



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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European Dialogue

“Eyes Wide Shut?”




Surveying Europeans' Views on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism



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Modern-Day Slavery and Human Trafficking

Modern-Day Slavery

Modern-day slavery is far from a relic of history. According to the *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery 2022*, nearly **50 million people** are living in conditions of enslavement today. Modern-day slavery manifests in **various forms** and is associated with numerous interrelated crimes, including human trafficking and the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism (SECTT).¹

A growing concern

In 2021, there were **10 million more** people in modern-day slavery than the global estimates from 2016. So, today there are **more people living in slavery than at any other time in history**.²

A hidden problem

For many, slavery might be out of sight, but it persists, **affecting the lives of millions every day**. Especially, women and children remain disproportionately vulnerable.³



What is Human Trafficking?

*Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, which involves the **recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals** through methods such as **force, fraud, coercion, or deception**, with the intent of exploiting them for financial gain.*⁴

Children in Human Trafficking

Child sex trafficking affects youth from all backgrounds but disproportionately targets those facing systemic and personal vulnerabilities. Risk factors include **societal issues** like sexualization of children, structural racism, and lack of trafficking awareness; **community challenges** such as poverty, gang presence, and under-resourced areas; **relationship dynamics** like family dysfunction and intimate partner violence; and **individual factors** such as abuse, homelessness, LGBTQ+ identity, mental health struggles, and risky online behaviour. Further, factors like **unaccompanied migration and armed conflict** increase the risk to become a victim. These interconnected elements heighten susceptibility to exploitation, necessitating targeted prevention and support.⁵

Globally, **one in three victims of human trafficking is a child**, most of whom are girls. Traffickers perceive children as easier to control through **coercion and manipulation** to exploit them in various sectors, including **forced labor, sexual abuse, illegal adoption and more**. Additionally, there is a **higher demand for exploiting women and children**, particularly in the commercial sex industry, which further exacerbates their risk of being trafficked.⁶

The Dark Side of Travel

Travel and tourism bring people together, but they also hide a tragic reality: the **Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism (SECTT)** – sometimes also referred to as Child Sex Tourism. Perpetrators, traveling domestically or internationally, **exploit vulnerable children** – sometimes planning on it, sometimes acting on impulse. Perpetrators use tourism services to blend in, creating a **hidden world of abuse**, where victims are trafficked, forced into sex work, or taken advantage of by chance. ^{7, 8, 9}

A worldwide problem – in the Global North and Global South.

Despite efforts to protect children, Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism has **INCREASED** globally.

The **ease of international travel** has fueled the rise of the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism, **offering more opportunities for offenders**. **Advances in communication technology** have further facilitated this, with the Internet enabling quick exchange of information and easier planning for such crimes, while also potentially lowering the bar for new offenders encouraging others to participate. New technologies, including smartphones and the darknet, facilitate SECTT by enabling offenders to communicate and exchange information anonymously. **Social media** is also **frequently misused** to groom vulnerable children.¹⁰



Anonymity Abroad

SECTT is a **secretive, complex, and evolving crime**. This abuse thrives due to **weak law enforcement, corruption, poverty, and the ease of modern travel**, where offenders can commit a crime and leave before facing consequences. Perpetrators come from **all socio-economic backgrounds and locations**.

Once viewed as primarily involving white, middle-aged men targeting children in low-income regions, it now encompasses a **broader range of offenders**, including international travellers, volunteers, business travellers, expatriates, and even individuals involved in large-scale events. Facilitators, such as pimps or even hotel staff, often enable exploitation without directly committing it.¹¹

Our Survey: We asked over 3,000 people from 14 European states what they think about the issue.

Among all respondents, **93%** judge people who travel to another country and engage in sexual acts with children are morally reprehensible.



Myth

Human trafficking always involves physically moving victims - be it across borders or to new locations.



Fact

Human trafficking **does not require the physical movement of victims**. A person can be trafficked without ever leaving their community or hometown. The crime lies in the **coercion, deception, or force used to exploit someone**, regardless of whether transportation is involved.¹⁹

Raising Awareness

The rise of less-regulated tourism services has **increased the difficulty of monitoring and preventing SECTT**. This highlights the need for **more collaboration** among stakeholders, including law enforcement, tourism, and tech sectors as well as the **need for heightened public awareness** to address this issue.¹³

54%

of Europeans **would like to know** how much **"Child Sex Tourism"**

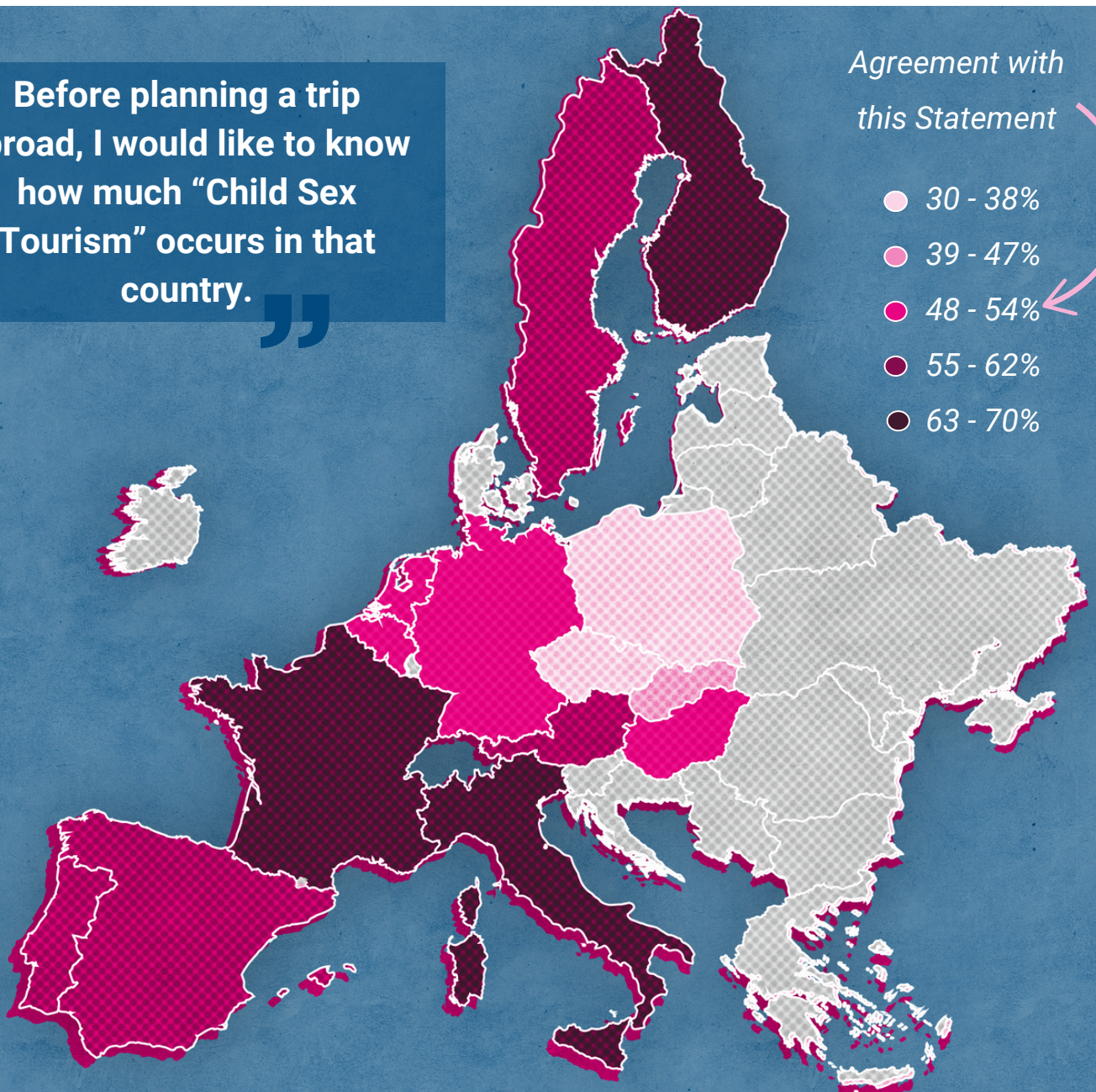
occurs in a country before travelling there.

In contrast, **18%** of participants **do not necessarily want to know** how much SECTT occurs in the country they are traveling to. Around **1/3** of Dutch and Austrian survey participants answered the same.

“ Before planning a trip abroad, I would like to know how much “Child Sex Tourism” occurs in that country. ”

Agreement with
this Statement

- 30 - 38%
- 39 - 47%
- 48 - 54%
- 55 - 62%
- 63 - 70%

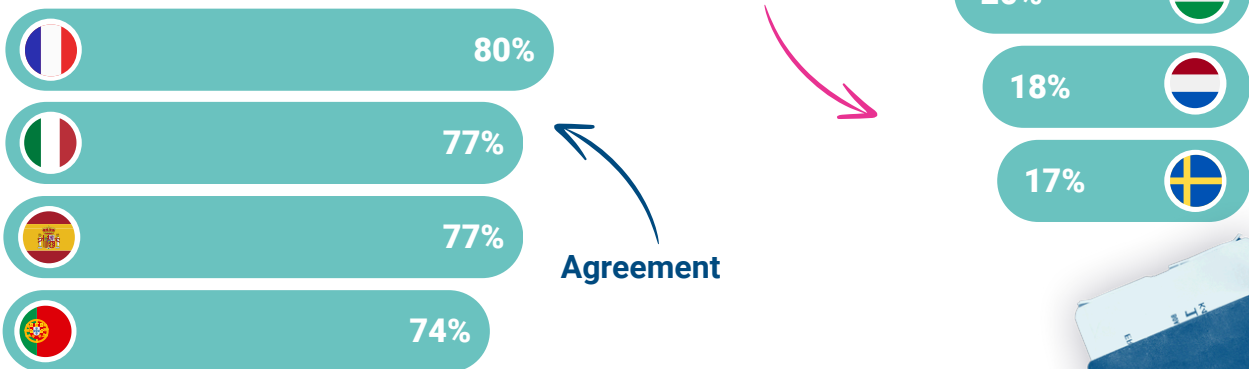


Hidden Reality

In general, it is **challenging to obtain accurate data** on the number of victims or perpetrators. SECTT is **generally illegal, hidden, and considered a taboo** in many countries, which often deny or downplay its existence. As a result, it frequently goes **unreported and is “under-prosecuted.”** However, the number of children affected globally by SECTT is undoubtedly in the millions.¹⁴

65% of Europeans agree it is a tourist's responsibility to aid in the prevention of “Child Sex Tourism” in the country they are travelling to.

“ It is a tourist's (personal) **responsibility** to aid in the prevention of Child Sex Tourism in the country where they are travelling to. ”



Myth

Offenders who sexually exploit children are middle-aged Caucasian men who travel internationally to target children.



Fact

Perpetrators come from **diverse backgrounds**, including business travellers, volunteers, expatriates, tourists, and **range in gender, age, and motivation.**¹²

Legislation & Enforcement

A significant barrier to combating SECTT lies in **legislative gaps** that allow offenders to evade justice. **Weak extraterritorial laws and limited cross-border cooperation hinder prosecution**, enabling perpetrators to exploit variations in national legislation. An additional major issue is, that when one country strengthens its prevention efforts, the organized criminal networks behind SECTT often **relocate their operations** to areas with weaker protections.¹²

69%

of Europeans **do not want to travel or vacation in a country that lacks**

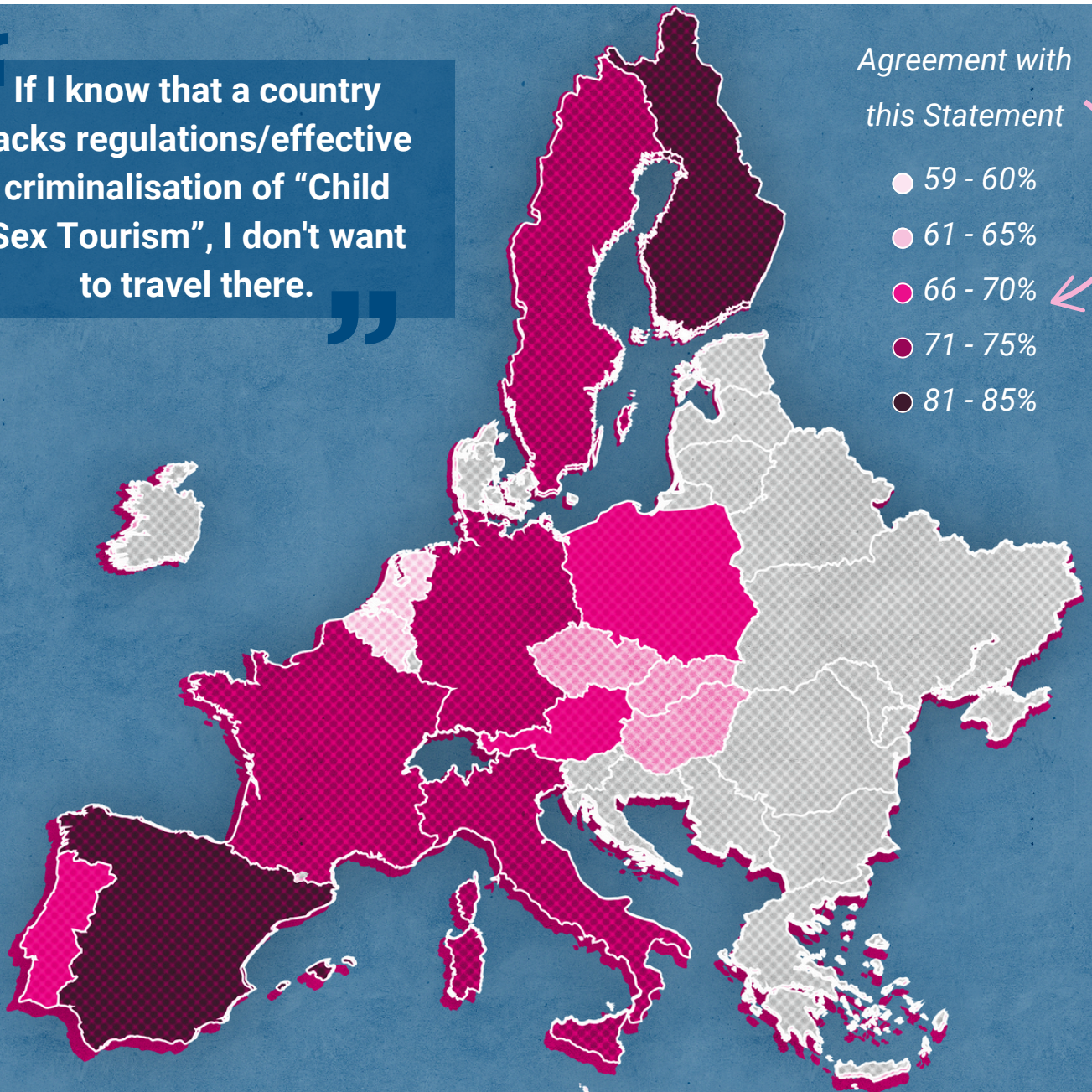
regulations/effective criminalisation

of "Child Sex Tourism"

“ If I know that a country lacks regulations/effective criminalisation of "Child Sex Tourism", I don't want to travel there. ”

Agreement with this Statement

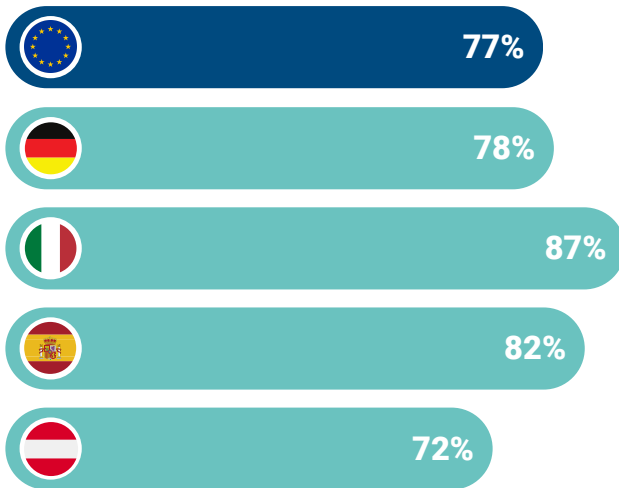
- 59 - 60%
- 61 - 65%
- 66 - 70%
- 71 - 75%
- 81 - 85%



European Initiative

In February 2024, after more than ten years, the EU Commission introduced Proposal 2024/0035(COD), a **revision of the guidelines addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation**. The directive aims to **strengthen EU measures** against child sexual abuse by **expanding criminal definitions, enhancing victim support** through awareness campaigns and **mandatory background checks** for child-contact roles. The directive also focuses on **better cross-border cooperation and adapting to technological advancements** to enhance investigations and prosecutions.^{15, 16}

“Alleged perpetrators of “Child Sex Tourism” should be **extradited** back to the country where they committed the crime to stand trial. Even if the local jurisdiction may not be comparable to Western ones.”



Agreement



Myth

Child sexual exploitation has decreased thanks to stronger global regulations and awareness.



Fact

While some progress has been made, the **ease of international travel** has contributed to a **rise in SCETT**. Offenders exploit accessible travel options to engage in illegal activities abroad.¹⁷



Unmasking Hidden Crimes

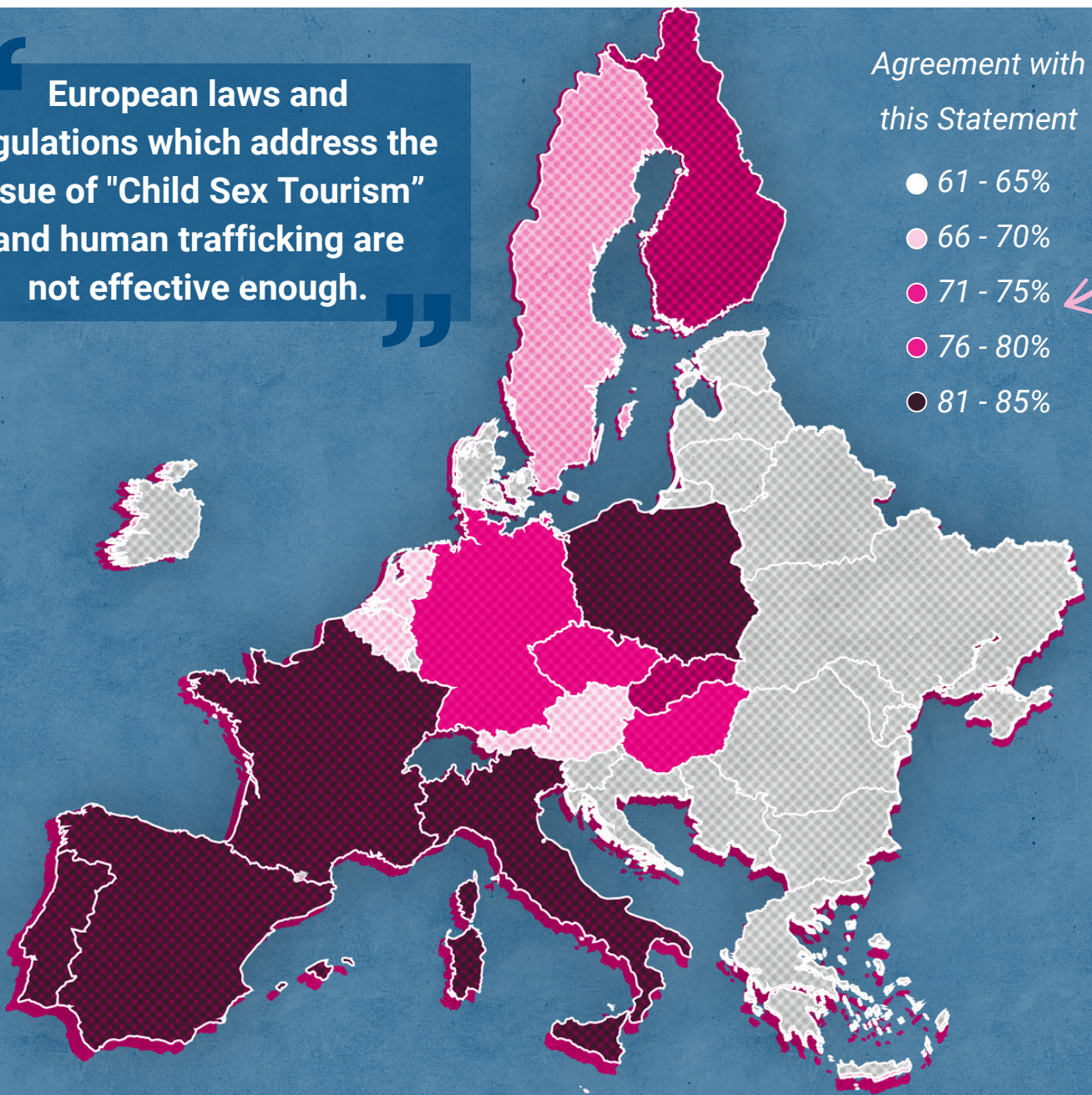
You can help combat human trafficking and SECTT by **recognizing key indicators** of the crime, **raising awareness** within your community or industry, and **reporting suspected cases**. Individuals in specific industries or roles are often better positioned to identify trafficking due to their daily interactions and environments, making their **vigilance and action** especially crucial in addressing this issue. Many victims face language barriers, fear of their traffickers, or mistrust of law enforcement, which prevents them from seeking help.^{16, 18, 20}

3/4 of Europeans agree EU laws and regulations are **not effective enough.**

“European laws and regulations which address the issue of "Child Sex Tourism" and human trafficking are not effective enough.”

Agreement with this Statement

- 61 - 65%
- 66 - 70%
- 71 - 75%
- 76 - 80%
- 81 - 85%



Background Information on the Research

This research was conducted across 14 European Member States, with surveys administered in each country's native language, translated by a professional translation agency. 250 respondents per country were interviewed. The survey included eight questions and one control question, covering the topic of forced labour. After excluding respondents who answered the control question incorrectly, the final sample size was 3.261 respondents. Participants were provided with an introductory text and definitions related to the survey topic before answering. The majority of the questions were multiple choice, offering a 5-point Likert scale for respondents to choose from.

The full results of the survey can be accessed here:



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