

VOIS Cyprus Statement on the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2021

After the United Nations General Assembly met in 2013 and adopted resolution A/RES/68/192, it realized the need to dedicate a day to highlight the issue of human trafficking and raise awareness on its survivors and promote the protection of their rights. Since then, July 30th has been observed as the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Today and every day, we in VOIS Cyprus advocate for the end of human trafficking in the island, for the promotion of the survivors' stories and rights, and for proper actions to be taken by all those responsible to eradicate the evil of trafficking.

Trafficking in the northern part of Cyprus takes place in several forms; sex trafficking and forced labor being the most common. These affect marginalized groups the most, groups such as asylum seekers, international students and LGBTI+ individuals. Due to the lack of support systems and their vulnerability, they, among others, are often more likely to fall victim to trafficking systems.

In regards to international students in particular, there exists a substantial degree of human trafficking that affect them and it is only getting more severe. There are a number of international students who are directly and unfortunately subjected to sex trafficking, working in entertainment clubs and other places under poor conditions, with their Passports taken from them, low pay, hidden away from the authorities, and sometimes undergoing verbal and/or physical abuse. There are also a number of employers that reportedly utilize methods akin to human trafficking, targeting extremely vulnerable international students to employ without a working permit, and then pay them very little (if at all) and scam them. Sometimes, even taking the Passports of such workers away as well.

The causes of these often vary and unfortunately, it is sometimes international students themselves who come with the purpose of doing such work. One of the main catalysts of this crisis, however, are bad Agents, and the lack of any sort of effective supervision, monitoring, accountability and legislation on this issue by the relevant authorities, such as universities and governmental departments. Local and foreign agents roam free on the island, and in countries where international students come from, these agents either lie to students with the purpose of bringing them in for sex trafficking or forced labor, or defraud them through falsehoods on the actual conditions here and subsequently abandon them, for financial gain. Such students often end up even more vulnerable to other trafficking techniques, ultimately facilitated by the:

- Lack of transparency from the universities on the agents that work for them, and conditions in the northern part of Cyprus.
- Lack of accountability from the universities and the relevant governmental bodies on these agents.
- Lack of proper supervision from the relevant bodies on universities to apply disciplinary practices.
- Lack of effective supervision from the relevant bodies on fake and scam universities that employ and support the same techniques that the agents use, all for financial gain.

All of these have led to the destruction of lives and futures of many young people who were looking for a better life. It is a crisis that is affecting the island and the lives of many, and it is a crisis that VOIS will continue to tackle and seek solutions to.

Based on aforementioned issues, we demand and seek the following:

1. A public, transparent, easily accessible list of official agents that are affiliated with each university on the island to be put on the University websites, in English.
2. More awareness campaigns and letters denouncing this practice and familiarizing people with it from universities, the Ministry of Education, and YÖDAK.
3. Legislation to be passed that criminalizes fraudulent agent activities.
4. Tougher restrictions and stronger supervision on the functions of universities working on the island from the Ministry of Education and YÖDAK.
5. Stronger supervision and laws from the police on clubs and similar entertainment places, as well as on Agents.
6. A section on the Universities' websites that advises against dealing with unaffiliated agents and offers direct help from the university on matters related to finding accommodation or registering to university.

With that being said, we thank all those who support this cause, will support this cause, and are with us. We move forward with full expectations and hope of a better future, together.