



## CHILD TRAFFICKING AMONG VULNERABLE ROMA COMMUNITIES

### Policy Brief No. 54, July 2015

Trafficking in persons is a lucrative crime and a gross human rights violation, which affects all EU Member States. Trafficking in children merits special attention of anti-trafficking efforts as children are especially vulnerable to trafficking, re-trafficking and victimisation<sup>1</sup> and the number of children trafficked throughout the EU is on the rise.<sup>2</sup> Investigation, protection and prevention measures for child trafficking are especially needed as the exploitation of children and violation of their rights have dramatic negative effects on children and society as a whole.

While there is some empirical evidence on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation of women, other forms of trafficking have not drawn attention of researchers, academics and policy makers. This means that victims of exploitation fall outside the radar of identification and thus cannot access the available assistance. Having this in mind, a consortium of seven partner organisations<sup>3</sup> sought to explore three specific under-researched forms of child trafficking in order to contribute to the knowledge on how and why children fall prey to exploitation. The three forms studied are child trafficking for the purpose of begging exploitation, child trafficking for the purpose of pick-pocketing and child trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of boys.

#### KEY POINTS

- Data on child trafficking is both limited and non-representative of the real scope of the phenomenon. Empirical data on the socio-economic and ethnic background on victims of trafficking is generally unavailable.
- There are no specific culturally ingrained practices that make Roma vulnerable to trafficking. Rather, socio-economic factors such as poverty, large-scale unemployment and low levels of education make the minority group especially vulnerable to trafficking.
- The limited caseload of identified victims of child trafficking for begging in recent years can be correlated with the increased involvement of parents and relatives in the organisation of begging activities.
- A typical recruitment strategy for children victims of pick-pocketing is early marriage into a family operating a pick-pocketing network.
- Specific groups of boys and transgender persons of Roma origin are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking. The victims identified in criminal proceedings had not been referred to assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> A study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from 2010 shows that of a 79 sample re-trafficking cases, 84 per cent involved children or young adults under 25 years old. IOM, *The Causes and Consequences of Re-trafficking: Evidence from the IOM Human Trafficking Database*, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> EUROPOL, Child Trafficking in the EU

<sup>3</sup> Centre for the Study of Democracy/CSD (BG) – project leader and Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights/BIM (AT), Centre for the Study of Social Investments/Censis (IT), Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy/ELIAMEP (EL), Center for Policy Studies at Central European University /CEPS-CEU (HU), People in Need /PIN (SK) and Soros Foundation (RO) - project partners.

Expert opinions and previous studies reveal a significant overrepresentation of Roma children among the victims of trafficking for begging and pick-pocketing. While trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys is the most hidden and least studied phenomenon, victim caseloads in Bulgaria, one of the two key source countries of trafficking victims in the EU, reveals that one fifth of the victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are boys. This factor, together with previous field observations of vulnerabilities of prostituting Roma minors to child trafficking, determined that sexual exploitation of boys would be the third form of trafficking to be studied.

The overrepresentation of Roma among trafficking victims calls for specific attention to be devoted to the vulnerabilities of Roma persons to child trafficking, as well as to the mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation of Roma children from vulnerable Roma communities. The study was not based on a hypothesis that Roma are key actors in the criminal networks recruiting and exploiting victims of trafficking. Rather, the assumption of the partners in this initiative was that grave human rights violations resulting from exploitation for trafficking affect disproportionately members of the Roma minority. Thus, significant efforts on behalf of researchers and policy makers are needed to redress human rights violations, devise targeted prevention strategies and offer effective and adequate assistance to Roma children victims of trafficking and their families.

Against the background of limited data and high sensitivity of the topic of trafficking in persons among Roma as a group of risk, **participatory research methods are best fitted to gather knowledge on the phenomenon of child trafficking.** Participatory research, ensuring that Roma experts take part in the formulation and conduct of qualitative research, minimise the risk of stigmatisation of Roma communities by ensuring sensitivity of the research instruments and also by providing a contextualised analysis. Last but not least, participatory methods are also useful in bringing knowledge back to the

communities on how they can protect themselves from trafficking and exploitation.

The fieldwork conducted in four of the countries studied, traditionally regarded as origin countries of trafficking victims, relied on participatory research methods. The participatory methods allowed to raise awareness on the risk of trafficking in persons among members of the community taking part in the research, to identify risk factors to exploitation as perceived by the communities, as well as to gain access to and trust of members of the communities who had been victims of exploitation. Specific attention is thus devoted to how participation of the Roma communities could be channelled in counter trafficking efforts, and specifically – in providing assistance to child victims.

## Data and trends

Data on trafficking in human beings is marred by several deficiencies, challenging significantly any discussion or policy actions based on quantitative empirical knowledge.

The most significant shortcoming of official data on child trafficking is that it reflects only cases of registered victims, as typically provided through the registry of victims **identified in criminal proceedings.** This data is not only uninformative, as regards to the socio-economic and ethnic background of the victim, it is also **misleading in terms of reflecting the actual size of the phenomenon.** For instance, in Austria, according to the Ministry of the Interior's statistics on filed cases with the police, both in 2012 and 2013, only three victims of trafficking have been below the age of 18, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in Slovakia, in the past three years, there have been only 9 child victims of human trafficking identified all together, whereby in 2014 there was none. Hungary reports no international victims of trafficking, while Italy, primarily a destination country for trafficking victims,

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<sup>4</sup> Bundesministerium für Inneres, Kriminalitätsbericht 2012, and 2013, available at [http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/bmi\\_service/start.aspx#t\\_download](http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/bmi_service/start.aspx#t_download).

reports 8 and 16 cases of child victims of trafficking for 2012 and 2013 respectively.

These statistics cannot provide an accurate picture of the size of the child trafficking phenomenon and **significantly undermine any serious efforts to counteract trafficking and provide assistance to many children** who may be victims of exploitation. The difference between identified and presumed victims is alarming of the numbers of children who may have not accessed much needed assistance. According Austrian Task Force Report 2012, the *Drehscheibe*<sup>5</sup> in Vienna dealt with a total of 315 unaccompanied minors in Vienna from 2009 to 2011, of which 118 cases of potential of child trafficking cases.<sup>6</sup> However, only the presumption was confirmed in only three cases.

The low numbers of registered child victims of trafficking reflects both the challenges in **identifying situations of trafficking**, the **limited efforts to investigate** this type of crime and the **problems in persecution under trafficking legislation**. Problems in identifying situations of trafficking are related to the fact that in many cases, children do not consider themselves as subject of exploitation, especially when family members are involved and in situations when their activities (begging, pick-pocketing, prostitution) are a source of family income. Research from Italy and Greece reveals that stereotypes against the Roma and institutional inertia can lead to looking away from cases of child begging, which are perceived as “culturally ingrained” practices. In Bulgaria, vested interests and corruption of officials by wealthy families operating pick-pocketing networks lead to very few investigations into this type of criminal activities. Across all countries, institutional homophobia turns a blind eye on boy and transvestite prostitution, causing possible exploitation and coercion to remain undetected.

Across the EU countries studied, **judicial authorities are reluctant to prosecute for the crime of trafficking**. Prosecutors hardly use the trafficking legislation but rather turn to other provisions of the penal law, related to the crime committed, such as stealing, pimping, aggressive begging. For instance, an official in Austria reports of 13 years old girl who has already 400 cases of pick-pocketing filed with the police, but no investigation for trafficking was launched. Not applying the anti-trafficking legislation also means that children are not being able to benefit from the “non-punishment clause” and from assistance provided to victims.

While child trafficking data can hardly indicate the extent and gravity of the problem, **proxy data gives a better perspective** on children who may be at risk of trafficking and among whom there might be actual victims, who fall outside the radar of investigation.

Data on begging children can indicate risk of trafficking or potential cases of trafficking. For instance in Greece, in the year 2010 alone, ARSIS street-workers approached 191 foreign children in the streets of Thessaloniki begging or carrying out auxiliary to begging activities such as selling handkerchiefs, flowers, candles or playing music alone or accompanied by their mothers. Data from juvenile justice system can indicate potential cases of trafficking, which were not investigated and persecuted as such. In Italy 342 foreign children were detained by Juvenile Services, with the most common offence being theft<sup>7</sup> (64%), followed at a considerable distance by robbery (8%) and receiving stolen goods (5%). In the *Drehscheibe* Vienna, in the year 2013, a total of 202 children have been admitted to the institution, of which 136 have been foreign children, predominantly from Eastern Europe and not seeking asylum. Children were admitted to the *Drehscheibe* who were in the conflict with the

<sup>5</sup> *Drehscheibe* is temporary care and accommodation facility for unaccompanied minors based in Vienna

<sup>6</sup> Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2. Österreichischer Bericht zur Bekämpfung des Menschenhandels 2009-2011 - Umsetzung des Nationalen Aktionsplans zur Bekämpfung des Menschenhandels von Jänner 2009 bis Dezember 2011, p 7, <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/aussenministerium/aussenpolitik/menschenrechte/schwerpunktthemen/kampf-gegen-menschenhandel.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Theft includes the crime of pick-pocketing.

law committed offences of pick-pocketing (63% of the children), had irregular residence status (12%), were involve in begging (11%) or prostitution (9%), or had committed other offences (5%). The *Drehscheibe* director estimates that 50 % of the admitted children might be victims of exploitation/trafficking. However, no investigation or prosecution under the Austria anti-trafficking legislation followed.

The official **data on child trafficking is also not informative of the socio-economic and ethnic background of the victims**. Data from criminal proceedings cannot shed light on such characteristics, while other data, collected by service providers and other stakeholders is not centrally collected and analysed.

While none of the countries studied provided data on the ethnic background of the victims, expert assessments from various stakeholders (service providers, police, child protection authorities) point out that **Roma constitute about 90% of the victims of trafficking** for begging and pick-pocketing activities and the minority groups are significantly overrepresented among victims of sexual exploitation. The significant share of Roma persons among trafficking victims calls for special attention to the factors, which make the members of the ethnic minority more vulnerable to trafficking.

- Data on child trafficking is both limited and non-representative of the real scope of the phenomenon. Member states lack centralised data collection mechanism; data is collected by different institutions as per different indicators.
- Empirical data on the socio-economic and ethnic background on victims of trafficking is generally unavailable.
- Problems in trafficking data are also related to challenges in victim identification and prosecution under anti-trafficking legislation.
- Indicators on trafficking in persons and child trafficking in particular need to be regularly updated to reflect new phenomena and groups at risk. National and local stakeholders should be trained to recognise these indicators among

groups at risk. Specific efforts should be made to build the capacity of local social and street workers to recognise signs of exploitation among vulnerable groups.

- Data on child trafficking should be centrally collected (including data of service providers, among other stakeholders) and regularly reviewed. The National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms should play central role in the collection and analysis of data on trafficking in human beings.
- The analysis of data, including disaggregated by ethnicity and socio-economic status, should serve to inform all policy actions. The analysis of data should seek to identify key risk groups and vulnerability factors.
- Empirical research and fieldwork based on participatory methods should be conducted in order to identify groups at risk of trafficking which have not come into contact with local authorities involved in counter trafficking. These groups at risk are currently not reflected in trafficking statistics and thus fall outside the target of counter-trafficking efforts.

## Factors of vulnerability of Roma to child trafficking

There are no specific culturally ingrained practices that make Roma vulnerable to trafficking. Rather, socio-economic factors such as **poverty, large-scale unemployment and low levels of education, resulting from a history of social exclusion** of the Roma, make the minority group especially vulnerable to trafficking. In **segregated and impoverished environments** the risk of **criminalisation** is substantially higher. In Hungary and Slovakia, a reported impact of the criminalised environment on peer groups is the formation of **youth gangs**. Within youth gangs, children, either school-drop outs or still at school, get together and commit crimes in the street such as robbing, stealing or, bullying other youngsters.

The lack of perspectives in attaining regular employment at home acts as a push factor for Roma families to undertake **high-risk migration** in pursuit of perceived economic opportunities abroad. The lack of knowledge of the labour markets regulations in the host society, together with lack of language proficiency and low level of education makes Roma migrants susceptible to exploitation.

The phenomenon of **poverty migration** deserves particular attention as increasing the vulnerability of Roma to trafficking. In Austria “poverty travellers/commuters” arrive mainly from Romania, Bulgaria but also Slovakia, Hungary and sometimes from Balkan countries and stay within the cities for a maximum of two to three months. They travellers beg or sell small items (flowers, magazines) in the streets or play an instrument and are accompanied by their children. Around 60-70 % of these people are estimated to be of ethnic Roma origin. The number of these people has increased in the past four to five years and the phenomenon is also recognised by Bulgarian authorities. In most cases, the travellers cannot access any support infrastructure such as emergency shelters for day care of children, the families are vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers who can offer loans, accommodation in return for exploitative work.

Migration of **parents leaving children at home** can also contribute to the increased vulnerability of the children to trafficking. Children are left in the care of grandmothers or other relatives or in other cases for older sisters or brothers. The caregivers have difficulties in looking after these children, especially if they are teenagers. In Hungary, such children are often referred to foster care and are at risk to become part of youth gangs. Throughout the countries studied, children left behind are also at higher risk of early school leave.

**Lack of civil registration** also makes Roma children particularly vulnerable to trafficking. The lack of civil registration makes it easier for traffickers to recruit victims and it also obstructs state authorities in their attempts to detect the true identity of children who are being transported across borders. It is difficult for

social workers or for police authorities to distinguish if the person accompanying a child is his parent or guardian if they had no identification means. The lack of official registration also makes it difficult for national authorities to collect reliable information regarding the nature and frequency of trafficking among Roma communities, and children in particular. The lack of civil registration for many Roma, including many children, also means that those individuals fall outside the protective net of state’s social support services.

Particular **traditional practices** encountered within the Roma communities, such as early marriage, child labour and mobility, may also render children more vulnerable to trafficking. Such practices may make parents and caregivers less aware of the risks and the problems when children are expected to work to contribute to the family income instead of regularly attending school. Entrusting a child to a relative, friend or acquaintance who promises to find him/her work, may appear acceptable to parents who are unaware of the actual conditions that will be encountered in a foreign country. In addition, reliance on loan sharks for money can be employed as recruitment strategies for child trafficking. The low level of education of parents and children makes them especially vulnerable to deception.

Other factors, such as **history of physical and sexual abuse, growing up in state institutions and previous involvement in prostitution** also increase the chance of children falling prey to trafficking exploitation. In Bulgaria, a report based on testimonies of trafficking victims found that 9 out of 26 trafficked persons reported having suffered domestic violence and sexual abuse at the hands of parents, grandparents, husbands and boyfriends prior to their trafficking<sup>8</sup>. Testimonies of transgender persons, victims of sexual exploitation and likely victims of trafficking, also revealed history of physical and sexual abuse in the family.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## Child victims recruited for begging, pick-pocketing and sexual exploitation of boys and transgender persons: victim profiles, groups at risk and mechanisms for recruitment and exploitation

### I. Child trafficking for begging

While child trafficking for begging attracted significant international attention in 2003-2005, **statistical evidence and policy response to this form of exploitation is declining**. Firstly, as illustrated above, Italy and Austria, both typical destination countries, register very few victims of trafficking for the past two recorded years of 2012 and 2013 (8 and 16 victims identified in Italy respectively and three victims identified in Austria). Neither of the countries provides data particularly on begging as a form of exploitation.

Greece, a destination country of children and families travelling for begging, identified 34 child victims between 2011 and 2013 and four of the victims had been trafficked for begging. In line with Bulgaria's Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Unaccompanied Children and Child Victims of Trafficking, Returning from Abroad 32 children victims of trafficking for begging were repatriated in 2013 and 10 victims in 2012. The predominant destination country for Bulgarian victims of trafficking for begging is Greece (22 cases), followed by Austria (5 cases), Belgium (1 case), France (1 case), Italy (1 case), Spain (1 case). Romania reported 13 and 11 cases of forced child begging in the years 2012 and 2013 respectively.

The limited caseloads of identified children victims of trafficking for begging **provide little empirical evidence of the profiles and vulnerability factors** of the Roma minority to trafficking. Most information on child trafficking for begging refers to the period between 2003-2004 when several such cases were investigated, including Romanian **victims** children

from Calarsi trafficked to Italy and **Bulgarian children, trafficked to Austria**.

#### Evidence Box 1.

An uncovered trafficking network recruiting children from the **Romanian town of Tandarei** revealed that children were trafficked with counterfeit documents by the notary. The documents were used to legalise the travel of children abroad with an unrelated adult. Investigation revealed that contracts were signed between a family selling a child and the trafficker taking control of the youngster. Reportedly, children were sold for £20,000 and trafficked into the UK to join members of the organised criminal network in Slough, London, Manchester and other cities. The children were given a false name and bogus birth certificate. Many were moved around the country frequently, using the bogus identity papers to make multiple claims for child benefit. In time the criminal network started to recruit members of different nationalities (Slovaks, Czechs and Poles, mainly of Roma ethnicity). The network controlled the minors that were sent to beg, clean car windows, or pick-pocket.

#### Evidence Box 2.

More recently, in 2013 criminal investigations revealed the operation of trafficking network in Milan, exploiting adult disabled Roma from Romania in Italy. The victims were recruited from poor families in Romania, transported to Italy in vans and forced to beg on the streets and on the underground in Milan. The exploitation for begging brought in about EUR 60,000 per month to the traffickers.

Although information from previous investigations is limited and cases involving child victims are outdated, it reveals the **lucrative nature of child begging**

**activities**, which makes them appealing to organized criminal groups. Moreover, uncovered cases of child trafficking for begging reveals the **vulnerability of impoverished Roma families to exploitation** through recruitment through bonded labour.

The limited caseload of identified victims of child trafficking for begging in recent years can be correlated with the **increased involvement of parents and relatives** in the organisation of begging activities across the countries studies. The tendency of involvement of parents in begging activities leaves confusion among authorities as to whether exploitation exists and whether cases could be considered as child trafficking.

The UN Trafficking Protocol implicitly considers the delivering of a child to another person for the exploitation of the child's labour, as defined by the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956), to be a form of exploitation associated with trafficking. Paragraph 3(a) to forms of "exploitation" that include "servitude", as well as "services, slavery or practices similar to slavery".

Thus, as per international anti-slavery and anti-trafficking legislation, a child who is sent to beg by parents or guardians, while continuing to live with them, cannot be regarded as "having been delivered" to anyone else, and thus the parent's actions do not constitute an act of trafficking.

At the same time, however, children who are made to beg by their parents could under some circumstances fall under the protection of the ILO Convention 182. Article 3 of the Convention includes (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children" as a worst form of child labour. The types of work falling under (d) are to be determined and formally listed by the appropriate authority at national level. However, the ILO Recommendation 190 on the worst forms of child labour specifies that work that exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse, as well as work in unhealthy environment or conducted for long hours should be considered as "worst forms of child labour".

Clearly, children begging on the streets fall within protection of international legislation on worst forms

of child labour as well as trafficking in persons, when delivered to third party. The country researches however revealed that **instances of child begging in all seven countries are rarely questioned or investigated by authorities, and rarely, if at all, investigated along anti-trafficking legislation**. In Italy, **prejudices and cultural bias of begging as a "traditional Roma" practice** lowers the threshold of alertness to possible exploitation of the children. There is therefore a large degree of discretion on the part of local institutions in deciding whether or not to take action when a Roma child is found begging on the street and if so what sort of action to take. There is no uniformity among different Juvenile Courts and among social workers in deciding on the best course of action for the child, in particular whether or not to take the child away from the family of origin. Similarly, in Greece children found begging on the streets with adults are most commonly treated under the legislation related to begging (Article 409 of the Penal Code), with charges pressed against the parent or the adult who has been ascertained as the child's legal guardian.

Contextual understanding on the child begging phenomenon is necessary to provide knowledge on the situation and profiles of children involved in these activities, in view of identifying vulnerabilities to trafficking. Currently, there is limited empirical knowledge on the profiles and situations of child begging, mostly gathered through service providers in destination countries.

**Two main typologies** of begging children can be delineated – children between 0-5 years old, begging with an adult (usually a mother), and children aged between 5-18 begging alone, in groups, or accompanying an adult. The **age profiles of begging children** in Slovakia are girls and boys in the age of 5 to 18 years, the largest group consisting of children in the age of 5-14. The Bulgarian children, repatriated for begging in 2013, were predominantly in the age group between 8 and 16, with only 3 cases of children aged between 16 and 18. As older children are less successful in begging, it is less frequent for them to be involved in such activities. The exception to this rule is **children with disabilities**, who are considered among the „more successful" groups for begging regardless of the age group.

Roma children trafficked into **Greece** from neighbouring countries are neither placed within Romani communities in Greece nor mingle with the domestic Roma population. As each local Roma community has its own characteristics and specific culture traits, the local Roma communities are not open to the settlement of newcomers. The **distance between migrating Roma and long settled local Roma communities is also confirmed** by the research in Italy and Austria.

Begging children in Greece are most often **accommodated in rented apartments in large cities where they are exploited**, often close to the centre so that they can easily reach the spots where they carry out their activities,<sup>9</sup> while city life potentially reduces the chances that they get identified and caught. There is an **increased presence of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants among the begging families in Greece**. This is facilitated by geographical proximity between the northern parts of Greece and Bulgaria, direct train transport from Bucharest, Romania, as well as by the accession of the two countries in the EU since 2007. The children do not attend school both in the sending and receiving countries.

In **Italy**, those involved in begging are children belonging to families of recently arrived migrants mostly from Romania, living in irregular camps. Activities on the street may involve both the very youngest children often carried around by their mothers and the oldest children. From adolescence onwards more females continue the activity of begging, while males are more involved in the collection of copper and iron. Both in Italy and Austria, **the absence of support mechanisms, such as day care for children, leave no alternatives than to involve even youngest children in precarious street begging activities**.

**Romanian children** trafficked for begging are **housed in very poor conditions**: rented apartments for 15-20 persons, caravans, deserted houses, and parks. According to research on based on caseloads of assisted victims, children had to beg on the streets between eight and fourteen hours a day in crowded areas – shop entrances, supermarkets, schools, churches, railway stations, crowded markets, touristic

attractions. Exploiters closely monitored the begging activities and used physical force and threats to ensure compliance.

A recent phenomenon identified in Austria related to child begging is the so called **“poverty travellers”**. The majority of the “poverty travellers” are of Roma origin and came from Romania, Poland and Slovakia; other countries of origin include Hungary, Czech Republic and Bulgaria. Income generation in Austria concentrates on begging, day-to-day work and single cases of prostitution. Poverty travellers originating from Romania organise the travel and stay in Salzburg within the family or with the help of friends/neighbours. Together with the adults, around 39 children arrived in Austria, in order to “assist their parents – more or less – in begging”.<sup>10</sup> The increased phenomenon of poverty migration was also confirmed by Bulgarian child protection authorities.

Expert assessments point out that more **than 90% of the children begging on the streets of EU countries are of Roma origin**. Service provider in Austria alerts that around 20 % of begging could be related to a criminal network and could be considered as child trafficking.

- In many cases, children begging on the streets have strong **loyalty and emotional attachment to their families**, even if they are involved in these activities under their control. This challenges significantly any efforts for identification of exploitation, as children may not consider themselves victims.
- Turning a **blind eye on child begging as a “cultural practice”** of the Roma precludes any efforts to assess each individual situation in view of examining indicators of exploitation and in view of assessing the needs of child.
- Situations of child begging need to be addressed by state authorities and **carefully**

<sup>9</sup> Interview with streetworker and responsible for counter child trafficking projects at Arsis, Thessaloniki, July 8 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Schoibl, Notreisende und Bettel-MigrantInnen in Salzburg, Salzburg, Juni 2013.



**examined on case by case basis** with adequate consideration of the best interest of the child.

- Families, resorting to begging as subsistence strategy should be provided with the necessary **assistance for ensuring adequate child care**, including respect for the rights of the child, access to education and to decent accommodation.
- The existence of **coercion, bonded labour and exploitation** of both families and children should be carefully examined by law enforcement authorities and street workers who come in contact with begging families.
- Local and national authorities should undergo **training** on recognising indicators of exploitation and trafficking for the purpose of begging.
- Roma **community based organisations** should be involved in raising awareness among the most marginalised groups on the risks of exploitation through bonded labour, on the negative effects on the children from hazardous work and on the possibilities for assistance.
- **Further research** should be conducted on the situation and needs of poverty travelers, seeking to identify vulnerabilities to trafficking and exploitation.

## II. Child trafficking for pick-pocketing

Similar to other forms of exploitation, the **officially registered child victims in the seven countries studied provide little evidence on the profiles of victims**. In Austria, Italy, Greece, Slovakia and Hungary there are no officially registered victims in the year 2013. Such information is available in two of the typical origin countries – Bulgaria and Romania. Romanian authorities report eight cases of children victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing registered in the first six months of 2013, three victims registered in 2012 and two identified in 2011. In Bulgaria, official statistics as

per criminal proceedings do not indicate the victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing, but information of such cases is provided by the Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection. The reports of the State Agency for Child Protection show an increase in the caseloads of child victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing repatriated from abroad from 11 cases in 2012 to 18 cases in 2013. Most of the victims are girls, between 13-16 years of age. Two thirds of the victims, 12 out of 18, were identified abroad with family or a relative and one third of them were unaccompanied. Expert interviews also confirm that most of the victims are brought into pick-pocketing within family networks.<sup>11</sup> In 2013, most of the victims were trafficked to Sweden (four victims), followed by Italy, Spain and the UK, (three victims in each of the three countries).

Apart from official statistics, service providers shed some light on the **profiles of children, victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing** as well as on children, **committing petty crimes, who are at risk of exploitation for trafficking**. In Bulgaria, service providers and experts signal that most child victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing originate from one Roma subgroup. According to service providers, child victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing are from well-off families, are literate and have finished some degree of education. As illustrated also in the SACP data, children are most often girls, aged 13-18 years old. The age group is the same in victims from Romania, whereas adolescents between 14-17 are most vulnerable to trafficking. Both in Romania and Bulgaria, children trafficked for pick-pocketing are **first exploited for such activities within the countries, after which they are transported abroad**. Elements of a “**rotation system**” have been observed, whereas children remain in one place/country only for a short period of time, and once they are registered by the authorities, the children are transferred immediately to another country. In Bulgaria, profits are returned to the family operating a pick-pocketing network, thus contributing to considerable wealth of some of the “clans”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Interview, SACP expert, Sofia, October 2014, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardhik 21.05.2014

<sup>12</sup> The term “clan” is used in throughout the report to signify the perceptions of respondents of Roma families and extended families belonging to the Kardarashi subgroup. The term is not used in its anthropological sense, pertaining to a

involved in pick-pocketing.<sup>13</sup> In Romania, research revealed that members of impoverished as well as well-off communities may be involved in pick-pocketing activities.

Evidence of Roma children involved in pick-pocketing activities is provided also by **destination countries**. From 2003 until the end of 2007 in Rome, as in other Italian cities, there were numerous cases of Romanian children at non-prosecutable age involved in pick-pocketing activities. Evidence revealed that the children became victims of trafficking as the parents had handed them over to so-called “uncles” to whom they were required to bring the proceeds of their activities each day.

The research in Italy has shown that the children represented only the final link in a **highly complex criminal chain**, with a first level consisting of adult leaders, who took care of the economic management of the proceeds. An intermediate level was represented by the older boys, who were responsible for instructing and managing the children during their activities on the streets and for protecting them, both from law enforcement workers and from the victims of the robberies/pick-pocketing. The older children also appeared at police stations to take custody of the children under 14 who could not be arrested or prosecuted.

Children assisted at the *Drehscheibe* shelter in Vienna, who had been caught committing pick-pocketing, are almost entirely of **Roma origin and mostly girls**. The girls would be forced to make up to 350 Euro a day. If they do not deliver, they have to experience violence or may be forced into prostitution. Significant language barriers further add to vulnerabilities of those children, making reaching-out for assistance and building trust by service providers more difficult.

A typical **recruitment strategy** for children victims of pick-pocketing is **early marriage** into a family operating a pick-pocketing network. Other strategies employed are similar to the recruitment of children for

begging and may involve “**bonded labour**” where as the child is used to return a debt by a family to a member of criminal network.

There are several **key factors that challenge significantly investigation of exploitation for children for pick-pocketing**. Firstly, when operating within a family network, children performing pick-pocketing do not feel victims of exploitation. Evidence from Austria, Bulgaria and Italy reveals that such children may be rewarded for their illicit activities and may feel proud to contribute to the family income. Distrust towards authorities means that such cases rarely come forward to seek support or protection. In Bulgaria, connection to the family is retained even if the child is repatriated for committing the crime abroad. When children exploited for pick-pocketing are referred to a crisis centre, the families manage to ensure that the child is returned to the family as soon as possible and well before the prescribed six-month duration stay in the centre is over.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the crime **can only be investigated if the child is caught in the act**. Even in such cases, linkage to adults profiting from these activities cannot be traced. Children are thus criminalised, if they are of prosecutable age, or are referred to the respective authorities if they are below the age of criminalisation. As in the case of a child with 400 charges for pick-pocketing in Austria, such cases rarely lead to investigations for trafficking in persons.

Although Hungary and Slovakia do not have any registered cases of children trafficked for pick-pocketing, country researches established particular **risk groups** to child trafficking for pick-pocketing. In Slovakia, children aged 5-15 years old part of in families living in the worst socio-economic conditions and committing criminal activities such as pick-pocketing, shop-lifting, metal theft are vulnerable to different forms of exploitation. The vulnerability is heightened by addictions to various substances, which makes them resort to desperate

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group of [people](#) united by actual or perceived [kinship](#) and [descent](#), as there were no interviewees and ethnographic studies to confirm such linkages in the extended families referred to by respondents.

<sup>13</sup> Interview police officer, Pazardzhik, 25.09.2014, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014, Valia - IGA

<sup>14</sup> Interviews Crisis Center Sofia, CC Balvan, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014

strategies for acquiring money to feed their addictions.

In Hungary, pick-pocketing, as part of crimes committed in **youth gangs**, exposes children to highly criminalised culture. Children aged between 8-10 and older ones, between 14 and 20 commit offences at a very young age without being directly coerced but rather due to their socialisation in a criminal environment. Such children can be easily lured into involvement in organised criminal activities and can become victims of exploitation of trafficking for criminal activities.

- Child trafficking for pick-pocketing is one of the least recognised form of trafficking as **the connection between the child and the exploiter is difficult to establish** and the prospect of identification can be only if the child is caught committing the crime. This means that in many cases, older children, who are victims of crime, may be penalised for actions performed under influence and coercion of traffickers.
- In many cases, pick-pocketing is organised within **extended families** of closed communities, which diminishes significantly opportunities to devise prevention actions and to address the issue with a bottom-up community approach.
- Law enforcement and child protection **authorities should be sensitised to recognise signs of influence and exploitation of children**, caught committing pick-pocketing activities. There should be careful review of cases of repeated offenders in view of identifying involvement of organised criminal activities.
- Specific attention should be devoted to **identifying** victims of trafficking or children at risk **among criminalised youth and children with delinquencies**. Questions and indicators should be developed to identify signs of exploitation.
- Investigation efforts should be strengthened

to “**follow the money**” and investigate sources of conspicuous wealth in migrating communities.

- Roma organisations should conduct **awareness raising campaigns** about the risks and effects of early marriage, including early school leave and risks of exploitation.

### III. Child trafficking for the sexual exploitation of boys and transgender persons

While victim caseloads and expert opinions based on assisted child victims of trafficking for begging and pick-pocketing allow some empirical discussion on the **profiles of the children** involved, there is no such reference point for determining the profile of boys, trafficked for sexual exploitation. Statistical evidence was provided in Bulgaria, where court decisions reveal that the period 2011-2013 there were between 10 and 14 boy victims of trafficking for “*F*”<sup>15</sup> each year. This constitutes about one fifth of the victims of sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, the **victims identified in criminal proceedings had not been referred to assistance**. Similarly, in Romania few cases of boys were officially registered as victims of sexual exploitation in recent years. Eight cases of boy victims of trafficking were recorded by the Romanian authorities in 2012 and 14 were registered in 2010. Notably, the Romanian victims were also not referred for assistance. Although there are no identified boys victims of trafficking for sexual services in Hungary, the statistics of the Unified System of Criminal Statistics of the Investigative Authorities (ENYÜBS) show 5 cases of sexual exploitation of boys in 2013.

Research in all countries studied show **clear indications that specific groups of boys and transgender persons of Roma origin are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking** and some have already been **victims of sexual exploitation**.

**Prostitution of Roma boys and transgender persons** was detected in the four countries, typically considered as origin countries for victims of trafficking. Previous studies in Bulgaria reveal a growing number of Roma transgender persons selling sexual services on the street.<sup>16</sup> This phenomenon is attributed to the relative lack of stigma towards same sex sexual activities within the Roma communities studied and were also explained by a pattern of impoverished men engaging in sex for money.<sup>17</sup> According to a report on HIV and sex work, most of the transgender sex workers are transvestites of Roma origin, working in hidden environments, due to the stigma attached to male prostitution. Roma boys enter prostitution as minors and some of them are HIV positive and suffer heroin addiction.<sup>18</sup>

Boy and transgender prostitution is also present in Roma communities in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. In Slovakia, Roma boys increasingly enter the sex markets either as homosexuals or transvestites. Their clients are mainly random tourists, visitors to restaurants or random drivers passing the localities where soliciting takes place. Boys and transgender persons who could become victims of forced prostitution in Slovakia are in the age range of 17 to 19 years. Those who offer sexual services meet together and have created a tight-knit community, where they exchange „job offers“. Similar tight communities were noticed also in segregated Roma neighborhoods in Bulgaria.

In Hungary, “hidden prostitution” of underage males is reported as increasing the risk of child trafficking. Young boys and girls are used for prostitution whereas they are taken directly to clients by their pimps, thus avoiding the visibility of street prostitution.

The **international aspect** of male and transgender prostitution was evident in all countries studied. The transgender sex workers originating from Bulgaria are very mobile, travelling mainly to Germany, Belgium and other Western European countries.<sup>19</sup> Typical

destination places that were found during research in three Bulgarian Roma communities included also Bordeaux, Paris, Saint-Tropez and other cities in France, as well as cities in Spain and Germany. Counter-trafficking authorities in Romania refer to clients in Italy and Spain that seek boys/children and use trafficking networks to placing special requests. The victims are recruited, mostly, from orphanages and they are recruited with the promise for a better life. The boys are taken across the border using fake documents. If the minor is “successful” he remains in this form of exploitation, if not he is sent to beg in the streets. In Slovakia, transvestite boys offering sex services have started travelling abroad, mainly to Germany, Austria and Cyprus. Finally, the study reveals evidence of the presence of Romanian boys prostituting themselves in Hungary.

Prostitution of Roma boys was common in Italy until 2008, with a boom in the period from 2004 to 2006. The phenomenon was especially visible in Rome and in other Italian cities. Roma children, especially Romanian, competed with youngsters already present on the streets, in particular non-Roma Romanians. Competition came in the form of lower rates and lower ages: Romanian youngsters were 16 and over, while Roma children included boys below the age of 16, who appealed more to a certain category of clients. According to Italian stakeholders, in more recent years this phenomenon appears to have declined significantly. Nevertheless, there are still cases of Roma boys selling sex services in Rome and Naples, and competing with unaccompanied Egyptian children and, to a lesser extent, Tunisian boys.

While the international aspect of boy and transgender prostitution of Roma persons from Eastern Europe could be detected, the **element of exploitation**, needed to provide evidence of child trafficking, is more difficult to determine. Across the countries studied an **institutional homophobia** and perspectives such as “male prostitution is voluntary”

<sup>16</sup> Amirkhanian, Yuri, Kelly, Jeffrey [...], and Khoursine, Roman. (2013) High-Risk Sexual Behavior, HIV/STD Prevalence, and Risk Predictors in the Social Networks of Young Roma (Gypsy) Men in Bulgaria

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> TAMPEP Bulgaria, National report on HIV and sex work 2007

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

and it is “gay business” **undermine significantly the chance for detecting signs of exploitation and trafficking** in persons.

Nevertheless, in the Roma communities where fieldwork took place, there were organised criminal networks for exploiting Roma women for prostitution abroad. Pimping was especially visible in one of the communities in Bulgaria, where “the street of the pimps” was pinpointed in a community mapping exercise. From a criminological perspective, it is not feasible to assume that the male prostitution and transgender sex market can be left to function independently from the networks for female sexual exploitation, whereby the traffickers forgo possible profits from male and transgender sex work.

Along this line of argument, service providers in Italy also refer to the zoning and control of prostitution areas in Italy by criminal networks. Finally, **testimonies of Bulgarian transvestite boys selling sex services abroad revealed clear elements of coercion and exploitation**. In one particular case, the pimp of the transgender sex worker had taken away documents of the person and had used threats and physical abuse to exert the return of an insurmountable “loan” for arranging travel and accommodation – a typical strategy of coercion by traffickers.

Evidence from the studies in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia revealed that the “**lover boy**” **method used to recruit** female victims was also applied to approach boys and transgender persons, victims of sexual exploitation. The boys and transgender persons are approached by a known person with promises for protection, luxury items and personal wellbeing are used to convince victims to travel abroad. Finally, in several reported cases in Romania and evidenced cases in Bulgaria, the families of the boys and young persons were aware of the engagement of sexual services of the boys and transgender persons, but accepted this behaviour as it contributed to the family income.

A significant **factor of vulnerability** to sexual exploitation of boys detected in all countries of origins is growing up in state care. The lack of adequate care and attention toward children growing up in so called “institutions” or “orphanages” – a legacy of the

communist organised system for children deprived of parental care – leads to development of deviant and high risk behaviour at an early age. Physical and sexual abuse corrode any self-protection mechanisms that a child needs to develop in order to avoid exploitation. Children are thus lured into prostitution and many cases of abuse of children living in state care by paedophiles have been recorded. The next step – to being lured into working and travelling abroad and thus falling victim to trafficking – is not difficult to take.

In addition, research in Slovakia and Hungary revealed that boys offering sexual services often suffer from various mental health disorders which are caused by a combination of factors such as unexplained and mainly undiagnosed mental health conditions, poor parenting, child abuse, sexual exploitation in the family and other factors including abject poverty and gross material deprivation.

- Specific groups of boys and transgender persons of Roma origin are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking and some have already been victims of sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, boys and transgender persons fall outside of the radar of identification of trafficking victims and thus cannot access available assistance.
- Significant efforts by service providers, street workers, child protection and counter-trafficking authorities are needed in order to **direct trafficking identification efforts to boys and transgender persons providing sex services**.
- The identification efforts need to take place both in the communities of origin, where male and transgender prostitution is usually a visible, yet ostracized phenomenon and in the countries of destination.
- Targeted efforts need to be directed towards combatting sexual exploitation in state institutions for child care.
- Indicators for trafficking used in identifying sexual exploitation of women need to be reviewed and adapted to reflect adequately the situation of male and transgender prostitution.

- Law enforcement, child protection and judicial authorities should be sensitised towards the risks of trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys and transgender persons. Evidence, gathered based on life stories of boys and transgender persons should serve to inform and raise awareness among all counter-trafficking authorities.
- Specific trainings should be developed for identification of male and transgender victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The trainings should be based upon empirical information and interviews with those affected. The trainings should provide information on the sex markets for male prostitution, the profile of victims, factors of vulnerability, as well as real case studies based on victim testimonies.

Bulgaria's NRM. The *Drehscheibe* in Vienna has established a network of contacts with relevant stakeholders in some countries of origin, which facilitates family tracing of the child victims of trafficking. However, in practice, priority is given to expedite return of children to the countries of origin. Evidence from cases of children repatriated to Bulgaria reveals that in some cases, children arrive with incomplete documentation and prior to the conducting of risk assessments, which would establish risk factors of re-trafficking in the home environment. In Slovakia, there are no provisions guaranteeing the tracing of family members in the country of origin of the child and there are also no provisions requiring formalised assessment of a child's best interests concerning assistance in family reunification. There are general provisions referring to the obligations under Convention of the Rights of the Child, including best interest determination.

## Protection and assistance to child victims of trafficking

Several deficiencies in the provision of assistance to child victims of trafficking were identified in the seven countries studied. Some of these deficiencies have an especially negative impact on Roma child victims of trafficking.

Firstly, five out of the seven countries **do not have a national referral mechanism (NRM)** for victims of trafficking. Such mechanisms were only identified in Bulgaria and Romania. The absence of NRM undermines victim identification and does not provide guidance and regulations for effective cooperation between stakeholders in the referral assistance of victims. Ad hoc cooperation mechanisms are established by authorities on local level in Austria, but there are no formalised national procedures for victim referral and support.

Most of the countries **lack formalised procedures for risk assessment** prior to referral and repatriation of the children victims of trafficking. Formalised procedures for risk assessment are provided in

Insufficiency in **funding and capacity of facilities providing assistance to child victims of trafficking** is a common problem in all countries reviewed. The limited capacity of transit centers for children victims of trafficking and abuse is a particularly acute problem.

The two main source countries for victims of trafficking to the EU – Bulgaria and Romania – display some common problems in the systems for child assistance and protection, which affect significantly Roma children victims of trafficking. **Challenges in communication between local authorities involved in child protection and assistance** undermines significantly the quality and effectiveness of support to Roma children victims of trafficking. In Bulgaria, child victims of trafficking repatriated from abroad are typically placed in a crisis centre. The assistance provided is supervised by a social worker/case manager at the Child Protection Department (CPD) covering the region of the crisis centre, whereas another CPD at the place of residency of the child is obliged to contact and establish relations with the family in view of preparing the parents or caregivers for the prospective reintegration of the child. The lack of coordination between the two Child Protection Departments and crisis centre leaves the

latter with no information on the long term re-integration path to be followed by the child. Such uncertainty and lack of information about the future is a cause of serious anxiety for children assisted in a crisis centre.

The **lack of experience** and in some cases the **unwillingness** of social workers to work with segregated and socially excluded Roma communities that are at high risk of trafficking was another defect in the system of child protection identified in all countries of origin of victims. Such attitudes are the result of a number of factors such as **case overloads** of the social workers that leaves them little opportunity for field work and thorough assistance to families at risk, **lack of motivation** to work in difficult and impoverished communities, which is also related to the low wages offered to social workers across Eastern Europe. The **high turnover** in this profession due to the poor working conditions and high levels of stress undermines the establishment of long-term trustworthy relationship between the social workers and the Roma communities. Last but not least, **prejudices and racism towards the Roma** communities can deter social workers from adequately supporting Roma families. These challenges undermine both the prospects for prevention of child trafficking and the effectiveness of the assistance provided to child victims of trafficking and their families.

The challenges between establishing trustful relationship between the children and child protection authorities are present also in the **countries of destination** of victims. Social workers in Italy, Austria and Greece **do not speak the language** of the child victim of trafficking. Thus, most often the children do not confide in or rely on the support of the social worker, while they remain in contact with the trafficker. This leads to **high rates of run-aways** from shelters and child protection facilities. For instance, in the *Drehscheibe* 63% of the children leave the shelter prematurely and go missing.

The **lack of facilities for long-term accommodation** for children, whose best interest is not to return to the families, is another problem in long term assistance identified in origin countries. In Slovakia there is insufficiency in so called “half way homes” for children

who have left the foster home. The few available facilities prefer to accommodate “healthy” children and may be reluctant to host children with special health or psychological needs. The under-development for long term care of children at risk and child victims of trafficking is also identifying in Bulgaria. Child victims of trafficking leaving the interim care at the crisis center are most often returned to their families or referred to state institutions, which offer low quality of child care. Due to the lack of sufficient family type accommodation facilities, children are often returned to their families and guardians without careful assessment of the environment and the potential risk of re-trafficking when parents or guardians were complicit with the crime.

Finally, the **lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** for the assistance provided to child victims of trafficking is a problem identified in all countries studied, across all phases of assistance. This leaves little possibility to assess the effectiveness of assistance provided, identify gaps, devise and monitor efforts for improvement. Not surprisingly, assistance provided to Roma child victim of trafficking does not manage to meet their needs, such as preserving cultural identity, and is unsustainable, as most often children are re-integrated in a high risk environment, that leads to re-trafficking.

#### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are several deficiencies in the protection and assistance provided to child victims of trafficking. The gaps are related to **ensuring adequate coordination between all stakeholders** involved in referral and protection of child victims of trafficking, **conducting thorough risk assessments** and best interest identification prior to repatriation and ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation across all phases of assistance.
- In addition, all countries experience difficulties in ensuring **adequate funding** for facilities for child victims of trafficking.

- Gaining the trust of victims of exploitation for begging and pick-pocketing is especially difficult for child protection authorities and service providers, due to the **lack of perception of exploitation** among children especially when parents and guardians are complicit or involved.
- Assistance to Roma child victim of trafficking in the countries of origin is challenged by the **lack of access** to the Roma communities of the social workers and **lack of motivation to work** with highly marginalised families.
- The lack of **careful assessment of the social situation** of each child victim of trafficking and **gaps in communication** between the stakeholder involved in providing assistance often renders the support ineffective and exposes the child to the risk of re trafficking.
- Member states should develop **National Referral Mechanisms for Assistance** and Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking. The operation of the mechanisms should be **monitored and regularly evaluated**.
- **Procedures for local level coordination** between the stakeholders involved in child protection and assistance should also be established and formalised and their implementation should be monitored. Opportunities for exchange of **experience and good practice** in assisting child victims

of trafficking should be provided at local level.

- Member states should assess the **capacities of existing accommodation facilities** for child victims of abuse and trafficking in view of optimising the support network and establishing new facilities, such as transit centers and family type accommodation centers, in areas where they are most needed.
- The **employment of members of the Roma communities** in child protection institutions should be encouraged through scholarships and specialised programmes. Roma persons should be included at all levels of child protection and social assistance, including as social workers and policy makers.
- **Community based centers providing social services** should take part in the provision of assistance and protection to Roma child victims. They should be involved in establishing contacts with the families of victims, assessing the family environment, providing support for the reintegration of the child in cases when this is in the best interest of the child. Community based centers also have instrumental role in preventing child trafficking by identifying families at risk, providing social assistance, raising awareness of the risk of exploitation and alarming relevant institutions.