needs, and present ways forward to reduce the risk of the individual being exploited again.

The treatment and acknowledgement of each individual is significant for their future.

“You saw me and gave me the keys to my own life.

34-YEAR-OLD WOMAN FROM NIGERIA, SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

There are several different paths that lead clients away from Safe Havens. When the client is appointed a legal representative in a legal process or asylum application, the contact lessens. During voluntary return through the repatriation program with IOM, the regional coordinator generally takes over. If the individual is placed at a safe house, on-site staff takes over the process. As a result, Safe Havens is often uninformed about the client's long-term outcome. Our role is to support those who are not receiving any support. Therefore, individuals are referred to other authorities when NRM is functioning as it should.

Most clients who are informed that they can file a police report based on their experience express a willingness to do so. However, the decision is not as common for individuals lacking legal right to stay in Sweden, as they are afraid to be deported. Despite this, only a small number of police reports lead to investigations, and even fewer end in prosecutions. Brottsbyrån has been appointed as a legal representative in around ten cases since Safe Havens was established, and charges have been filed in only two of these cases, involving four affected clients. As a result, we have sought support from Brottsbyrån and the human trafficking section of the police in Stockholm to improve our presentation of accurate information when filing a report.

In doing so, we aim to create better circumstances for the police to initiate a preliminary investigation.

Asylum counseling involves outlining the individuals' possibilities to stay in Sweden, where the lawyers take the clients' vulnerable situations into account. This may involve seeking asylum based on the need for protection from perpetrators or applying for a new work/residence permit after being exploited by an employer. Aylbyråns support has resulted in successful cases where clients obtained asylum due to the threat posed by the perpetrator.

In 2022, Safe Havens had a strong focus on individuals in labor exploitation, with a particular emphasis on berry pickers. Safe Havens became involved in a case through Victim support in Finland. They received information indicating that there were berry pickers from Thailand in Sweden who were facing debt, unpaid wages, extensive overtime, and poor living conditions. This led Safe Havens to engage with about twenty berry pickers, who had connections with about 250 other pickers. All of these were identified as potential victims of human trafficking. Therefore, Safe Havens offered this group the same support as our other clients, providing legal support and assistance in legal proceedings. Based on the clients request, evidence was gathered for a police report and affected parties were notified of the report and informed that the clients had received legal assistance from Safe Havens' lawyers. This case is still ongoing, and the hope is that the prosecutor will file charges soon.

As a result of this case, Safe Havens has become active in different networks, contributing to discussions on how society can better work to prevent the exploitation of this particular group. We have also provided training to the police on work related crime, and we now maintain ongoing collaboration with LO (Swedish Trade Union Confedera-



PHOTO: TERESIA JANSSON

tion) and their members, such as Kommunal and Byggnads, offering them guidance and support.

In January 2022, the Salvation Army released a status-report on labor exploitation: *Modern Slavery in Sweden – with experiences from a Nordic Perspective*. The report highlighted both accomplishments and evident shortcomings. The report ends with several recommendations aimed at improving all aspects of preventive and crime-fighting efforts.

Safe Havens contributed to the report, bringing attention to the largest case of human exploitation in modern Swedish history at that time – involving around 50 exploited berry pickers from Bulgaria. The case displayed significant shortcomings in collaboration among various actors and a lack of preparedness for large-scale interventions with many victims. Thanks to the commitment of regional coordinators and the efforts of Safe Havens' mobile teams, around thirty individuals were still able to access legal information and social support. This led to 33 individuals wanting to file police reports. Unfortunately, the case was closed due to a lack of evidence.

In 2023, Safe Havens was asked by the regional coordinators to participate in an informational meeting concerning several other Thai berry pickers, this time in Åsele. Several suspicions of exploitation had arisen throughout the season. As the pickers were getting ready to go back home, the regional coordinators wanted to share more information in a secure setting. This resulted in 41 IOM reports, emergency placements in safe housing, and multiple police reports. The perpetrators were arrested, and the prosecutor is expected to decide on potential charges shortly. Safe Havens' primary focus was to meet individual and unique needs within a large group, offering support through activities like conversations and support during visits to healthcare centers. It was crucial for Safe Havens' representatives to uphold the sense of community among the group of clients and offer them a positive reception, especially as all other actors were fully occupied with their respective responsibilities. Safe Havens also assisted by coordinating work, prioritizing tasks, and determining the order in which they should be done.

“Modern Slavery in Sweden” is a status report on labor exploitation conducted by The Salvation Army in 2022.

“With a calm and personal approach, Safe Havens built trust and hope as they flew in and were present for the vulnerable berry pickers in Åsele.

JONNA ÅLANDER, REGIONAL COORDINATOR AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

“The Salvation Army's Safe Havens responded fast and flew in to participate during the early stages of one of Sweden's most significant cases of human exploitation in Åsele. By providing information about rights, stabilizing conversations and basic healthcare, they offered substantial support for the fundamental needs of the victims.

EVA NORLIN, REGIONAL COORDINATOR AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING



► It has always been a natural part of Safe Havens’ work to engage in advocacy, sharing the reality we encounter. Here is an example from The Salvation Army’s European campaign in 2019, “Cheap prices can come at high cost”. The purpose was to make the public aware of the modern slavery aspects of labor exploitation.

During 2023, Safe Havens Stockholm’s primary focus continued to center around labor exploitation. Clients in these cases have often hesitated to interact with authorities or file reports to the police. Nor have they found any reason or motivation to participate in making such a report. In the cases where Safe Havens assisted clients with a police report, the majority of the investigations have been closed.

“Investigations are closed due to lack of evidence, leaving the individual empty-handed. Companies systematically exploit people and get away with it. I keep asking myself: can it really be like this, how is it possible?

CECILIA NILSSON, DEPUTY MANAGER AND CLIENT COORDINATOR, SAFE HAVENS STOCKHOLM

Voices from Safe Havens' network

Safe Havens strives to offer holistic assistance to all clients. To accomplish this, access to multiple competencies and different societal components is required. Therefore, a significant part of Safe Havens' added value lies in the daily collaboration with other actors, both nationally and internationally. The main focus lies on the connections with our established core partners, while also engaging in collaboration with other organizations offering support and alternative strategies to address problems.

“I would like to emphasize the importance of societal actors viewing each other as essential pieces in a larger puzzle. With our diverse responsibilities, we implement the convention's articles in practical terms. This is crucial to reduce the risk of individuals falling through the cracks or identification not leading to assistance.

NINNA MÖRNER, FOUNDER OF THE SWEDISH CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

“A well-functioning collaboration among all who are working against human trafficking is crucial in order for the victims to have enough strength to participate in legal proceedings and to trust the judicial authorities.

SILVIA INGOLFSDOTTIR ÅKERMARK, PARTNER, BROTTSBYRÅN

In Safe Havens' network, several key actors are involved, including both civil organizations and authorities. Among the civil organizations are for example, The Salvation Army's internal operations, Doctors of the World, The Ellen Center, The Red Cross, The Trade Union Center for Undocumented Workers, and The Syndicalists. At the authority level there are regional coordinators/social services, the Equality Authority, the Mika Center, and the Police. Our international collaborations include actors like the Salvation Army, IOM, Baltic States, and Crime Victim Support Finland.

Cecilia Nilsson highlights the importance for all support providers to be familiar with and capable of seeking assistance from one another. By doing so, we can securely guide clients to other resources and assist them in various areas.

For instance, Safe Havens volunteers/legal buddies can turn to Doctors of the World if a client needs medical care. Based on our partnership, we are confident they will address the target group effectively and ensure that clients' rights are upheld. In a similar way, Safe Havens serves as a complement to the work of regional coordinators and social services. Regional coordinators acknowledge Safe Havens' valuable contributions in identifying those at risk, offering practical assistance when social services fall short, providing legal support, and facilitating repatriation efforts.

The regional coordinators testify to the invaluable efforts of Safe Havens in terms of identifying vulnerable individuals, providing practical and legal assistance, and offering support upon their return.

“Safe Havens’ volunteers who have provided support to individuals exposed to human exploitation have been very valuable and appreciated. Especially considering that there is no other support available for this particular target group. Safe Havens has been of great value in linking individuals to legal support and has been very helpful in the application and follow-up aspects of return programs. Safe Havens has also played a crucial role in identifying individuals vulnerable to human trafficking and linking these individuals to regional coordinators or social services.

ELISABET LUNDQVIST, REGIONAL COORDINATOR AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency, focusing on the structural aspects of protection and support for individuals exposed to human trafficking, affirms the vital role of Safe Havens and its complementary function in ensuring the effective implementation of support and assistance processes in society.

“By directly engaging with potentially vulnerable individuals and your advocacy and collaborative efforts with us, you demonstrate how support can be developed and enhanced to reflect the needs of society. (...) There is a lack of initiatives providing legal advice to the target group. This is why we see that your work is highly relevant in today’s society. (...) It’s important to acknowledge that legal support and guidance should be available regardless of the location in Sweden. This is also something we recognize as a problem in today’s society. (...) The Equality Agency is set to create a sustainable structure for collaboration between civil society and government bodies in the year 2024. (...) In this regard, Safe Havens is an important and valuable contributor. Effective collaboration within civil society is important in order to work closely with operations, providing a space to address challenges, and sharing information with the target group.

SOFIA GUSTAVSSON, THE GENDER EQUALITY AGENCY

Safe Havens plays a substantial role in the broader scope of the Salvation Army’s social initiatives. This has led to creating a special care system for victims of human trafficking. Safe Havens acts as the gateway for ongoing support from other parts of the Salvation Army.

“Each week, as we engage with hundreds of women from across the globe, Safe Havens has become an invaluable reference for addressing

any signs of concern related to exploitation. In the future, we also see a growing need to expand the relationship to educate our participants about their rights, aiming to prevent the risk of re-exploitation in Sweden. Overall, we see that we engage with all components of the services offered by Safe Havens – referrals, client support, counseling/guidance and education.

KARIN ASPLUND, AKALLA WOMEN'S CENTER, THE SALVATION ARMY

At The Salvation Army's safe house Lyktan, program manager Kremena Hultby shares her perspective on the role of Safe Havens: "Safe Havens has identified and directed numerous requests to us for housing and long-term support. Safe Havens has also become an additional function for clients already living with us who require legal support. Something they have a right to. This collaboration has lightened our workload and enabled us to focus on the support interventions that we excel in."

Over the years, Safe Havens has had numerous clients who have been referred to us either through The Salvation Army in other countries or through civil society actors in Europe. Victim Support Finland is one with which we have collaborated on several occasions. Additionally, when there were no options for an extended stay in Sweden, Safe Havens facilitated several returns to individuals' home countries or other locations. Efficient communication channels have been crucial.

“We consider it extremely important for survivors of human trafficking or exploitation to have access to a service like Safe Havens since they often fear reaching out to authorities and lack information about which authority to contact and how. There is also a need for someone with direct insights into the needs of the target group and deficiencies in government services, who is willing to address these issues and advocate for the necessary changes needed. Therefore, government actions can never completely replace a low-threshold NGO service.

PIA MARTTILA, COORDINATING SPECIALIST, VICTIM SUPPORT FINLAND

In addition, Jeroen Hoogteiling, Chair of The Salvation Army's European Network against Human Trafficking, highlights that the efficient development and progress of the Safe Havens Trafficking Center in Sweden has set a standard for The Salvation Army's efforts in combating human trafficking and modern slavery in Europe. He considers it "an excellent local example" of a quick response aligning with The Salvation Army's mission to support the most vulnerable individuals in exploitation. He also highlights that Safe Havens in Stockholm offers consistent methodological support to many of The Salvation Army's operations in other countries. As a result individuals in countries such as Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova are provided with information and support.

Safe Havens' trafficking center in Sweden has become an exemplary model for The Salvation Army's work against human trafficking and modern slavery in Europe.

“Safe Havens’ support with legal assistance and the opportunity to have a contact person is incredibly important. This holds true in both specific instances when individuals are in Sweden and need help, and in preparation for a possible return. The support provided by Safe Havens can also encourage individuals to believe that there is help for them, making it easier for the continued support process in their home country. We see Safe Havens as a valuable collaborative partner to ensure the best possible outcomes for the individuals of the Return Program.

PIA LINDQVIST, ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION/COUNTER-TRAFFICKING,
UN’S INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)

Lovisa Landälv expresses her appreciation for the establishment of such a well-functioning network of collaborating partners. She argues that without support, interventions such as job training, health care, trauma counseling, and the opportunity for social connection, clients wouldn’t have been able to come to the center. “The network plays a crucial role in our holistic approach, addressing the diverse needs of clients and making them more receptive to the legal support we offer. Collaboration is essential.”

Advocacy and influence

The essence of Safe Havens is the practical work for the vulnerable individual, ensuring the protection of their fundamental rights. Over the years, based on our experiences from direct client work, we have also developed a qualitative societal work where, through our insight into the issues, we can identify gaps in the system.

Since its establishment, Safe Havens has been actively involved in leading educational initiatives upon request, in both the public and nonprofit sectors. Notable among these initiatives are educational programs for several social outreach units within The Salvation Army, trade unions linked to LO, and a number of organizations within the Swedish Civil Society Platform against Human Trafficking. To present a concrete figure, Safe Havens has trained 385 individuals in The Salvation Army’s basic course “A Safe Hand – To identify, respond to, and take action against human trafficking and exploitation” since 2018.

“Safe Havens has contributed to increasing our awareness of the extent of labor exploitation and the framework of the support system for exploited workers in Sweden. This has been enlightening and meaningful for us.

MATTIAS GÖTHBERG, THE DELEGATION AGAINST WORK RELATED CRIMES

Since 2018,
Safe Havens has
trained 385 individuals
in The Salvation Army’s
training program,
“A Safe Hand”.

Safe Havens has also received invitations to several conferences on human trafficking and crime prevention, including events hosted by OSCE and CBSS, to share its unique approach.

“Safe Havens has been recognized as a leading example in our reports and conferences for member countries, providing support to migrant workers and potential victims of forced labor regarding their rights. Due to the limited support accessible for this vulnerable group and the fact that Safe Havens exists, it represents a success factor on its own and deserves to be recognised.

EDI MUJAJ, COUNCIL OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES

Under topics such as “Where is the victim perspective for human trafficking victims?” and “Are we the worst in the Nordic region?” Safe Havens has, multiple times, brought together experts, authorities, and politicians for discussions in Almedalen on ways to improve.



► Lovisa Landälv led a panel discussion during Almedalen Week in June 2023 on the topic “Human Trafficking in Sweden – Unseen, Does it Exist?” Participating in the discussion were experts and politicians from organizations such as the Economic Crimes Authority, LO (Swedish Trade Union Confederation), and the City Council of Stockholm.

Through media channels and opinion pieces, we have expressed demands for an increased need for protection and support, focusing on the practical implementation of the national referral system (MMM). We have also highlighted the need for a national hotline, along with the need for unconditional reflection time, faster appointments of legal representatives for victims, enhanced knowledge within the legal system, and a stronger victim perspective in collaborative efforts among authorities.

Contribution to international and national reports

Over the years, Safe Havens has become a reliable source to consult regarding the exploitation situation in Sweden and the availability of protection and support.

On two occasions, we have engaged with the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) from the Council of Europe, responsible for evaluating Sweden's compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Through open conversations, we have shared our experiences. GRETA has specifically highlighted the reliable information from civil society about the inadequate identification of vulnerable individuals, as well as the lack of state funding for support and protection efforts, as well as legal support.

In 2019–2020, the National Audit Office carried out an examination of the government's measures against labor exploitation. With the help of Safe Havens, they were able to interview an individual who had experienced labor exploitation in Sweden. The examination underscored Safe Havens' observations regarding the victims' lack of knowledge about their rights in the Swedish labor market, and noted that "The Salvation Army is the only organization providing accommodation for male victims of labor exploitation, but the number of available spaces are currently not enough". The report highlighted shortcomings across the entire system concerning essential mandates for authorities in the areas of regulations, inspections, information, and victim support.

As a result of the National Audit Office's examination, a delegation against work related crime was established. Safe Havens provided information to this delegation regarding the current underestimation of the number of crime victims of labor exploitation and the limited resources allocated for protection and support.

The investigation on "Enhanced System for Labor Immigration", SOU 2021:88, affirms what Safe Havens has long demanded: "that there is a need for a support function (...) there is a lack of a comprehensive approach, a support that can be provided regardless of the industry or location where the person is situated".

“A big problem in Sweden is the limited number of vulnerable workers who report different types of work related crimes to the authorities or other stakeholders. Civil society organizations play a vital role, espe-

The Salvation Army is the only organization that provides accommodation for men who are victims of labor exploitation.

cially for this reason. In SOU 2023:8, the conclusion is that there is a need to preserve and develop the role of civil society organizations in supporting employees who have been or are at risk of being exploited through the labor market.

MATTIAS GÖTHBERG, THE DELEGATION AGAINST WORK RELATED CRIMES

Safe Havens has been involved in the annual report “Trafficking in Persons” by the U.S. Department of State. According to Haralampos Karatzas at the U.S. Embassy, regular conversations with the Salvation Army have provided important information that highlights Safe Havens’ distinct role in making rights accessible.

In the commission report SOU 2023:97 “Out of Vulnerability, Exit Program for Women and Children in Prostitution”, it is stated that “civil society takes an unreasonably large responsibility for these groups, involving both economic and practical aspects (...) It is unacceptable in our society for the state and municipalities to neglect this”. The investigator Anna Skarhed points out the need for sustainable social work, emphasizing that society needs to identify individuals, ask questions, establish routines, and engage in “interprofessional collaboration”.

This is exactly what Safe Havens is doing. However, to ensure the success of this work, it is necessary for civil society to receive increased financial support.

Safe Havens is a regular contributor to the ‘Trafficking in Persons’ report published annually by the U.S. Department of State.



Concluding analysis and recommendations

Analysis

Based on discussions, interviews, and information provided by organizations, partners, authorities, and clients, it is evident that Safe Havens offers support in areas where there are significant gaps within Swedish society.

Despite these challenges, we believe that a change is happening. We notice the positive change we bring to both individuals and society. We have seen legal changes, such as the reflection period of 30 days now not only being linked to the legal process but can also be sought by the social services committee in case of suspected crime. On the contrary, we observe a wide range of interpretations and implementations of the law. We want to see more consistent compliance with the law so that potential crime victims are guaranteed this right. We also want to see an extension of the reflection period to a minimum of 90 days.

From 2018 to 2022, several authorities worked together to carry out 8,800 joint inspections targeting workplace crime. Despite these tens of thousands of inspections and a couple of police reports related to exploitation, none of the cases have resulted in charges for human trafficking or exploitation. Among the seven cases resulting in convictions, the victims of the crimes themselves have come forward, either making themselves known to civil society or directly approaching authorities. Based on Safe Havens' experiences, authorities' inspections have revealed a distinct lack of information on where victims can seek help. Furthermore, information exchange between relevant authorities has been inadequate.

We now see a number of newly established A-krim centers with the purpose of tackling work related crimes, and the judicial system is set to receive additional resources from 2024. Our goal is to achieve greater knowledge and maintain a continuous victim-oriented perspective, thereby identifying potential victims in the shadows of society. We also wish to incorporate Safe Havens and other support systems to ensure that all these previously unknown victims of human trafficking can access their rights as established in conventions. To achieve this, an increased number of support providers need to actively follow the manual when there is suspicion of human trafficking. According to the Swedish Police latest situation report (Situation Report No. 24), only 30 percent of the consulted actors were using the manual.

This deficiency is noticeable and evident in many of the contacts that Safe Havens

We want to see more consistent compliance with current international regulations and that all potential victims have the right to at least a 90-day reflection period.

There must be a relief in the burden placed on the victim of crime to immediately participate in interrogations.

has with authorities. All too often, we have to put forward arguments even for the basic commitments.

There also needs to be a relief for the crime victim from having to immediately participate in interrogations to contribute to the juridical procedure. Safe Havens recognizes that an unrestricted reflection period with the right to reflect, secure accommodation, and swift access to specialized legal representation, is essential for achieving more successful legal processes. We believe this could lead to an improved opportunity for the individual's redress and a higher number of prosecutions. A win for both the legal system and the rights bearer.

Representatives from government agencies and civil society agree that Safe Havens plays a crucial role in situations where societal resources are limited. Safe Havens' work can be seen as a complement to the authorities engaging with the target group. This involves legal counseling as well as support and protection processes.

Staff members at the police department explain that the collaboration with Safe Havens has been an important element in making crime victims and other stakeholders feel secure and willing to cooperate in police investigations. By engaging with clients in a different manner than the police and authorities, Safe Havens gains a deeper understanding of the victim's situation and becomes an important link in the fight against human trafficking.

“Access to this knowledge is something we at the police department appreciate in order to become better at our work.

ANNA MARTIN, NATIONAL OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT OF THE SWEDISH POLICE AUTHORITY

The assistance provided by Safe Havens goes beyond merely accessing legal support. Partners affirm that the social support offered by Safe Havens benefits the process, providing a sense of security that makes it easier for individuals to participate in interviews or migration processes.

“I notice that clients who have contact with a legal buddy, or have had that connection before their asylum process, often open up in a completely different way to the asylum officer at the Migration Agency.

KARIN GYLLENRING, PARTNER, ASYLBYRÅN

All these efforts have resulted in providing support and legal advice to 588 individuals who otherwise would not have received assistance. Safe Havens also contributed to ten initiated police investigations in 2023. Unfortunately, none of Safe Havens' own client cases have resulted in prosecution so far – we are still waiting for that to happen. Cecilia Nilsson shares that investigations are all too often closed due to lack of evidence, leaving the individual empty-handed. Safe Havens' quick response and professional guidance are emphasized by various organizations and authorities.

A productive and action-oriented collaboration benefits the client, and organizations are assured of support when they seek assistance. This emphasizes the importance of organized work, offering opportunities for advice and establishing a network of contacts to facilitate active intervention.

Overall, Safe Havens firmly believes that prioritizing the fundamental rights of the potential victim of human trafficking is the way forward. We can make this statement with certainty, drawing from our experiences of standing by and witnessing numerous cases where the rights of the vulnerable were neglected.

It is Safe Havens' firm conviction that the way forward is to prioritize respect for the fundamental human rights of every potential victim of human trafficking.

“I have witnessed many examples where the interaction with Safe Havens has had a significant impact on the individual client. Legal proceedings that wouldn't have occurred if the client hadn't first gathered courage with their legal buddy and gained insight into their rights before making a police report.

JUNI LIVION, LAWYER, BROTTSBYRÅN

“Safe Havens plays a crucial role for many victims of human trafficking in Sweden. A reception that is open, easily accessible with drop-in services, and has a low threshold is often essential for individuals in vulnerable situations to feel comfortable seeking support on their own terms. Early accessible support is crucial for individuals who have faced exploitation or human trafficking, helping them report, feel empowered, and seek additional protection to break free.

JACOB FLÄRDH, CHAIR OF THE CIVIL PLATFORM AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

When we asked Vasil and Mykola, two men from Ukraine who were subjected to labor exploitation at a construction site, what they want to say to the Swedish authorities, they responded like this:

“This isn't our home country, and we're not here to complain. It just seems like anyone can deceive anyone in Sweden. Many exploit others, and many feel insecure in their workplace. They promise work, you work, but then you receive no pay, and nothing happens. It seems quite easy to deceive others with the existing laws. We could have received financial support when we arrived in Sweden, but we chose not to. Instead, we wanted to contribute and work. Yet, when we took that step, we were denied our payment. I hope politicians will listen to Safe Havens as you engage with ordinary people who are facing difficulties and exploitation. You provide them with protection.

Recommendations

To conclude: slavery is a clear disgrace for Sweden and Safe Havens demands stronger priorities in the fight against human trafficking and exploitation.

Safe Havens stands behind the recommendations of the Council of Europe's expert committee, GRETA, emphasizing the need for Swedish authorities to enhance their efforts "to ensure effective and cost-free legal support for victims of human trafficking".

Safe Havens Trafficking Center is therefore regarded as a civil response to one of Sweden's government commitments.

Given our experiences and the identified needs in this report, we see a compelling reason for Sweden to step up and assume a greater responsibility in protecting the rights of victims of human trafficking. This should be accomplished by increasing mandates and resources for relevant authorities, along with reinforcing state support and operational grants for organizations, such as Safe Havens, that provide assistance and protection in alignment with Sweden's international commitments in this area.

For Sweden to truly embrace its responsibility, Safe Havens recommends the Swedish government to take the following actions:



1. Establish a national hotline/support phone, available 24/7 throughout the entire year, where the public and potential human trafficking victims can seek assistance and information regarding their rights. Our suggestion is to place this hotline within a civil society organization to build trust among those who have been victims of crime.
2. Assign the Equality Authority to allocate a minimum of 10 million SEK for a sustainable national support program addressing all forms of human trafficking. This program aims to provide access to adequate protection and support, including free legal advice, for all victims, regardless of age, gender or forms of exploitation
3. Ensure the practical implementation of the National Referral Mechanism by all responsible actors, with an increased focus on labor exploitation.
4. Enhanced victim oriented perspective in the fight against labor exploitation. Ensure that the authorities at the newly established A-krim center have a clear mission against human trafficking. Additionally, make sure that any suspicion of exploitation leads to immediate action by contacting the regional coordinator or social services.
5. Ensure a standardized and sustainable enforcement of the unconditional reflection period, as well as:
 - Extend the reflection period to a minimum of 90 days.
 - Allow certified actors participating in the Civil Platform's National Support Program to submit applications for this.
6. Strengthen the resources of the police and prosecutors against human trafficking and exploitation by:
 - Establish a national mobile team so that the police can act with the same resources during major operations as in a special operation.
 - Make sure investigators assign legal representatives for victims as soon as a potential victim is identified.

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