

CHILD TRAFFICKING AMONG VULNERABLE GROUPS

COUNTRY REPORT BULGARIA



**CENTER FOR
THE STUDY OF
DEMOCRACY**

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This publication presents the results of a research conducted within the project “Countering new forms of Roma children trafficking: Participatory approach” (CONFRONT). The study was conducted in seven EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia. Experts from Center for the Study of Democracy coordinated the project and conducted the research in Bulgaria.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current report looks at three specific forms of trafficking in persons: child trafficking for begging, for pickpocketing and for sexual exploitation of boys and the way they manifest themselves among Roma communities. The report examines the profiles of victims and discusses the vulnerability factors that make the Roma minority a particular group at risk. The study provides empirical knowledge on the mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation of victims in order to inform identification efforts and counter-trafficking responses. Particular attention is devoted to the policy and measures for assistance of victims. In this field, the report identifies specific gaps in assistance and the way they affect Roma victims in particular, and suggests how child victim assistance could be improved. The active involvement of Roma organisations in the research through participatory methods aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the risk factors involved, bring knowledge back to the communities and support Roma experts' involvement in counter-trafficking policy and mechanisms.

Bulgaria is one of the key source countries of victims of trafficking exploited in Europe. Between 2011 and 2013, from 540 to 580 Bulgarian victims of trafficking have been identified throughout the EU. Between 12 % and 15 % of these victims are children. The predominant type of exploitation of child trafficking in last reported years (2012 and 2013) is begging and pick-pocketing. Although there is no centralised data collection system that would provide information on the socio-demographic profiles of victims, according to expert assessments between 50 and 80 % of all victims are of Roma origin. In some specific forms of exploitation, such as begging and pickpocketing, the share of Roma is reportedly around 90 %.

The study looks at three specific forms of child trafficking – for **begging, for pickpocketing and for sexual exploitation of boys** – and determines the way these crimes **affect the Roma as a group at risk**. The three forms of exploitation were chosen in order to address a gap of knowledge on the way the crime manifests itself, the mechanisms of recruitment and of exploitation. While begging and pickpocketing have been recognised as subsistence strategies for impoverished families, they have only recently been recognised as potential form of trafficking and have been criminalised as such respectively. The third form – trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys – remains under the radar of counter-trafficking bodies and empirical knowledge is much needed to improve victim identification and assistance.

Against a background of limited data and having in mind the sensitivity of the topic, the report relied on participatory research methods to gain better understanding on the profiles of victims of trafficking, on risk groups and factors of vulnerability, as well as on the mechanisms of

recruitment and of exploitation of Roma children victims of trafficking. Roma organisations and community members were actively involved in the preparation and conduct of fieldwork, thereby ensuring that the topic was approached in a non-discriminatory manner and that the research was carried out with a necessary degree of sensitivity to those involved.

The over-representation of the Roma among trafficking victims calls for heightened attention on the particular **factors that make the ethnic group vulnerable** to trafficking. The study concludes that 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. 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 addition, early marriages and reliance on loan sharks for money can be employed as recruitment strategies for child trafficking.

The findings on profiles of victims, mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation are organised along the three forms of exploitation. The chapters on Roma child trafficking for **begging** depict the **profile of the victim** as girls and boys, between 8-16 years of age, trafficked typically to Greece, Austria and other countries such as Sweden, UK, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain. Although the caseload of victims referred does not provide information on the ethnic belonging of the victims, stakeholders assess that the large majority of the victims are Roma.

A snapshot on the places of origins of victims based on the latest caseload of referred victims shows that the children (both Roma and non-Roma) originate from the regions of Pleven, Pazardjik, Veliko Turnovo and Sofia. Other places of origin established in previous research on children (both Roma and non-Roma) begging in Greece include Varna, Dobrich, Pleven, Ruse, Sofia, Shumen and Vidin regions. Most children beg accompanied by a family member or relative. While the first identified cases of child begging in Austria in 2003 – 2004 demonstrated clear involvement of trafficking networks, in the case of 62 Bulgarian children identified begging in Thessaloniki, Greece, the link to organised criminal networks was far less clear. Particular efforts are needed on behalf of law enforcement child protection authorities in order to determine the exact circumstances of begging and whether begging activities were part of family subsistence strategy or induced by organised criminal networks.

Children victims of trafficking for **pick-pocketing** are typically girls, between 13-16 years of age and are usually identified abroad, accompanied by family or relative. Experts assess that almost all victims are of Roma ethnicity, originating from Kardarash Roma subgroup. In 2013, most of the victims were trafficked to Sweden, followed by Italy, Spain and the UK. Official data of 2013 clearly indicates the region of Pleven in the north central Bulgaria as a predominant source of the victims of trafficking

for pick-pocketing, with one half of the victims originating from that region, followed by Pazardzhik and Veliko Turnovo regions. While there is no in-depth information the socio-economic profile of the victims of child trafficking for pick-pocketing, experts assess that the gender affects significantly the degree of education of the victims. Roma girls tend to have lower education levels than the boys and are typically withdrawn from the education system by fourth grade in order to commit petty crime. Further research is needed to substantiate such hypothesis and develop adequate assistance measures.

While victim caseload 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, such reference point is missing with regards to **boy victims trafficked for sexual exploitation**. Court decisions for the period 2011 – 2013 show that boys are between one fifth and one third of the underage victims trafficked for debauchery, with between 10 and 14 such cases registered each year. However, the research established that boy victims of sex trafficking abroad are not referred to assistance by national authorities and service providers. Thus, there is no information on the socio-economic profile of such victims based on victims' caseload. Against this background, fieldwork identified a profile of Roma boys who are especially vulnerable to this form of trafficking. Young men and transgender persons of Roma origin are a significant share of the persons providing sex services to men in Bulgaria and abroad. The research established transgender Roma youth providing sex services in all three communities where research took place, as part of family subsistence strategies. At the same time, testimonies of victims revealed that they had been involved in sex services at age of minority and that work abroad was not possible without intermediaries, who profited significantly at the expense of the sex workers for the services provided.

The report outlines the different recruitments and exploitation strategies applied for each of the three forms within the **child trafficking process**. Bonded labour and early marriages are common strategies for recruitment of Roma child victims of trafficking for begging. Children could be rented to a family operating begging network in order to pay out an amount of their indebted family. Most begging children are exploited on the street and beg alongside adult companions. More information is needed on how recruitment strategies have evolved in the last several years and how they have affected groups that are especially vulnerable to trafficking, such as impoverished families, living in irregular camps abroad, who reverted to begging as a subsistence strategy.

Early marriages into a family operating a pick-pocketing network is the most common recruitment strategy employed for children victims of petty crime. Exploitation for petty crime is considered as especially lucrative, generating significant profits for the family network involved. Use of force is rarely applied as a mechanism for coercion. Rather, children's emotional ties to their families and their lack of awareness of the exploitation ensure that the victims perform the expected pickpocketing activities. The lack of perception of exploitation makes both begging and

pickpocketing especially difficult to identify as a form of trafficking, as children do not perceive themselves as victims. In addition, in the case of pickpocketing, children are only identified if caught committing the crime, and the lack of evidence collected on family involvement in the crime, makes them vulnerable to further exploitation.

Little information is available on the mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation of boy victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, as the research did not find any evidence that such victims are referred and assisted. However, the research established that Roma boys and transgender persons providing sex services are especially vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation. Roma boys and transgender persons are likely to be in the situation of trafficking in the sex markets of EU Member States in cities such as Bordeaux, Frankfurt, Salamanca, Bedinor and other cities in Germany, France and Spain among others. While transgender and male prostitutes working abroad may have achieved the age of majority (i.e. 18 years), abuse and sexual exploitation is likely to have started in childhood within the country. Testimonies of Roma transgender persons involved in the sex markets abroad demonstrate that traditional methods of coercion, such as threats, taking away of personal documents and demands for repayment of non-extinguishable debt are employed by pimps who are responsible for the “oversight” and accommodation of the youth abroad.

Special attention of the study is devoted to **protection and assistance** to child victims of trafficking. Child victims of trafficking identified abroad are returned to Bulgaria in line with the two coordination mechanisms, outlining the roles of all stakeholders partaking in return and assistance: the Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Unaccompanied Children and Child Victims of Trafficking, returning from Abroad and the National Referral Mechanism. While Bulgaria is among the only countries in Europe to have a special coordination mechanism for child victims of trafficking, a closer look at the implementation of return, protection and assistance measures for child VoT in practice reveals some serious deficiencies. The most acute weaknesses can be observed in the last two stages of protection – finding a long-term durable solution and monitoring of the reintegration assistance. These weaknesses have especially negative effect upon Roma child victims of trafficking.

The lack of adequate information sharing and effective cooperation between local stakeholders involved in the provision of interim assistance to Roma child victims of trafficking seriously challenge the identification of a durable solution, grounded on the child’s best interest. As per key principles of child protection, the durable solution for most child victims is reintegration in their families. However, as risk assessments are rarely conducted and potential involvement or complicity of parents or caregivers in the crime of trafficking is neither refuted nor confirmed, the reintegration of children in the family sometimes leads to re-trafficking. The lack of effective monitoring of the reintegration for one year also erases any chance for prevention of re-trafficking and ensuring more sustainable long-term support of the child victims.

The final chapter of this report is dedicated to exploring **possibilities for more active Roma community involvement** in the assistance for child victims of trafficking as well as in the prevention of re-trafficking. Two such opportunities, grounded on discussion with experts from two Roma communities, are identified. The potential of Family Consultation Centers or similar community based service providers in monitoring of the long-term reintegration of children victims of trafficking and of abuse and should be further explored. Finally, any improvement of the functioning of the child protection and social assistance systems and their effects on Roma could be expected only after Roma experts take an active role in the formulation of the policy and the delivery of services. In the specific case of child trafficking, the employment of Roma experts in the local child protection departments would serve to diminish the lack of trust in the institution by the local communities. Involvement of Roma experts as social workers at the child protection departments would also address one of the main challenges faced by the personnel – the difficulty in accessing marginalised Roma families in need of assistance.

A Note on Terminology

The text of this Report seeks to comply with the European Commission and the Council of Europe's adopted usage of the term 'Roma'. The term 'Roma' in this Croatian RECI+ Report, in common with the inherent definitions used widely in publications by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other international institutions, refers to a diverse community of related groups that would include, but not be limited to, Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Gitano, Resande, Romer, Romanlar, Domlar, Lomlar, Kaale, Egyptians, Ashkali, Tattare, Gypsies, Scottish Travellers, Mandopolini, Ghurbeti, Beyash (Bajaši, Rudari/Ludari), Jevgjit and many others that are understood to be part of the wider Roma populations across Europe and beyond. By using the term 'Roma' it is understood that the Sponsoring Agencies and the authors intend no disrespect to individual communities. Readers should note that the usage of the term is not intended in any way to deny the diversity that exists across both Roma and Traveller groups. It is to be noted that a significant and growing Roma middle class exists, which participates fully as citizens in the countries and societies in which they live without sacrificing their ethnic and cultural identity. For readability purposes, the adjective 'Roma' will generally be used, in particular when referring to the Roma people as a whole or to groups or individuals, e.g. Roma child, Roma families. The adjective 'Romani' will generally refer to languages and culture.

INTRODUCTION

"In this neighborhood, every house has a story."

Each year, around 540-580 Bulgarian citizens are identified as victims of trafficking and around 15 % of the victims are children. Each victim has a story, starting from being born into a family, being raised into family or state institution, being seduced or forced to move abroad to make a living, and in some of the cases of *identified* victims, being helped to return home and offered assistance.

Roma are identified as a key risk group to human trafficking across Europe, and Roma persons are overrepresented in the caseload of victims receiving assistance in Bulgaria. In some forms of child trafficking, like child begging and pick-pocketing, Roma can represent over 90 % of the victims, according to expert assessment; in other forms of exploitation, the share of Roma victims ranges between 70-80 %. While begging and pick-pocketing are not "new" subsistence strategies for poor families, they have recently been recognized as potential forms of trafficking and exploitation by the counter-trafficking policy regimes. Sexual exploitation of boys, the third form of trafficking studied in this report, is still under the radar of counter-trafficking bodies and assistance providers. The three forms of trafficking are largely under-researched and the lack of empirical evidence is one explanation of the lag in policy response.

In the framework of the current study, the research team visited eight Roma neighbourhoods where each house has a story. The stories were those of extreme poverty, early school leave and prostitution as subsistence strategies. The houses were built in neighbourhoods, where history of discrimination and segregation had resulted in extreme forms of social exclusion. However, informal community leaders are playing an active role in improving access to health, education, employment and housing, thus reducing the effects of discrimination and exclusion. Having both knowledge on the socio-economic problems, as well as access and trust of the most vulnerable families, informal leaders and community based structures have the potential to take lead in efforts to prevent child trafficking and offer assistance to victims. Last but not least in importance, Roma experts and informal leaders have the potential to provide the missing "Roma voice" in policy formation and implementation in the field of counter-trafficking.

Against this background, the current study had twofold **objectives**: to gather empirical evidence on the three "new" forms of Roma child trafficking and to prepare Roma experts to take a more active part in the policy debate on trafficking. Using participatory methods to achieve this goal is both the most promising strategy and the best-suited way to address a very sensitive topic. Through applying participatory methods and working alongside Roma organisations in fieldwork, the project team

hoped to acquire enough contextual understanding about the Roma communities where fieldwork took place. Participatory research allowed to develop a more sensitive approach to trafficking and to address fears of stigmatisation. Finally, as the research was more of a two way process, where both researchers and participants shared their perceptions on realities, the team was committed to bring knowledge back to those groups at risk about the way the crime is of trafficking committed and how vulnerable persons can protect themselves.

The research was conducted in **two stages**: a preliminary stage and a fieldwork phase. The objectives of the preliminary phase of the research were threefold:

- i) to gain a general understanding on the extent of child trafficking in the country and the CT institutional frameworks,
- ii) to identify localities with vulnerable Roma communities and
- iii) to assess the available child support infrastructure in each locality and to identify potential partners – Roma NGOs to be involved in further research activities. The methods used in preliminary stage were literature review, semi-structured interviews with national stakeholders and electronic data collection questionnaires on national statistics.

The three regions chosen for the field work phase were Stara Zagora, Pazardzhik and Shumen. The regions were chosen based on the following criteria:

- several localities with concentrated Roma communities living in dire socio-economic situation;
- documented cases of identified child victims of trafficking;
- developed assistance infrastructure for children at risk or child victims of violence or trafficking;
- a Roma organisation or a community member, who was willing to partake in this study.

In the fieldwork phase, the research team conducted three study visits in each chosen locality. In the first round of visits, the research team met with the partnering Roma NGO, discussed research topic and objectives. In the first visit, relevant local stakeholders were interviewed. During the second study visit, the research teams applied PR techniques, such as community mapping, venn diagrams and ranking exercises to determine factors of vulnerability and communities at risk of trafficking and to explore local resources for prevention and for victims' assistance. Trainings were conducted to acquaint local activists with the trafficking phenomenon and local counterparts were trained in data collection methods. In the third round of visits, research teams, composed of the lead researchers, the local partner and research assistants conducted semi-structured interviews and life story interviews with Roma persons directly affected by or at risk of trafficking.

Throughout the research, the team conducted 25 semi-structured interviews, 4 focus group discussions and 18 life story interviews. The respondents included young men providing sex services, caregivers of

children abandoned by mothers trafficked for prostitution, families, relying on begging and trash collection as subsistence and many persons living in daunting poverty. The narratives came together to paint a more complex and less judgemental picture of the communities affected by trafficking. Each individual story helped gain deeper understanding on the reasons and ways children fall victims to this type of exploitation. In return, this study aims to provide knowledge, which is needed to improve the response mechanisms to child trafficking. The report also offers observations and suggestions on how assistance to Roma child victims could be improved to the benefit of the children, their families and society at large.

1. COUNTRY BACKGROUND

1.1. Trafficking in human beings: data and trends

Bulgaria is a source and, to a lesser extent, a transit and destination country for victims of trafficking. According to Eurostat data, Bulgaria is among the primary sources of victims of trafficking to the EU along with Romania, Nigeria and China.¹

Bulgaria does not have a comprehensive, centralised data collection system on victims of trafficking, which challenges any in-depth analysis on the profiles of victims (formally and informally identified), key trafficking routes, types of exploitation, types of assistance provided and its effectiveness. Although data is incomplete and segmented, as institutions maintain separate data banks, data on victims of trafficking maintained by state authorities² allows limited of analysis on the basis of number of victims over time, types of exploitation and gender. In addition, information provided by key stakeholders discerns the most common countries of destination for both adults and child victims.

TABLE 1. VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING BY SEX, 2008 – 2013

Year	Total victims	Men	Women	% of women
2008	249	10	239	96 %
2009	346	13	333	96 %
2010	432	34	398	92 %
2011	541	10	448	83 %
2012	580	11	507	87 %
2013	540	15	476	88 %

Source: Eurostat (2008 – 2010), the Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office (2011 – 2013).

Each year, more than 500 victims are registered by the formal mechanisms for victim identification. This number of course, can not be perceived as representative of the full extent of trafficking from the country and is described as “the tip of the iceberg” by counter-trafficking official. The number of identified victims remains relatively constant for the period 2011 – 2013 with 541 victims identified in 2011, 580 identified in 2012 and 540 in 2013. There is an evident increase in the number of victims identified in 2011 – 2013 as compared to the

period 2008 – 2010. A total of 249 identified victims were identified in 2008, 346 in 2009 and 432 in 2010.³ Rather than a result of increased trafficking flows, the increase in trafficking victims between 2008 and 2010 is more likely to be the result of improved victim identification.

¹ Eurostat (2013), Methodologies and working papers. Trafficking in human beings. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013 ISSN 1977-0375.

² Data is provided by the Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office, the National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons as well as by the State Agency for Child Protection.

³ Eurostat (2013), Methodologies and working papers. Trafficking in human beings. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013 ISSN 1977-0375.

Throughout the period 2008 – 2013 women are the majority of identified victims. Nevertheless, there is a notable increase in the share of male victims in the last three reported years (2011 – 2013) as compared to the period 2008 – 2010. Most of the cases of identified men victims of trafficking are in the field of labour exploitation.

TABLE 2. VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN BULGARIA, 2011 – 2013⁴

Period	Victims								
	Total			Men			Women		
	Total victims	from them:		Total men	from them:		Total women	from them:	
		Minors (14 – 18 years)	Under 14 years		Minors (14 – 18 years)	Under 14 years		Minors (14 – 18 years)	Under 14 years
Year 2013	540	44	23	64	3	15	476	41	8
Year 2012	580	48	18	73	0	11	507	48	7
Year 2011	541	57	13	93	0	10	448	57	3

Source: Supreme Court of Cassation, the data provided by the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB), 2014.

In 2013 the profile of the victims, according to the type of exploitation includes 80 % (428 persons) trafficked for sexual activities, 8 % were trafficked for forced labour (44 persons), 2 % were trafficked for servitude (11 persons) and 0.3 % were trafficked for the removal of organs (2 persons). Women predominate among the trafficked for sexual activities (96 % or 411 persons) and men predominate among the trafficked for forced labour (75 % or 33 persons). The proportion of women and men among those trafficked for servitude is almost identical with 54 % women (6) and 46 % men (5).

Analysis of the profiles of trafficked victims in 2012 and 2013 of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) indicates that most victims of trafficking come from areas with a high rate of poverty and unemployment, and the main destination countries are Germany, Greece, Holland, Austria, France, Cyprus, Poland and the Czech Republic. There are typical destination countries for the specific forms of exploitation: victims of sexual exploitation are predominantly trafficked to Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, France and Poland; victims of exploitation for the purpose of pick-pocketing are trafficked to Greece, the UK and Austria; victims trafficked for

⁴ The data in the table reflects the victims in Chapter II of the Criminal Code Offences Against the Person Section IX Trafficking – art. ÷ 159 and Art. NC 159g incl. and Chapter IV, Section I Crimes against marriage and the family – art. 182b Penal Code.

purpose of labour exploitation are destined to Greece, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden and the Czech Republic, and pregnant women are trafficked to Greece to sell newborns. The 2012 – 2013 caseloads of the NCCTHB shelters for adult victims of trafficking shows that the majority of the victims have a low level of education and one third of them are illiterate. Notably, there is a large share of victims with different forms of mental retardation and/or mental disorders.⁵

The cases of identified foreign nationals trafficked into the country are isolated. A report of the Council of Europe quotes only three foreign victims of trafficking in Bulgaria until 2010 – one from Poland and two from Moldova.⁶ The NCCTHB report for the period 2011 – 2012 cites one foreign victim from Poland identified and repatriated in 2012.⁷

1.2. Child – victims of trafficking

Between twelve and fifteen percent of all identified victims are children, with this trend remaining stable for the past six years. The share of minors and under the age of fourteen remains almost the same throughout a six year period (2008 – 2013).

TABLE 3. VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING BY AGE, 2008 – 2013

Year	Total victims	Minors and under age of 14	% of the total share
2008	249	38	15.0 %
2009	346	55	16.0 %
2010	432	67	15.5 %
2011	541	70	13.0 %
2012	580	66	11.4 %
2013	540	67	12.4 %

Source: Eurostat (2008 – 2010), the Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office (2011 – 2013).

A closer look at the data from the Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office reveals the types of exploitation of child victims of trafficking.

It is noteworthy, that for the last three reported years (2011 – 2013), between 10 – 14 boys were established as victims of trafficking for debauchery, i.e. one fifth of all victims of this type of this form of

⁵ Official letter of NCCTHB on 19.06.2014, № – TX-02-315, in response to a formal request of the CSD.

⁶ GRETA (2011), Report Concerning the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Bulgaria, First evaluation round. Strasbourg – 14 December 2011, p. 36.

⁷ Report of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2012 [Report for the Activities of NCCTHB for 2012], p. 10-13.

TABLE 4. TYPE OF EXPLOITATION OF VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING BY SEX, 2011 – 2013

Year/ type of exploitation ⁸	Debauchery		Forced Servitude		Forced submission		Trafficking of pregnant women
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
2011	49	10	4	0	2	0	NA
2012	55	11	3	0	0	0	9
2013	32	14	3	4	1	0	NA

Source: The Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office.

exploitation in 2011 and 2012 and one third of the victims registered in 2013. These numbers should be given due consideration: for one, none of the service providers interviewed for this research and also quoted in previous studies had provided assistance to boys, victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Moreover, the key state authorities, NCCTHB and SACP, had not participated in the referral of boys victims of sex trafficking from abroad. It could thus be concluded that boys victims of trafficking do not fall under the radar of counter-trafficking efforts, including victim identification, and thus are deprived of the right to assistance. The sections on profiles of (potential) victims in this report will provide more insight into cases of sex trafficking of boys and transsexual persons, who had not been identified as victims.

The State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) maintains data on child victims of trafficking or child “victims of the migration processes” who were identified abroad, living in negligence and/or deplorable living conditions. The SACP data shows one notable indicator – the prevalent type of exploitation of child victims of trafficking remains begging and pick-pocketing, with begging being the main type of exploitation in 2013 and pick-pocketing in 2012. In 2012, SACP registered 66 cases of child victims of trafficking or of the “migration processes”; 48 of them were girls and 18 were boys. Eleven children were involved in pick-pocketing and ten of them were exploited for child begging, three children were identified as victims of baby trafficking, and 24 were children of Bulgarian migrants living abroad in poor conditions. The remaining nine children were cases of “prevented child trafficking” though there is no data on the type of trafficking or measures taken.

The data for 2013 is shown in the table below.

Most child victims of trafficking are between eight and sixteen years old and in 2013, most of them (32 cases) were trafficked for begging. Most

⁸ The types of exploitation are listed as defined by the Bulgarian law and may not correspond exactly as the types of exploitation listed in international legislation.

TABLE 5. CHILD VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING ASSISTED BY SACP IN 2013

		Pick-pocketing	Begging	Sexual exploitation
	Total number of children – 2013 = 60 children	18	32	10
Sex	Boys	4	25	0
	Girls	14	7	10
Age	0-7 years	0	6	0
	8-12 years	1	11	0
	13-16 years	14	12	3
	17-18 years	3	3	7
Family status	with a parent	6	19	1
	with a relative	6	6	0
	unaccompanied	6	7	9

Source: The Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office.

of the trafficking routes lead children to Greece, which also coincides with the increased trend of child begging, known to happen on Greek territory. Other destination countries as per the SACP caseload and other sources include Austria, Sweden, the UK and France.⁹

Pleven is by far the predominant region of origin of the victims, with 18 victims identified for begging, 9 for pick-pocketing and 1 for sexual exploitation. Children from Pleven region and in particular the towns of Levski, Gulyanci and Polski Trambezh are trafficked to Greece.

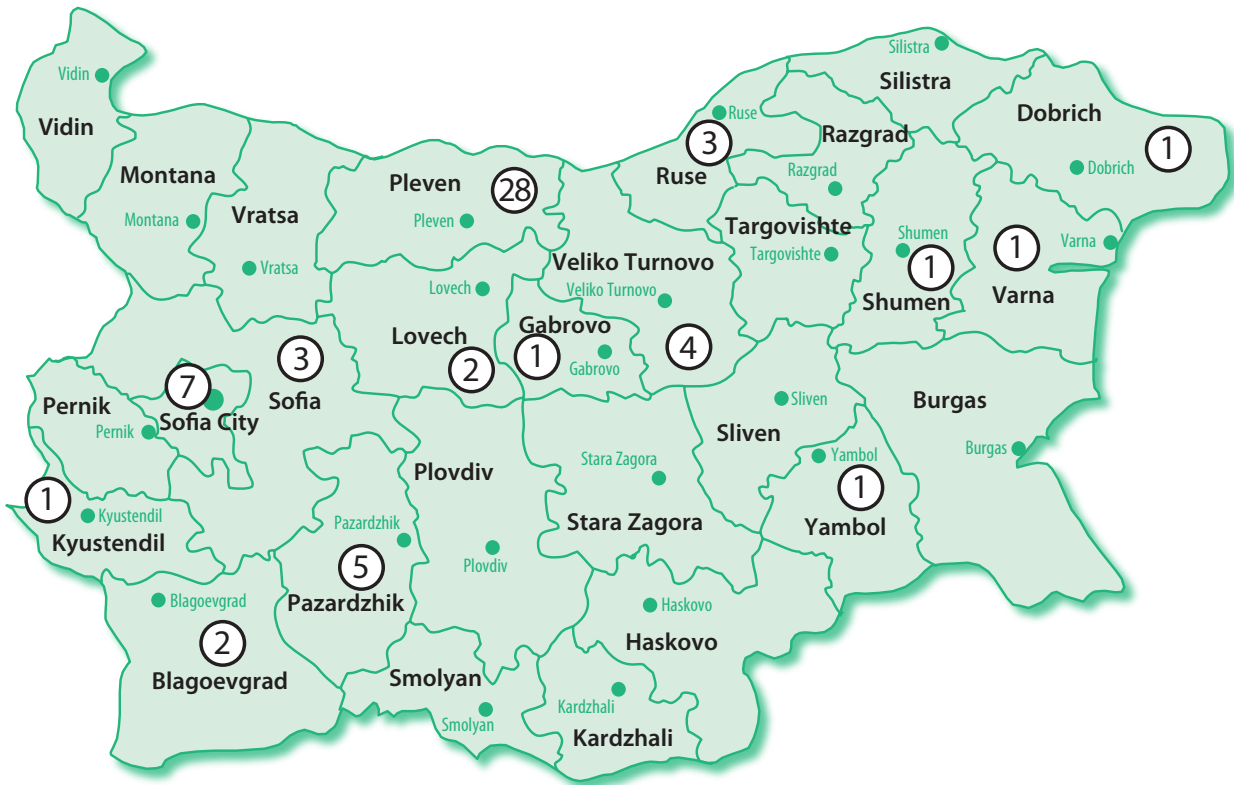
Pazardzhik region, one of the fieldwork sites of this study, is the second most predominant region of victims registered by SACP, with five victims identified in 2013. Children from Pazardzhik are mostly trafficked to France, though according to expert assessment, some of the children returned in 2013 were victims of negligence.¹⁰

One victim was registered from the Shumen region, the second field work site of this study. While no child victims from Stara Zagora were registered by SACP in 2013, the regional prosecutor's office data reveals that there were 9 of sentences for trafficking in 2013, with 30 victims of trafficking, among which 6 children.

⁹ US Trafficking In Persons Report (2014), Office To Monitor And Combat Trafficking In Persons, Country Narratives.

¹⁰ Interview SACP expert, Sofia, November 2013.

FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF CHILDREN VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN 2013 (BY REGIONS)



Source: SACP data.

While the SACP data provides information on the places of origin and destination of the child victims, as well as on the types of exploitation, it could not be considered representative on the extent of the phenomenon. As with trafficking data in general, it represents a very small share of children experiencing different forms of exploitation abroad. Most of these children remain unidentified and many of them do not have the perception of being victims, which makes identification very difficult. While there is no well grounded expert assessment on the actual number of child victims of trafficking for begging, pick-pocketing and sexual exploitation of boys, the qualitative analysis in the next sections will provide information on risk groups, the mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation. This in turn should serve to improve identification so that trafficking victims receive the assistance they need.

Secondly, the data is not very informative on the socio demographic profiles of child-victims of trafficking in the country (gender, age, ethnicity). The lack of a centralised data collection system on THB is the main reasons for the lack of available socio-demographic data. In response to a formal request from the Center for the Study of Democracy, the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) provided the typical profile of a child victims of human trafficking in 2011, “mainly Roma girls between 12-17

years, with low or no education and involved in pick-pocketing, begging and sexual exploitation”.¹¹ This profile, however, was not supported by statistical information.

According to the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) “most of the victims of child trafficking for begging and pick-pocketing are of Roma origin, along with some of the victims who are disabled.” Echoing the data from the NCCTHB, the US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report for 2014 states that ethnic Roma men, women and children represent a significant share of the identified victims.¹² In more quantifiable manner, previous studies assess that between 50-80 % of the trafficked persons were Roma, falling short of the estimates for trafficking for forced begging and petty crime, which usually display the highest share of Roma victims.

TABLE 6. EXPERT ASSESSMENT ON THE SHARE OF ROMA VICTIMS IN EACH FORM OF EXPLOITATION

Form of Exploitation	Sexual Exploitation	Forced Labour	Forced begging/ Petty crime	Illegal adoption		
Estimate	80 % police estimate, 50 % service provider estimate	70 % police estimate	No data	70 % police estimate		

Source: *Breaking the Silence*.

Data from one service provider – *Crisis center for child victims of trafficking and of abuse* – confirms the gross overrepresentation of Roma children in the case loads of trafficking victims.

TABLE 7. CHILD VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND OF ABUSE; CRISIS CENTER PESHTERA

Year	Total number of children assisted	Number of Roma children assisted
2009	18	12
2010	10	9
2011	12	10
2012	16	13
2013	5	4

Source: *Crisis Center Peshtera, Fund for Crime Prevention IGA*.

¹¹ Response to ASA, an official letter: N 92-468, 3.09.2011.

¹² Us Trafficking In Persons Report (2014), Office To Monitor And Combat Trafficking In Persons, Country Narratives.

1.3. Root causes of trafficking

Across the globe, poverty, social exclusion, limited or lack of education and illiteracy, ethnic and gender discrimination are key vulnerability factors, which put particular groups at a high risk of trafficking.

These root causes also provide an explanation of the overrepresentation of Roma children in the caseloads victims of trafficking in Bulgaria.¹³ The Roma minority in Bulgaria equals 352 343 persons or 4.9 % of the population according to last census results of 2011, a number that contrasts expert assessments which refer to between 640 000 and 800 000 living in Bulgaria. A history of school segregation and discrimination brings about early drop-out rates overall non-attendance of school and high rates of illiteracy among the Roma. In 2011 the share of Roma and non-Roma living in close proximity to Roma households in Bulgaria aged 18 to 22 who are not attending school and have not completed education higher than lower secondary or short-term upper secondary compared to national averages is the following: 87 % are Roma, 44 % are non-Roma living in close proximity to Roma households.¹⁴ The rates of illiteracy are 21,8 % among Roma, compared to 0,9 % among the general population.¹⁵

The poor educational attainments and functional illiteracy lead to de facto exclusion from the labour market – unemployment rates among the Roma aged 15-64 reach 40 % as opposed to 20 % among the general population (UNDP/WB/EC FRA). The high levels of unemployment and low incomes of Roma households explain the high at risk of poverty rates (88 % among Roma, 51 % among general population) and high share of households with severe material deprivation (82 % of Roma, 37 % among the general population). The severe material deprivation limits the possibility to lead a healthy lifestyle, to buy basic foods and medicines, but also affects negatively the housing situation of the Roma.

The poor housing conditions of the Roma minority in Bulgaria have been widely documented. Overcrowding (Roma typically have 14 square meters per household member, as compared to 26 for the majority of the population) leads to the fast spread of any disease. The lack of access to a clean water supply (affecting 40 % of Roma households) and lack of indoor bathroom facilities (80 % of the Roma do not have an inside bathroom), together with infrequent waste disposal leads to the poor hygiene both in Roma neighbourhoods and Roma households, which is conducive to the breeding and spread of disease. Infant mortality rates among the Roma are 28/1000 as compared to 9.9/1000 for the majority of the population – a difference that is almost three times higher for Roma than for non-Roma.¹⁶

¹³ Factors of vulnerability for each community studied are discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this report.

¹⁴ Brüggemann, C. (2012), Roma Education in Comparative Perspective. Analysis of the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011. Roma Inclusion Working Papers, Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, p. 48.

¹⁵ Council of Ministers of Republic of Bulgaria, Roma integration strategy 2012-2020.

¹⁶ Ibid.

1.4. Institutional Set Up, Legal and Policy Framework

Three policy systems provide the framework for treatment of child victims of trafficking: the counter trafficking (CT) policy framework, the child protection regime and the social assistance system. The CT, child protection and the social assistance systems operate along their own legislation, strategic documents, annual programs and institutional structures.

The system of combating human trafficking in Bulgaria was established with the promulgation of the Law on Combating Human Trafficking (LCHT) in 2003. In accordance with LCHT the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was established in 2006 as the central coordinating body in the area of counter-trafficking. The NCCTHB is a body with the Council of Ministers, chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister and includes deputy ministers from all relevant ministries and high level representatives of the judicial system. In its expert group, the NCCTHB includes non-governmental organisations (NGO) and international organisations (IO), involved in combating THB and in supporting victims.

The responsibilities of NCCTHB include drafting of and implementation of the annual CT programme, coordinating of state institutions and other organisations in combating human trafficking, as well as processing and maintenance of statistics on THB. In addition NCCTHB manages international cooperation, information, awareness-raising and educational campaigns on THB and trains officials on THB.

The National Commission has nine Local Commissions for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (LCCTHB) in the towns of Blagoevgrad, Bourgas, Varna, Veliko Turnovo, Montana, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Rousse, Sliven responsible for supporting the work of the NCCTHB and implementing policies and initiatives at local level.

The State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) is the institution responsible for the development of state policy in the area of protection of the rights of the child and also conducts control and analysis of policy implementation. Child victims of trafficking fall within the protection provided for children at risk. Child Protection Law (CPL) was promulgated (13.06.2000). Par. 1, item 11 of the CPL (Additional Regulations) defines children at risk as children whose parents are ill, unknown, whose parental rights are restricted or who are unable to care for their children; children who are victims of abuse, violence, exploitation or any other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment within or outside their families; children who are under the threat of injury of their physical, psychological, intellectual and social development; children suffering from disabilities or those who are under the risk of school drop-out or who have dropped out from school.

At the same time, the assistance and reintegration of the child is implemented through the system of social assistance which falls under the jurisdiction of the ASA.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Social Assistance Agency is a governmental body placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Two co-ordination mechanisms define the responsibilities of all related institutions in the process of identification, assistance and reintegration of child – victims of trafficking.

The Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Unaccompanied Children and Child Victims of Trafficking, returning from Abroad (hereinafter, the Coordination Mechanism) is especially designed to define actions and responsibilities of the stakeholders with regards to referral and assistance of children. The document defines the channels through which a signal regarding a child – victim of trafficking could be received, the stages in the process of referral and support of cases of trafficked children and the responsibilities of different institutions along these stages. The Coordination Mechanism defines four stages in the process of identification, support and reintegration of child VoT. These stages include:

1. Receipt of a signal for unaccompanied child or a child – victim of trafficking and repatriation to Bulgaria;
2. Reception of the child on the territory of Bulgaria and implementation of relevant protection measures (accommodation in crisis centre);
3. Implementation of protection measures at local level after accommodation in crisis centre;
4. Observation of the case for a period of one year with the aim to prevent re-trafficking.

The National Mechanism for Referral and Support of Trafficked Persons (hereinafter The National Referral Mechanism) was developed by an inter-institutional working group under the leadership of NCCTHB and the Association Animus La Strada Foundation. It deals with both adult VoT and child VoT. The National Referral Mechanism provides for the organisation of identification, protection, support and reintegration activities for VoT in 3 stages:

1. Identification and referral (including: identification, risk assessment, assessment of immediate needs and referral);
2. Protection and support (including crisis intervention, support during reflection period);
3. Reintegration (including: long-term psychological support and empowerment, safe return, participation in court proceedings, compensation).

The functioning of the coordination mechanisms and the impact on Roma child victims of trafficking are discussed in more detail in section five on assistance and reintegration in this report.

The infrastructure for child VoT assistance and reintegration involves a network of specialised crisis centres for child – victims of violence and THB. In September 2014 fifteen crisis centres with a total capacity of 155 children operated throughout the territory of Bulgaria. The main services provided in the crisis centres include: safe accommodation, health care, psychological care and education. Depending on the needs of the child VoT, durable solutions could involve reinsertion in the family or close relatives, or placement in the existing network of child

protection institutions and community based accommodation services. Those include: homes for children missing parental care, transit homes for children, supervised homes, protected homes, centres of family type accommodation.¹⁸

¹⁸ Agency for Social Assistance Official Website, available only in Bulgarian at: http://www.asp.government.bg/ASP_Client/ClientServlet?cmd=add_content&lng=1§id=24&s1=23&selid=23

2. THE ROMA CHILD TRAFFICKING PHENOMENON

2.1. Child trafficking for begging

Before discussing findings on practices of child begging within the Roma communities, a clear distinction needs to be made between the use of children for begging by parents or guardians and exploitation for trafficking.

Article 1 of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) specifies that, in order for a child to fall under the terms of the convention, the child must be handed over to another person, rather than being exploited directly by the parent or guardian. The Convention calls on States Parties to abolish or abandon

"[...] (d) Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years, is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour".

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

"In determining the types of work referred to under Article 3(d) of the Convention, and in identifying where they exist, consideration should be given, inter alia, to:
(a) work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse;

...

(d) work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health;

...

(e) work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer”.

In a similar line, Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stipulates that children should be protected from economic exploitation and from “performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”. Finally, the Convention prescribes to families the duties and responsibilities to provide adequate care of the child. Article 27 of the CRC calls on States assisting parents in providing for children’s living standards including nutrition, clothing and housing.

Bulgaria is a state party to all the treaties mentioned above, and according to the Bulgarian Constitution, international treaties have a primacy over national legislation. In addition, trafficking for begging exploitation is criminalized in article 159 d of the criminal code.¹⁹

A child begging on the street, while not necessarily a victim of trafficking, is likely to be working in an unhealthy environment and to be at risk of different types of abuse. Finally, working for long or late hours on the street interferes with a child’s right to education and exposes him/her to factors that may be harmful to health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Thus, this study recognizes that relevant institutions need to offer protection and assistance to Roma begging children, while at the same time aiming to establish the role of the parents in the act of begging. In some cases, begging is chosen as a family subsistence strategy, while in other situations children may be sold or rented to other individuals, which constitutes an act of trafficking. Each situation should be assessed individually and the child’s best interest should be taken into account when determining protection and decisions on the most appropriate form of childcare.

An understanding of the phenomenon of child trafficking for begging should begin with an overview of the extent of practices and policies on child begging within the country. Data provided by the National Statistics Institute on the number of children passing through the Child Pedagogical Offices (CPOs) of the Bulgarian Police for reasons of begging and vagrancy provides some reference on the extent of child begging activity. While the data cannot account fully for the extent of the phenomenon, statistics reveal a steady decline for the period 2001 – 2010, whereas number of cases decreased from 1,318 per year in 2001 to 1,059 in 2003, only to reach a peak of 1,785 in 2004. The numbers of registered begging children decreased from 1,537 in 2005 to 671 in 2010.²⁰

¹⁹ Criminal Code, Supreme Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, available only in Bulgarian at: http://www.vks.bg/vks_p04_04.htm#Pa3AeAIX

²⁰ European Commission (2012), Report for the study of typology and policy responses to child begging in the EU, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/cybercrime/docs/child_begging_final_11jan2013_en.pdf

While the numbers are hardly representative of the extent of the phenomenon, as many begging children are likely to remain unregistered, expert assessments confirm a sharp decline in the instance of child begging in the past several years.²¹ According to expert assessments, the majority of the begging children are of Roma origin.²²

There are two main explanations for the decline in the number of begging children – the introduction of policy and measures to prevent child begging and also, outward migration of begging families towards the EU. The State Agency for Child Protection developed a Plan for Working with Begging children, setting out the use of multidisciplinary mobile teams, tasked to register begging children, establish their identity, assess their situation and needs and refer them to the respective services. The teams also establish whether the children were accompanied and exploited by an adult and undertake respective measures if necessary. Such teams were formed first in Sofia, Varna, Burgas and Plovidiv, but later on the approach spread around the country in many big towns. Field work interviews revealed that in cities such as Pazardjik, Kazanlak and Stara Zagora police officers assessed this approach as successful in “neutralizing the problem” and leaving only “sporadic” instances of child begging.

The second factor, outward mobility to EU countries, should be considered at least as important in diminishing the number of children registered as begging on the streets of Bulgaria.

The first instances of Bulgarian begging children were identified in Austria in 2004. Children were mostly Roma girls, aged 14-15 years old and were begging and pick-pocketing on the streets of Vienna. The children were accompanied by parents or relatives and were identified as victims of trafficking. Following an active law enforcement and victims assistance cooperation between the two countries,²³ the number of identified children decreased from 650 in 2005 to 233 in 2006 and to 12 in 2007.

An IOM caseload of Bulgarian children victims of begging and delinquency in 2003 and 2004 revealed that in 2003, all 9 victims were female and in 2004, five of the victims were girls (83,3 % of all victims). All victims, with one exception, in 2004, were of Roma ethnicity and from rural areas or small towns. They lived with their families and often also in an extended family environment, with many relatives living in the same community. All reported cases originated from poor economic circumstances and were begging in Bulgaria prior to being trafficked

²¹ Interview policeman, child pedagogical unit, Kazanluk, 30 May, 2014.

²² European Commission (2012), Report for the study of typology and policy responses to child begging in the EU, p. 109.

²³ The Austrian-Bulgarian model of cooperation included establishment of joint multidisciplinary teams, including representatives from law enforcement, units for combatting organised crime, consular services, social assistance and child protection agencies. The child victims were offered assistance in the Vienna Crisis Center “Drehscheibe”. A Coordination mechanism for referral and assistance to unaccompanied minors and child victims of trafficking was established and the child were repatriated and assisted in Bulgaria. An Austrian liaison officer was appointed in Bulgaria, improving significantly the exchange of information.

abroad. Most reported coming from “normal” family environments, without violence or conflict.²⁴

After the first instances of Bulgarian children identified in 2003 – 2004 abroad for begging activities, Roma children appeared in other EU countries. According to a report tracing child begging practices in 15 countries in the EU, Bulgarian children were found begging in Austria, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden, UK as well as in Bulgaria.²⁵ In 2013, child VoT for begging were returned from Greece (22 cases), Austria (5 cases), Belgium (1 case), France (1 case), Italy (1 case), Spain (1 case). Notably, SACP data reveals that for the past two years, the cases of child victims of trafficking for begging have more than tripled from 10 in 2012, to 32 in 2013. In 2013 twenty five of the victims were boys, while seven of them were girls.

TABLE 8. CHILD VICTIMS OF BEGGING EXPLOITATION

Age	0-7 years	6
	8-12 years	11
	13-16 years	12
	17-18 years	3
Family status	With parent	19
	With relative	6
	Unaccompanied	7
Region	Blagoevgrad	1
	Varna	0
	Dobrich	0
	Lovech	1
	Pleven	18
	Sofia – city	2
	Yambol	0
	Rousse	0
	Veliko Turnovo	2
	Pazardhik	4
	Pernik	0
	Sofia region	2
	Gabrovo	1
	Shumen	1

Source: SACP.

Due to its geographical proximity, favourable climate and established channels for seasonal migration, Greece has become a favoured destination for begging activities. Notably, as illustrated in Chapter 1, in 2013 the largest share of child victims of trafficking were repatriated from Greece (26 out of 60 children) and most of them (22 out of 26) were involved in begging activities.

A research conducted several years ago sheds some light on the situation of begging children in Greece. A study on vulnerability to trafficking of Bulgarian children and adults begging on the streets of Thessaloniki conducted between November and December 2010 found 62 Bulgarian children and adolescents begging or conducting similar types of economic activities.²⁶ In addition, four young adults aged around 18 and 19 were approached in the research as they accompanied other youth or carried out economic activi-

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ European Commission (2012), Report for the study of typology and policy responses to child begging in the EU.

²⁶ Invernizzi, A. (2011), *Vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking of Bulgarian child and adolescents in Greece. A case study of street based survival strategies in Thessaloniki*. Project Mario in collaboration with ARSIS, Budapest, available at: <http://resourcecentre.savethechild.se/sites/default/files/documents/5316.pdf>

ties which could be linked to exploitation or detrimental outcomes. Two of them were disabled young persons begging at traffic lights and a 19 year old girl was arrested for delinquent behaviour together with a 15 year old peer. Several types of begging activities were found: around one third of the begging children were babies and toddlers five years or younger found in the arms of adults begging. Adolescents were found to be working seemingly on their own and begging around traffick lights outside the city center. Some of them were seemingly disabled and supported themselves with walking sticks. Three unaccompanied minors, aged 12-13 were found begging or selling small items.

TABLE 9. TYPE OF BEGGING ACTIVITIES OF BULGARIAN CHILDREN IN GREECE

Economic activity	Number of children/ adolescents
Mother/carer begging with a baby/ child in his/her arms or nearby	18
Windscreen cleaning	12
Begging	10
Playing a musical instrument or helping parent/carer who plays music	3
Pickpocket	1
Unknown	10

Source: ECPAT Bulgaria, Situational analysis of some groups of children at risk in Bulgaria, Sofia 2012.

The Bulgarian street children originated from Varna, Dobrich, Plevan, Ruse, Sofia, Shumen and Vidin regions. Experts interviewed for the study estimated that most of the children were of Roma origin.²⁷ According to experts and stakeholders, the root causes of the begging activities in Thessaloniki were related to poverty, inability to ensure family subsistence, and destitution. Other related factors include the expectations imposed on children to contribute to the family budget, the exploitation of children by adults, lack of adequate parental capacity on account of poverty and other factors and or lack of control over children. According to the researcher's

assessment, none of the children of school age attended school in Thessaloniki. Most claimed they had attended school in Bulgaria and in a few cases it appeared that children never went to school at all.²⁸

The study does not draw clear conclusions on the involvement of trafficking networks in the child begging activities in Greece. While begging was perceived as part of an organised criminal activity by some law enforcement respondents,²⁹ other interviewed respondents assessed the begging practices as basic family subsistence strategies. The latter explanation, however, could neither be taken as a given or as a representative of the whole situation of the child begging in Thessaloniki. As the report concludes, this explanation could also „reflect the elusive nature of the (trafficking) phenomenon“.³⁰

²⁷ This assessment of course should be taken with a grain of salt, as it is not based on self-identification.

²⁸ ECPAT Bulgaria (2012), Situational analysis of some groups of child at risk in Bulgaria.

²⁹ Ibid 33.

³⁰ Ibid 33.

BOX 1. A CASE STUDY ON PESHTERA, PAZARDZHIC REGION

Pazardzhik region is given a high priority in counter trafficking efforts. The city of Pazardzhik hosts one of the nine Local Commissions on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings. In addition, a crisis centre for child victims of abuse and of trafficking in persons is situated in the town of Peshtera. Pazardzhik is also a key source region for child victims of trafficking according the SACP data on repatriated children in 2013. The registers of the regional prosecutor reveal that there were 10 persons convicted of trafficking in persons in 2013, there were 30 victims of crime for that same year, and 16 of them children.

The Roma minority in the Pazardzhik region is 20,350 persons, or 8.5 % according to census results of 2011.³¹ The Roma in Peshtera are 749 persons of 16,316, according to census results, or 4.6 % of the population. The census results do not portray an accurate picture, as some persons may not wish to declare their ethnic group background for the fear of stigmatisation. Furthermore, some Roma prefer to self-identify as Turks, due to proximity in language or religious beliefs or for political reasons.³² The number of the Turkish population is 2,797 in Peshtera. Some Roma experts assess the number of Roma as one third of the local population of Peshtera,³³ a number that is far greater than the 749 self-identified Roma in the census, and that probably takes into account the local self-identified Turkish population. The Roma population is dispersed in two neighbourhoods – Lukovitsa and Pirin. The economic situation in Peshtera, including the Roma neighbourhoods (notably Lukovitsa), has remained relatively good even in the height of the economic crisis. Local industries, such as shoe factories and factories for production of pet foods helped the city maintain a relatively high economic standard.

Stakeholder interviews pointed out that seasonal migration of the Roma communities are another important factor for the economic well-being. Fieldwork in the Roma communities confirmed that two-three floor newly built solid houses were constructed with profits earned abroad. Interviewees and focus group discussions established construction, agriculture and “work in the public sector” as the main sectors of employment of Roma migrants to France, UK, Germany, Belgium, Spain.³⁴

Interviews with counter trafficking bodies and local authorities pointed out that the channels for seasonal migration open opportunities for illicit activities such as pimping and exploitation of minors abroad. Specifically, law enforcement authorities and LCCTHB members referred to the established channels for organised begging from Peshtera to cities in France, such as Bordeaux and Toulouse.³⁵ According to a member of the LCCTHB, the Commission had called on an inter-institutional meeting between local authorities to determine the best solution for Roma children from Peshtera repatriated from France for begging. The children were victims of international trafficking and were to be accommodated outside the family.³⁶ The only available public report of the LCCTHB is from 2010 and does not provide additional information on this case. It provides information that the Commission

³¹ Regional Strategy for Integration of Roma 2012 – 2020.

³² The Roma identity in Bulgaria is a complex issue, and detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this study. In Bulgaria, large share of what others perceive as Roma population, self-identifies as Turks. Some of these populations speak Turkish language, some do not; some practice Islam and some are Christians. To make matters more complex, some of the Roma-Turkish population are not perceived as Turks by local Turkish minorities.

³³ The model for Roma houses in Peshtera, last modified March 7, 2010, available only in Bulgarian at: <http://valerilekov.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-post.html>

³⁴ Focus group discussion, vulnerable groups, Peshtera, 07.07.2014.

³⁵ Interview police officer, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014; interview, expert at IGA, Pazardzhik 22.05.2014.

³⁶ Telephone interview, Member of LCCTHB, 8 October 2014.

BOX 1. A CASE STUDY ON PESHTERA, PAZARDZHIK REGION (CONTINUED)

has worked on 8 cases of child begging in 2010, though there is no available information on any organised criminal activities.

Data from the local crisis center for children for victims of abuse (including THB) also confirms that a large share of the victims of abuse and exploitation originate from the town of Peshtera. According to the Director of the Center for the period 2008 – 2011, there were 8 cases of begging children from Peshtera. The former crisis center director, who is also a LCCTHB Member, referred to other cases of child victims of trafficking from Peshtera, repatriated from abroad, including the children identified in Burdeuax, who were referred to other crisis centres in the country.

Similarly, a Court Decision of 29.11.2010 places a begging child in the care of the crisis center, as the mother has neglected the minor.

While there is some fragmented information on child begging activities both within the country and abroad, there is little information on the involvement of organised crime and the role of the families of the children. There is no public information on the Burdeuax network for child begging and the path of the children repatriated from France is difficult to follow.

The community perspective does not help to achieve clarity on involvement of children in organised begging activities. The subject of begging was carefully avoided in community based discussions and at most attributed to “sporadic instances” or “other Roma communities”.³⁷ The interviews and discussions showed that the topic needs to be handled with care and that strong commitment is needed to understand the community’s perception of this practice. Such understanding could possibly be achieved through long term ethnographic field work as well as through observation of migration practices and migration cycles within the community. For the limited possibility of this participatory research, the only conclusion that could be reached was that the community does not seem to be ready to reflect on such practices and that no preemptive conclusions should be drawn.

At the same time, the registered cases of child victims of trafficking for begging originating from the community calls for special attention to such activities. Further attention from law enforcement, child protection authorities, CT bodies and national stakeholders in both countries of origin and destination, is needed to differentiate clearly practices predicated by organised criminal networks, from family subsistence strategies. For the children involved, we refer to the introduction of this chapter which calls for an individual assessment of each begging situation, including by the use of indicators for trafficking, careful assessment of the family situation and determining of solutions for assistance that are in the child’s best interest.

2.2. Child trafficking for pick-pocketing

The reports of the State Agency for Child Protection show an increase in the caseload 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

³⁷ Focus group discussion, vulnerable groups, Peshtera 7.07.2014.

that most of the victims are brought into pick-pocketing within family networks.³⁸ 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).

The SACP data of 2013 clearly indicates the region of Pleven in the north central Bulgaria as a predominant source of the victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing, with one half of the victims originating from that region. Expert opinions state that the victims originate mostly from the city of Levski and the towns of Gyurkovo and Polski Trambesh in the Pleven region. Other regions from the SACP 2013 data include Sofia, Rousse, Veliko Turnovo, Pernik, Pazardzhik. According to expert assessments, most of the victims from the Pazardzhik region originate from the towns of Zvanichevo, Malo Konare, Belovo and Pazardzhik city. The list of regions should not be considered as exhaustive as it is based mostly on recent cases of identified victims.

TABLE 10. CHILD VICTIMS OF EXPLOITATION FOR PICK-POCKETING

	Total number of children	18
Sex	Boys	4
	Girls	14
Age	0-7 years	0
	8-12 years	1
	13-16 years	14
	17-18 years	3
Country	Greece	1
	Spain	3
	Italy	3
	England	3
	Denmark	2
	Slovakia	1
	Czech republic	1
	Sweden	4

According to expert assessments, child victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing originate from one Roma subgroup – the Kardarash Roma, which has large communities in the Pleven, Sofia, Pazardzhik and Veliko Turnovo regions. The Kardarashi subgroup is a closed community, with large scale intra-group marriages and preserved traditions. According to expert opinion, girls are trained to pick pockets at an early age and they first begin to practice this activity within the country, after which they are transported abroad. Profits are returned to the family, and in the opinion of interviewees, thus contributing to considerable wealth of some of the “clans”³⁹ involved in pick-pocketing.⁴⁰

While there is no quantitative data on the socio-economic profiles of the victims of child

³⁸ Interview, SACP expert, Sofia, October 2014, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardzhik 21.05.2014.

³⁹ 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 group of people united by actual or perceived kinship and descent, as there were no interviews and ethnographic studies to confirm such linkages in the extended families referred to by respondents.

⁴⁰ Interview police officer, Pazardzhik, 25.09.2014, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014, Valia – IGA.

TABLE 10. CHILD VICTIMS OF EXPLOITATION FOR PICK-POCKETING (CONTINUED)

	Total number of children	18
Family status	with a parent	6
	with a relative	6
	unaccompanied	6
Region	Pleven	9
	Sofia-City	2
	Ruse	2
	Veliko Tarnovo	2
	Pazardzhik	1
	Pernik	1
	Sofia Region	1

Source: SACP.

trafficking for pick-pocketing, interviews with stakeholders and service providers portray a vague image of the children. According to service providers, child victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing are from well-off families and are “well behaved”. As illustrated also in the SACP data, children are most often girls, aged 13-18 years old. The children are literate and have finished some degree of education. The access to education merits further study and attention as experts indicate that children, involved in pick-pocketing are deprived of the possibility of education on gender basis. While boys raised in such families finish at least primary and often secondary education,

girls are withdrawn from the education system by fourth grade, after which they are involved in pick-pocketing activities.⁴¹ Such observations need to be substantiated with data on the educational profiles of girl-victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing and also with assessments of their family environment.

In general, children involved in pick-pocketing have very close ties to the families and do not consider themselves as victims of exploitation. In cases where children 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.⁴²

2.3. Child trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys

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. As discussed in the introductory section, even though court decision for the period 2011 – 2013 show that there were between 10 and 14 boys victims of trafficking for debauchery each year, it occurs that the victims had not been referred to assistance by national authorities and service providers. Further information from the court decisions could not be attained within the timespan of the research, as the court rulings would need to be traced from the centralised data to the regional prosecutor’s office which had overseen

⁴¹ Interview police officer, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014, Interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014.

⁴² Interviews Crisis Center Sofia, CC Balvan, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014.

the case. Court decisions are also unlikely to provide much information on the profile of the victim and the mechanism of recruitment into trafficking and debauchery.

Against this background, field observations aimed to bridge gap of knowledge on the profiles of victims and mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation by gaining insight into the sexual services provided by underaged men in Roma communities and also seeking information on possible involvement of such groups in trafficking. Both previous studies and the current fieldwork shed light into substantial presence of Roma transgender persons in the market of sexual services.

A study on high-risk sexual behaviour among young Roma reveals a growing number of Roma transgender persons selling sexual services on the street.⁴³ On the one hand, 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.⁴⁴ 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. According to the study, Roma boys enter prostitution as minors and some of them are HIV positive and suffer heroin addiction.⁴⁵

The study indicates that many of the transgender sex workers are very mobile, travelling mainly to Germany, Belgium and other Western European countries.⁴⁶ These findings reflect the period prior to Bulgaria's EU accession. Having in mind the large presence of Bulgarian sex workers in the EU, mobility for Roma transgender and male sex workers is likely to have increased substantially after EU accession.

Expert interviews conducted for this study referred to male prostitution of Roma boys in all three communities. Instances of Roma men from Peshtera prostituting in Bordeaux were reported; cases of men from Pazardzhik travelling to Paris, Saint Trope and other cities in France, as well as cities in Germany, were also cited. Health and social workers described cases of transgender Roma men from Stara Zagora prostituting in Germany and France and transvestite Roma youth from small villages around Novi Pazar – selling sex services in Germany. Apparently, most of these cases cited referred to young men, above 18, who have been engaged in sex work from childhood age. Only in one instance, participants of a focus group discussion from vulnerable communities in Pazardzhik referred to families or caregivers selling underage boys into prostitution. Other experts and service providers described numerous cases of Roma boys in the care of state institutions who were sexually abused and brought into selling sex services.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ TAMPEP Bulgaria, National report on HIV and sex work 2007.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Involvement of Roma men and transgender persons⁴⁷ in prostitution cannot lead to drawing pre-emptive conclusions about the existence of large scale organised networks for sex trafficking abroad. At the same time, however, in all 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, 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. Finally, the following story recorded in the course of the fieldwork shows clear indications that Roma transgender sex workers may fall into trafficking networks.

BOX 2. EXCERPTS FROM LIFE STORY INTERVIEW WITH ROMA TRANSGENDER SEX WORKERS

Deniz and Kalin⁴⁸ are Roma youth, aged 20 and 23 who live in a Roma neighbourhood in central Bulgaria. They have both grown up in state institutions, before returning to their parents’ house. Currently, they are providing sex services to male clients to contribute to the family budget. They are transgender persons and are mostly involved in street sex work. They have been prostituting from a young age, seemingly with the full awareness of the parents. The parents now rely on their income to patch a leaking roof and to save money to buy medical insurance for the mother. While Deniz has not left the country, Kalin travelled abroad and relied on intermediaries to organize his travel and stay.

When he⁴⁹ first travelled to Benidor, Spain, Kalin did not speak the local language. “I didn’t know how to buy bread and water. I only knew a few words to offer services and to ask for money.” He worked on a highway, lined up, along with the other “girls”.

As it turned out, his first experience abroad did not go as planned. “When I arrived, I did not know that I would be working for a pimp. He abused me, did not give me money and I wanted to quit. I wanted to go back home and to take a break. He told me that he would buy me a ticket, but he lied. I told him that I am not like the rest, I am not like his other prostitutes, and that he cannot control me. That night he said I was free to go, but he took my ID card and my phone. I had to go back to work to buy my documents and phone back from him. A few days later, police broke into his house and confiscated everything. I remained in Spain and worked for others. After 7-8 months in Spain, I came back home with 50 Euro in my pocket.”

⁴⁷ The term transgender refers to a person, whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth (National Center for Transgender Equality, http://transequality.org/Resources/TransTerminology_2014.pdf). In this report we refer to transgender women – a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman, but is perceived by others as man. While we respect fully the choice of identity, we use the pronoun “he”, for ease of understanding and to avoid confusion, since the discussion in this chapter is focused on exploitation of boys.

⁴⁸ The names of the persons have been changed.

⁴⁹ The respondents refer to themselves using feminine pronouns. The authors respect fully their choice of self-identity. The masculine pronoun is only used to give due weight to the fact that both genders as well as transgender persons can fall victim of sexual exploitation.

Box 2. EXCERPTS FROM LIFE STORY INTERVIEW WITH ROMA TRANSGENDER SEX WORKERS (CONTINUED)

While both of the brothers are aware of the risks of exploitation when working abroad, neither of them wishes to remain in their home communities. For one, having grown up in state care, they feel like outsiders at home. Family relations seem more like a business partnership, whereas the boys can stay in the house as long as they provide income. “The money just gets eaten away” sums up Kalin, and he explains that he has sent 1 500 EUR to renovate the house, which never happened. Opportunities for work are sparse, if not non-existent. Their friends have tried to work informally for local employers in an alcohol factory, but ended up working 12 hours per day for half of the amount of money that was promised. Kalin does not want to be involved in prostitution in his town, as the money he would make, about 4 Euro per service, “would not even be enough for coffee and food and to pay for my mobile phone fees”. “In Spain, you can make 20, 30 or even 40 EUR for service”, he says.

Kalin is set on finding a way to return and work abroad. He says that the best he can hope for is to share his profits equally with the pimps. According to his brother though, in reality this never happens. “I know of a lot of friends, who were deceived to work abroad. I know it from them that the pimps take all the profits. If they are not happy with the profits for the day, there is problems and abuse. At the end of the day it is hard to get out of this scheme.”

3. THE CHILD VICTIMS – MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES, RISK FACTORS AND RISK OF TRAFFICKING

This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the situation of child victims of trafficking for the purposes of begging, pick-pocketing and sexual exploitation of boys among the Roma communities, examining the multiple factors of vulnerability that put children at risk of being sold and trafficked both internally and abroad. These include socio-economic factors, the family environment and cultural practices, and more importantly, the interconnection between them.

Any analysis on the factors of vulnerability to trafficking of Roma children would be best grounded on the examination of the socio-economic and family background of Roma child victims. However, as demonstrated in the background chapter of this report, there is no centralised data collection system in Bulgaria, which is based on caseloads of victims, and which would provide ethnically disaggregated data on the child victims. On the other hand, even such analysis could not be considered as comprehensive, as many of the child victims are not identified as such, whereas others (notably, in the cases of boys trafficked for debauchery) do not access assistance.

Having in mind these limitations due to the lack of relevant data based on caseloads of victims, the factors described have been identified through participatory research methods such as the focus groups and the ranking exercises carried out in the four communities (Stara Zagora, Peshtera, Pazardzhik and Novi Pazar). Thus, they are grounded on community participation and self-reflection and offer important insight into the risk factors and situations experienced by the Roma communities themselves. The vulnerability factors established in the discussions have been further corroborated by research in the form of interviews and life stories with victims of trafficking published by IOM in 2005⁵⁰ and by the European Roma Rights Centre and People in Need in 2011.⁵¹

MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES AND INTER-SECTIONALITY APPROACH

Children at risk of becoming victims or being drawn into trafficking for begging, for pick-pocketing or for sexual exploitation are subject to a multitude of risks, which make them vulnerable to becoming victims of exploitation. The factors determining those risks are described here and the vulnerability of victims is examined through the use of

⁵⁰ IOM (2005), *Other Forms of Trafficking in Minors: Articulating Victim Profiles and Conceptualizing Interventions*.

⁵¹ ERRC and People in Need (2011), *Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities*.

intersectionality approach. The term “intersectional” comes from gender studies and allows for a richer, more complex analysis than attempting to reduce people to one category at a time. Thus, this approach makes visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it.⁵²

The following chapter will examine the main factors that put children in general in a vulnerable situation to trafficking and exploitation and will simultaneously look at the particular factors related to being Roma. Vulnerability factors are significantly worsened in the case of Roma due to, on the one hand, the failure of national social protection networks to reduce and eliminate the vulnerable situation in Roma communities, and on the other, the existing barriers preventing Roma from accessing public services such as schools, health services, employment services and other social services.⁵³ The report will also examine whether there are any specific forms of vulnerability stemming from belonging to the Roma community and cultural practices specific to it.

3.1. Poverty

Poverty is a complex phenomenon, which has many dimensions and ways of measurement in absolute and relative terms, as well as in monetary and wellbeing terms.

The measurement of child poverty is done on the basis of household surveys or household income data for the households in which children live and cannot be viewed separately from that of the adults, who are taking care of them. According to one such multipurpose household research study from 2007 by the World Bank and Open Society Institute, families with children below 7 years are 12.7 % of all households in the country. Among them 22.9 % have an equivalent income lower than 60 % from the median income (below which households are considered “at risk of poverty”), in other words, they fall below the poverty line of 162 lv. per person (about 80 EUR), calculated by the Eurostat method.⁵⁴ Furthermore, National Statistica Institute data for 2008 shows that poverty among the age group 0-15 is 17,1 % and among the age group of 15-64 is 12,5 %, ⁵⁵ which demonstrates that families with children are experiencing proportionately higher risk of poverty.

The data on poverty and child poverty discussed above are spread across the whole of Bulgarian society, as discussed earlier ethically disaggregated statistical data is not available. However, targeted surveys confirm that the Roma face a disproportionately higher rate of poverty, with the World Bank estimating that 49 % of Bulgarian Roma live under the poverty line.⁵⁶ Consequently we can assume that Roma families with children face a significantly higher risk of poverty compared to the rest of the population.

⁵² Verloo, M. “Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and the EU”, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2006 13: 211 DOI: 10.1177/1350506806065753, p. 187.

⁵³ ERRC and People in Need (2011), *Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities*.

⁵⁴ UNICEF and OSI (2010), *Faces of Child Poverty, Compilation of Analysis*.

⁵⁵ UNICEF and OSI (2010), *Faces of Child Poverty, Compilation of Analysis*.

⁵⁶ ERRC and People in Need (2011), *Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities*.

Furthermore, the wellbeing of children is not defined only by the income of the household. For children to live well, the basic survival household resources are absolutely necessary. However, this basic level of resources is not enough as children need more – i.e. that a portion of these resources is allocated for the children so that they get the necessary care, attention, support, security and encouragement.⁵⁷

In addition, some of the children facing the highest risk of poverty are often not found in households because they live in homes for children without parental care, temporary facilities, detention centres or out on the streets. Or they live in households that are either too remote or in illegal settlements and therefore are not being included in statistics. These marginalized groups, which are “invisible”.⁵⁸ however are the ones that face the highest risk of poverty, exclusion and of trafficking.

3.2. Unemployment and lack of prospects

The Roma have been disproportionately affected by the rise in unemployment since the collapse of state-employment and specific programmes targeted at providing work for the Roma in the early 1990s. This deterioration in employment status was further aggravated by the economic crisis in 2008. On the other hand, the level of economic activity across the country also varies and therefore there is a big difference between the levels of unemployment in different municipalities. The overall level of unemployment among the Roma across the country is 70 %. In addition, 70-80 % of these registered unemployed have a level of education which is elementary or lower and which puts them at a further disadvantage on the labour market and locks them in low-wage precarious work.⁵⁹

In the region of Stara Zagora, the level of registered unemployed among the Roma is 46.1 % (in 2013), in addition the percentage of inactive population is also among the highest at 60.8 %.⁶⁰

In the region of Shumen, according data from 2012, the overall levels of unemployment among the Roma community was around 61 % (the economically active Roma population in the region is 3,605 individuals between 15-64 years). Of these 54 % are long term unemployed (have been registered as unemployed for over one year).⁶¹

A significant number of Roma are also not registered anywhere and do not appear in official statistics, they do not receive any form of state support and this puts children from such households at the highest risk of being exploited and trafficked. They lack basic living facilities, such as housing, water and sanitation, heating and often go hungry to bed at least once a week. In addition, they often suffer from varying degrees of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ UNICEF and OSI (2010), Faces of Child Poverty, Compilation of Analysis.

⁵⁹ ERRC and People in Need (2011), Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities.

⁶⁰ Regional Roma integration strategy for Stara Zagora (2013 – 2020), p. 13.

⁶¹ Regional Roma integration strategy for Shumen (2012 – 2020), p. 9.

physical and mental disabilities but lack access to any sort of treatment or medical support.

Box 3. "KATIA",⁶² 55, LIVING IN ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT IN STARA ZAGORA

Aged 55, "Katia" lives in the poorest part of Lozenets neighbourhood, the shack she lives in is just one room built out of materials from demolished houses. She lives there with her son and daughter in-law and their two children aged 4 and 5. No one in the household works, they receive child benefits.⁶³

"I have no bed, electricity and water. I covered myself with linoleum. Every night I light candles. Every day I give 0.60 lv (0.30 EUR) for candles. I am very poor. I collect garbage from the containers – plastic bottles and iron. Once I collect them I sell them and from that I earn 7 to 10 lv. per day. With the money I buy bread for the children on my way home, and so on to the next day.

I used to work as a bath attendant in the mineral bath complex near the city but then it was privatised and the new owner stopped paying my salary.

No one ever comes here from social services. I know they give sometimes wood for heating and food but I never receive anything because I am not registered".⁶⁴

Lack of employment and prospects are one of the main reasons for people to look for work abroad and to ignore or underestimate warnings of possible exploitation abroad.

3.3. Access to education and risk of dropping out

Dropping out of schools is considered one of the biggest risks for children to become victims of exploitation and trafficking.

According to research carried out by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 37 % of Roma drop out of school before the fifth grade (age 10-11 years). Of the Roma that do complete fifth grade, only 18 % finish on time. The average illiteracy rate is approximately 20 %, as compared to less than 1 % for members of the Bulgarian majority.⁶⁵

In the region of Pazardzhik the municipality is working with identified families at risk to keep children in schools and prevent drop out rates. Data from the 2011/2012 school year indicates 164 pupils dropped out of schools in the region of Pazardzhik. 44 of those were reintegrated, through newly designed reintegration programmes. However, 120 remained out of school and did not finish the year. Availability of transport, school meals,

⁶² The name of all persons have been changed.

⁶³ The benefits paid amount to 100 lv per child/per month for the first year after birth if the mother is unemployed and from then on 35 lv per child/per month until it graduates from high school.

⁶⁴ Interview with resident of Stara Zagora, September 2014.

⁶⁵ ERRC and People in Need (2011), Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities.

study books, have been useful measures for supporting families at risk of poverty to keep their children in school. However, it is recognised that these measures have a temporary character and more needs to be improved, in particular, in terms of the quality of education and skills acquired by pupils.⁶⁶

Lack of clothes for the children was also a problem mentioned during interviews both in Novi Pazar and in Stara Zagora.

BOX 4. FATME FROM KRIVA REKA, SHUMEN REGION, NORTHEAST BULGARIA

“I have six children they are all going to school but I have no money to buy them clothes and shoes. The girls cry when they come home and don't want to go to school because they are ashamed to wear the same clothes every day”.

In Shumen, the low level of knowledge of the Bulgarian language, due to the fact the majority of the Roma groups in the area are Turkish-speaking, was mentioned during the focus groups as one of the problems for dropping out and also a problem for continuing further into secondary and higher education.

3.4. Segregation

Discrimination in the form of school segregation of Roma children is systemic across the country. This is particularly the case in neighbourhoods and villages with predominantly Roma families, when there are no other mechanisms for interaction and integration with the rest of society. Schools in Roma communities can sometimes be difficult to reach due to poor road and access infrastructure and often teachers and social workers are unwilling to work in these schools, which are considered “difficult”. As a result the quality of education is very low, the drop-out rates high and reintegration practically non-existent. With regard to trafficking, a particular risk related to segregation and isolation of Roma-only schools is that prevention campaigns often don't reach these schools, which due to the lack of knowledge of the risks and how to protect oneself increase the vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking.⁶⁷

3.5. Disabilities

According to data from the Trafficking in Persons report by the US State Department in both 2011 and 2012 there is an increasing number of women and girls with mental health disabilities, trafficked for sexual exploitation in the Netherlands.⁶⁸ Taking into account the higher number of mental health disabilities among the Roma, and the higher risk of violence and exploitation among such people due to neglect from the

⁶⁶ Regional Roma integration strategy for Pazardzhik (2012 – 2020).

⁶⁷ ERRC and People in Need (2011), *Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities*.

⁶⁸ US Department of State (2013 and 2014), *Trafficking in Persons*.

general society and negative traditional norms,⁶⁹ they are particularly vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and trafficking.

Respondents in other research with trafficked persons also reported that a significant number of trafficked persons have an intellectual disability or a mental health disorder.⁷⁰

3.6. Inability to access social assistance

The inability to access social assistance, due to lack of formal registration of the child, as well as living in illegal settlements or in very remote areas and in abject poverty significantly increases the chance of undertaking risky subsistence strategies and thus falling prey to trafficking. Fieldwork established that such families face very high levels of illiteracy and marginalisation and often lack the most basic abilities for navigating society and the social security services.

Children from such families are most vulnerable to the risk of neglect from their parents and carers and are at the highest risk of trafficking.

3.7. Experience of violence early in life whether in an institution or at home

Children growing up in environments (state care institutions or at home) where they are subject to physical and sexual violence are also much more vulnerable to trafficking. 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.⁷¹

Three of the four cases of the transgender prostitutes stated that they were sexually abused in early childhood, in the state care home (two cases) and by an older relative (one case) in early childhood.

3.8. Previous experience in prostitution

With regard to trafficking for sexual exploitation in particular, previous experience in prostitution has been reported to be of relevance. This seems to be particularly the case with regard to boys who engage in male prostitution abroad, all the interviews reported being engaged in such activities beforehand and going abroad to continue doing the same earn more money.

As mentioned earlier, this form of trafficking is the most under-researched phenomenon and both statistical and analytical data is missing. However, on the basis of the interviews concluded in two of the three municipalities with transgender individuals, an initial assumption can be made that they face the same risk of exploitation as other victims of trafficking and are entitled to protection. The respondents explained that they were lured to work abroad through promises of earning a lot

⁶⁹ Crosse, S., Kaye, E., & Ratnofsky, A. (1993), A report on the maltreatment of children with disabilities. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information.

⁷⁰ ERRC and People in Need (2011), Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities.

⁷¹ Ibid.

of money, while in reality pimps take at best 50 % and most often close to 100 % of the profit.

3.9. Substance abuse

Research for Breaking the Silence found that violence and substance abuse increase vulnerability to trafficking. They may begin before the person enters the trafficking situation and are often present during the period of exploitation.⁷²

While there is no statistical evidence on the share of Roma child victims of trafficking who had having a history of drug and alcohol abuse, all focus group discussions in the three communities assessed that drug abuse was one of the main risks facing children in their communities. In addition, children may engage in risky or criminal behaviour in order to feed their addictions.

3.10. Usury and family debt

The report on trafficking in persons affecting the Roma minority by European Roma Rights Centre,⁷³ established that family debt and paying for usury is an important risk factor in the trafficking of children.

During the project fieldwork, an interview with the social workers in Novi Pazar described a case of an attempt of a father to sell his daughter to someone to whom he was indebted.

Box 5. COMMUNITY WORKER FROM NOVI PAZAR

The case happened a few years ago, when a man from a nearby village tried to sell his daughter. The girl had a boyfriend in the town and they both wanted to get married, the whole family of the boy agreed on the wedding, but the father refused. He was an alcoholic and wanted to sell his daughter in exchange for money he owned.

The local Child Protection Agency and the Child Pedagogical Unit with the Police were both notified but no one dared to intervene.

The community worker, who is very highly respected in the community, was the only one who intervened on the day, when the girl was going to be led away. She went to the father's house and said she will not allow him to sell the girl and is taking the girl with her. She also told him, how everyone knows that he sold his wife years ago to someone he owed money to and will not allow the same to happen to his daughter. In the end she succeeded in pressuring the father to let the girl go.⁷⁴

⁷² ERRC and People in Need (2011), *Breaking the Silence, Trafficking in Romani Communities*.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview with community workers from Novi Pazar, September 2014.

3.11. Cultural practices

Early marriages are traditional in the majority of Roma groups, which consider the “cleanliness” (virginity) of the girl before marriage a virtue. The work of many community organisations has put this topic up for discussion involving parents and children and community elders, with a growing recognition that girls should be allowed to finish their education and develop as individuals so that they can have a healthier marriage.⁷⁵

However, early marriages are also a survival strategy for poor families and in this respect they become an additional vulnerability factor. The poverty and overall lack of financial stability and perspective (even among families that are not considered poor) is one of the main reasons for the continuation of the practice of early marriages in most communities.⁷⁶ As was mentioned during one of the interviews with a community worker in Novi Pazar: “Although parents say they will allow their girls to finish high-school, when a good proposal from a well-off family is received they do not want to take the risk of losing this proposal and marry the girl off despite this meaning she will not finish her education”.⁷⁷

3.12. Multiple vulnerabilities and risk of trafficking

Previous reports assess and the current study confirms that there is no unique “Roma vulnerability factor,” and no indication that trafficking is a “cultural practice” specific to the Roma. On the contrary, the research reveals that Roma are highly vulnerable to trafficking due to structural forms of ethnic discrimination, poverty and social exclusion, very low educational achievement and illiteracy and high levels of unemployment and low-wage employment. Furthermore, many of the vulnerability factors such as domestic violence, high school dropout rates, homelessness or being in state care affect children disproportionately. The complicity of family members in trafficking of children is apparent, which is similar to the situation in other communities throughout the world.

A 2005 IOM report reached a similar conclusion, investigating other forms of trafficking among minors. The report did not establish any significant differences between generally known vulnerability factors and the vulnerability factors present in Roma communities. Interviews conducted with a broad range of respondents and consultation with Roma and anti-trafficking organisations also refuted the perception that trafficking is a cultural practice of Roma.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Amalipe Center for Interethnic dialogue and tolerance (2011), Preventing Early/Forced Marriage, ISBN 978-954-350-118-2.

⁷⁶ Among the more closed and conservative groups like the Kaldarsh it is a practice aimed at keeping the community closely knit and ensuring no outside influences are allowed.

⁷⁷ Interview with community health worker in Novi Pazar, September 2014.

⁷⁸ IOM (2005), Other Forms of Trafficking in Minors: Articulating Victim Profiles and Conceptualizing Interventions.

4. CHILD TRAFFICKING PROCESS

4.1. Child trafficking for begging

Although information on the recruitment and exploitation of child victims of trafficking for begging is patchy, expert interviews and previous studies shed some light on the channels, which lead Roma children into such situation of exploitation. Recruitment strategies were first outlined with the identification of child victims of trafficking in Austria in 2004. The recruitment process was best described as a type of "bonded labour" whereby the victim was sold by his/her parents for a set sum, generally between 200 to 300 euros. The amount was to be recouped by the victim, and she or he was to be allowed to keep some of the additional earnings. According to studies, many minors were aware of the recruitment process, including the amount that was paid for them. In many cases, several children from one family entered such an arrangement. One female minor trafficked to Austria and assisted in 2004 came from a family of eight children, five of whom were in Vienna begging for different recruiters. The immediate family were apparently complicit with the act of trafficking, as the majority of the children travelled with a notarized letter from their parents. There is little information on the exact relations between the family and the traffickers, though apparently in many cases close or extended family member was involved.⁷⁹

The bonded labour strategy still remains as a form of recruitment not only for victims of trafficking for begging, but also for victims of trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.⁸⁰ Another form of recruitment employed especially for victims of trafficking for begging and pick-pocketing is through early marriages. Early marriages were discussed earlier as factors of vulnerability to trafficking. As a recruitment strategy, the early marriages, involving Roma girls between 12-16 years of age, are arranged by the family of the girl and the family of the groom, whereby the former receives an amount of money from the latter. The bride is expected to at least double the amount which was paid for her and is involved in begging or pick-pocketing to make these earnings.⁸¹ It is important to note that early marriages do not have a direct causal relation to child trafficking and in fact many of the arrangements may not lead to exploitation. Early marriages, however, are considered as problematic by Roma activists as well as state experts for a number of other reasons, such as limiting girls' access to education or leading to early pregnancies. This broader discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

The involvement in begging activities of children along with their parents are not discussed in this section. As explained in section 4.1,

⁷⁹ Surtees, Rebecca, NEXUS Institute to Combat Human Trafficking and International Organisation for Migration (2005). *Other Forms of Trafficking in Minors: Articulating Victim Profiles and Conceptualizing Interventions*.

⁸⁰ Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardzhik 21.05.2014.

⁸¹ Interview NCCTHB expert, Sofia, 31.10.2013.

unless children are sold or rented to others, their begging activities could be considered as subsistence strategy, even though it involves the exploitation of the minors. There are such cases registered among the children repatriated from abroad. For instance, children repatriated from irregular settlements in France were begging and living with their families in abject poverty and deplorable living conditions.⁸² A careful analysis and a distinction between such cases and children trafficked or “rented” out by their families would help shed a light on the recruitment strategies and the necessary responses to these phenomena, including the most appropriate assistance and protection of the child. Such analysis should be based upon review of the accompanying documentation on the victims assisted in the crisis centres, and should also include interviews with the children themselves. Finally, careful assessments of the begging situation by local stakeholders, including through questionnaires that include indicators on trafficking, would help add clarity to a large grey area, which may involve an overlap of both situations. Interviewees indicated that in some cases families are begging together along with their children but profits are shared with traffickers and criminal networks, as repayments of their credit or debt.⁸³ Such scenarios should be subject to further investigation.

4.2. Child trafficking for pick-pocketing

The identification of child victims of trafficked for pick-pocketing is difficult for a number of reasons. For one, according to law enforcement the crime of pick-pocketing is difficult to detect and prosecute.⁸⁴ Unless the child has been caught “in the act”, it is almost impossible to determine pick-pocketing, as the stolen object(s) is quickly passed on to a third and fourth person. Secondly, the involvement or exploitation of children by parents is difficult to prove. Law enforcement referred to cases of children being caught committing the crime, while parents, who were suspected of forcing children to perform this activity, acted unaware and even ready to punish the child for the deed.⁸⁵ Finally, as in the case of child begging activities, the children do not feel that they are victims of exploitation; on the contrary – they often bear a sense of pride for being able to bring income to the family budget.

As outlined in the previous sections, children involved in pick-pocketing are most often girls between 13-18 years of age. The recruitment strategy employed is usually an early marriage into a family which operates a pick-pocketing network. Wives are chosen on the basis of how skilled they are in this business.⁸⁶ According to some experts, the marriages are normally within the particular Roma subgroup between different ‘clans’. It is also reported that marriages between close relations are not

⁸² Interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014.

⁸³ Interview, respondent with criminal record, previously involved with trafficking networks in Roma communities.

⁸⁴ Interview with expert at General Directorate Combatting Organised Crime, Ministry of Interior, (9.12.2011), Interview with police officer, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014.

⁸⁵ Interview with police officer, Pazardzhik, 21.05.2014.

⁸⁶ Amalipe Center for Interethnic dialogue and tolerance (2011), Preventing Early/Forced Marriage, ISBN 978-954-350-118-2.

uncommon, which can lead to higher than average rates of children born with disabilities.⁸⁷

According to CT experts, children undergo several stages of training on pick-pocketing. In the first phase, they are trained within the family and the 'clan'. "Experience is gained" by practicing pick-pocketing in larger cities and holiday resorts within the country. After these internal trials, the most experienced children are transported abroad to pickpocket.⁸⁸

Previous reports and expert assessments point to the highly lucrative nature of the crime of pick-pocketing. According to Europol estimates, a child victim of trafficking can generate between EUR 20-30,000 every three to four months through activities such as pick-pocketing, begging and other delinquent behaviour.⁸⁹ A police officer from the Department for Combating Organised Crime in Bulgaria refers to a case of a child VoT for pick-pocketing who estimated that she generated 3 000 EUR profit per day for her "employer".⁹⁰ It is unclear to what extent such assessments can be considered as representative of average amount earned per month and per day respectively.

According to service providers, the use of force is rarely used as a coercion strategy for children exploited for pick-pocketing. Rather, the child's emotional ties to their families act as the instrument of control.⁹¹

Children repatriated from abroad and offered assistance in Bulgaria are usually caught committing the crime of pick-pocketing. According to law enforcement agencies, they are returned from abroad with a copy of their police arrest and no other supplementing information. Investigations into possible exploitation by parents for the purposes of trafficking are rarely instigated once children arrive in Bulgaria. One explanation provided by a law enforcement officer, is that the crime was "not committed on the territory of the country (Bulgaria)".⁹² The same informant claimed that although some of the families of the victims appear to live in 'conspicuous wealth', they are rarely, if at all, subject to police operation work on the origins of these resources.⁹³ At the same time, children exit crisis centre assistance preemptively, upon their pro-active request to leave the facility and under pressure exerted from their families.⁹⁴ There are no indications that social workers monitor the reintegration process

⁸⁷ Interview with police officer, Pazardzhik, 25.09.2014, interview with SACP expert, 11.2013, Sofia, interview with NCCTHB expert, 11.2013, Sofia.

⁸⁸ Interview with police officer, Pazardzhik, 25.09/2014, interview LCCTHB member, 21.05.2014, Pazardzhik.

⁸⁹ See Europol (2011), *Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union*, and Europol (2011) *Child Trafficked and Exploited in the European Union* (2011).

⁹⁰ Interview with expert at General Directorate Combatting Organised Crime, Ministry of Interior, (9.12.2011), quoted in *Assessment of Programmes for Assistance and Reintegration of Child Victims of Trafficking, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Sweden in Comparison*. In *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking: Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, CSD 2013, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

⁹¹ Interview, Crisis center Nadezhda, 6 March, 2011; Interview, Crisis Center Balvan, 2011.

⁹² Interview with police officer, 21.05.2014, Pazardzhik.

⁹³ Interview with police officer, 25.09.2014, Pazardzhik.

⁹⁴ These strategies are discussed in more detail in the section on assistance and protection of victims.

in families of children returned from abroad for pick-pocketing. As a preventative measure the SACP issues statements for forbidding outward migration of children victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing and other forms of deviant social behaviour, when there is ground to believe that the families were involved in the trafficking. The exchange of personal ID documents within the families⁹⁵ and weak border controls, however, make this measure largely ineffective in preventing re-trafficking.

It is claimed by one police officer that the seeming lack of institutional responses on the exploitation of children for pick-pocketing is explained by the influence of some families over key political stakeholders and by their ability to exert pressure on public officials. In one case, according to an interviewee, the head of a “clan” from the region of Pazardzhik involved in the trafficking of children for pick-pocketing abroad, was involved in the vote buying for the October 2014 elections for a leading political party.⁹⁶

It is noteworthy, that the information on child victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing is incomplete in more than one ways. For one, while some expert assessment referred to the sale and transfer of children, it is not clear what share of the most victims repatriated from abroad are exploited by their own families, or have been recruited from other families. The institutional inertia rendered in lack of investigations of the crimes and inadequate risk assessments on the return of the child to his/her family environment does not help in shedding light on the phenomenon or on assessing the “best interests” of the children. It is clear that in all cases, children’s rights have been violated by making them commit a crime and also depriving them of a safe childhood and access to education. As in the case of child begging, each case should be assessed individually and the responsibility should be sought from those profiting from their activities.

Finally, information is incomplete as the community perspective, which could help provide a more clear and contextual picture on the phenomenon, is lacking from this study. This is recognised as a deficiency in the report. Access to communities, which were reportedly affected by pick-pocketing networks, was not possible for a number of reasons. Firstly, the preliminary research established that there are no active Roma civil society organisations in the towns and villages considered to be (both according to caseloads and expert assessment) places of origin of the victims. Secondly, the Kardarashi subgroup, the community most affected by these forms of exploitation, are known to be closed communities, which find little in common with other Roma subgroups. This in turn mars possibilities for intra-group communication and involvement of other Roma partners in possible fieldwork.⁹⁷ Finally, as the activities are most often organised within large family structures, there is little possibility to find observers of this phenomenon that are both within the community but outside of those involved in the pick-pocketing activities.

⁹⁵ Interview with police officer, 25.09.2014, Pazardzhik.

⁹⁶ Interview police officer, Pazardzhik, 25.09.2014.

⁹⁷ Interview Roma expert, WWB, Stara Zagora.

4.3. Child trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys

It is difficult to provide information on recruitment strategies and methods of exploitation of Roma boy victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, as there is currently no caseload of assisted victims upon which an empirical analysis could be based. As previously mentioned, an analysis on the court decisions on boys, victims of trafficking of debauchery, could offer some insight into the recruitment strategies and mechanisms for exploitation. However, access to such decisions was not possible within the research timeframe. Nevertheless, expert observations on boys and transgender persons selling sex services as well as the testimonies of Roma youth, who were likely to have been in the situation of trafficking, provide some grounds for analysis.

Interviews with service providers, as well as the life story interviews by transvestites selling sex services, indicate that in some cases Roma boys start prostituting during the stay at an institutionalised care home – i.e. homes for children deprived from parental care. Two such cases were described by a local CT expert, who was also a director of a crisis centre for child victims of trafficking and abuse, and two more such cases were identified in the course of field work in one of the communities.⁹⁸ Institutionalised care leads to increased possibility of involvement in offering sex services. Explanations for this correlation are related to the low quality of care and supervision of the children. The low quality of care, in turn leaves room for abuse, including sexual abuse by other children, outsiders or the personnel of the institutions.⁹⁹ In many cases, children may consequently turn to prostitution as a subsistence strategy or may remain under the control of the abuser.

Sexual exploitation at homes for children deprived of parental care thus makes Roma boys especially vulnerable to trafficking in persons. As in the case of the testimonies illustrated in Chapter 2.3, the young transgender persons then become involved with pimps and trafficking networks in order to access sex markets abroad.

The direct sale of Roma boys by their caregivers (grandparents) to traffickers for the purpose of sexual exploitation was one of the recruitment methods mentioned by community members in the town of Pazardzhik.¹⁰⁰ However, no further empirical evidence was found to refute or confirm this hypothesis.

Some interviewees referred to emotional involvement of the prostituting males to partners, who also help them organize their travel and act as their pimps abroad. Further research is needed through interviews with male sex workers to understand whether this could possibly be

⁹⁸ Interview Interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014, interview Roma transgender persons, 06.2014, central Bulgaria.

⁹⁹ Cases of physical and sexual abuse of children in state institutions have been documented by the State Agency for Child Protection, human rights watch organisations and media. For instance, an inspection by the State Agency for Child Protection conducted in 51 homes for children deprived of parental care conducted in May – June 2012 found 35 cases of physical abuse, 10 cases of sexual abuse (including 1 case of sexual abuse of a child by the personnel) and 1 case of psychological abuse. The results of SACP inspection are made public at: <http://sacp.government.bg/novini/2012/07/27/tematichna-proverka-na-dazd-konstatira-46-sluchaya/>

¹⁰⁰ Focus group discussion, 08.07.2014, Pazardzhik.

a “loverboy” recruitment method within a trafficking network or just a form of a business partnership between those involved. Finally, while some interviewees suggested that “gay markets” function independently and rely mostly on informal networks to recruit and accept new comers from Roma communities, the testimonies of transvestite sex workers¹⁰¹ indicated clearly that providing sex services abroad without a pimp is not only impossible, but also a dangerous task.

¹⁰¹ See section 2.3. of this report.

5. VICTIMS ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION RESPONSE MECHANISMS

5.1. Identification of victims as a prerequisite to assistance

While this chapter is focused on assistance and protection of Roma child victims of trafficking, it is important to note that access to assistance is available only after effective victim identification has taken place. This study established several significant gaps in the child victim identification process, which prevent children in the situation of trafficking and exploitation from gaining access to assistance.

Notably, Roma boys and transgender persons providing sex services are especially vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation. Roma boys and transgender persons are likely to be in the situation of trafficking in the sex markets of EU Member States in cities such as Bordeaux, Frankfurt, Salamanca, Bedinor and other cities in Germany, France and Spain among others. While transvestites and male prostitutes working abroad may have achieved the age of majority (i.e. 18 years), abuse and sexual exploitation is likely to have started in childhood within the country. Regardless of the age of males prostituting, transvestite and transgender Roma offering sex services, law enforcement and service providers should pay active attention to indicators of trafficking. Interviews conducted for this study clearly revealed the involvement of pimps and other intermediaries in the provision of services. Respondents involved in prostitution abroad showed clear indications of exploitation by those who had assisted their arrangement.

Currently, institutional homophobia and intolerance exemplified in opinions such as “they are ‘voluntary’ victims of sexual abuse” or “they are to blame for their situation” prevent effective identification of boys, men, and transgender persons, mostly of Roma origin, who may be victims of exploitation and who are entitled the same equal access to protection and assistance provided for victims of trafficking. Further empirical research on their situation in their home communities, as well as on their presence on the markets of street prostitution abroad, should be the first step towards overcoming the institutional “blind eye” and improving identification and access to assistance.

Secondly, increased attention is needed in order to improve identification rates of child victims of trafficking for begging and for pick-pocketing. Expert assessments reveal, that with the few rare exceptions of use of physical abuse and violence, in most cases, the children are attached to their families or caregivers and do not feel that they are victims of exploitation. These perceptions challenge seriously possibilities for identification. On the other hand, the attachment to the families should be taken into account when determining the child’s “best interest”. A child’s best interest, however, can only be accurately assessed if all circumstances related to his/her situation, be it negligence, exploitation

or trafficking, are taken into account. In all cases children should be provided with adequate care, safe environments, unhindered access to education. Families or caregivers should be both responsible for and assisted in providing such safe and fulfilling upbringing.

5.2. Protection and assistance

As illustrated in the Background section of this report, child victims of trafficking identified abroad are returned in line with the two coordination mechanisms, outlining the roles of all stakeholders partaking in return and assistance: Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Unaccompanied Children and Child Victims of Trafficking, returning from Abroad and the National Referral Mechanism.

While comparative studies reveal that Bulgaria is one of the most advanced countries in the EU in terms of inter-institutional counter-trafficking responses,¹⁰² a closer look at the implementation of return, protection and assistance measures for child VoT in practice, reveals some serious deficiencies. The flaws are especially acute in when it comes to the protection and assistance of child victims of trafficking of Roma origin.

The focus of this analysis is on the second, third and fourth phases of the assistance of child VoT, as outlined in the coordination mechanisms.¹⁰³ The most acute weaknesses can be observed in the last two stages of protection – finding a long term durable solution and monitoring of the reintegration assistance. These challenges, however, are influenced by gaps in inter-institutional cooperation that happen in earlier phases of policy and provision.

According to both mechanisms, prior to repatriation of a child victim of trafficking from abroad, the Ministry of Interior and the Social Assistance Agency have the responsibility to conduct a risk assessment and to evaluate the family and social environment of the child in his home country. This assessment includes checking for criminal records of both the child and his parents. In the case of involvement of the parents with the act of trafficking, such background checks of the family could lead to the recognition of the first indicators that children may not be being returned to a safe environment with their parents and or caregivers.

The Coordination mechanism indicates that in cases of expedite return of the child, such social and family assessments need to take place once the victim is returned and accommodated in a safe place. However, it seems that hasty a return is the rule, rather than the exception in the case of Bulgarian children of victims trafficking repatriated from

¹⁰² Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

¹⁰³ These stages include: 1. Receipt of a signal for unaccompanied child or a child – victim of trafficking and repatriation to Bulgaria; 2. Reception of the child on the territory of Bulgaria and implementation of relevant protection measure (accommodation in crisis center); 3. Implementation of protection measures at local level after accommodation in crisis center; 4. Observation of the case for a period of one year with the aim to prevent re-trafficking.

abroad. In such cases of pre-emptive return the minors are placed in the crisis centre with little or no accompanying information or documentation.¹⁰⁴

The lack of complete information on the child's circumstances of trafficking, relations with the family and risks assessment of re-trafficking leaves the children vulnerable to further capture and exploitation by traffickers during their placement at the crisis centres. Another factor contributing to this vulnerability is the lack of coordination and communication between the Child Protection Department (CPD) at the place of residency of the victim, the CPD covering the region of the crisis centre (case manager) and the service providers.

The child victim of trafficking is directed to a crisis centre by the CPD of his residency (permanent address) or by the Department that received the child upon his identification and return. Once the family tracing is completed, a social worker from the CPD of the town of the child's residency needs to start working with the families to prepare them for the receipt and reintegration of the child, to help (re) establish relations with the child and, if needed, assist in the development of parenting skills needed to provide care to the victim of trafficking. Simultaneously, the CPD of the child's current location /crisis centre/ is obliged to oversee the care and assistance provided to the child and to ensure that both CPD of the child's residency and the personnel of the crisis centre work towards the same goals of a durable solution.¹⁰⁵

However, there is a serious lapse in the communication between the CPD of the child's residency and the crisis centre personnel. Thus, social assistants and psychologist working with the child in the crisis centre are left in the dark in regard to the progress made by the CPD in working with the families.¹⁰⁶ The lack of feedback, along with the case-overload of the CPD units¹⁰⁷ and their lack of experience with working in Roma communities, leaves serious grounds to assume that such connections with the families do not take place. The result is that in some cases, the crisis centre director has no information from the CPD on the progress made in finding a durable solution and no further instructions on the child's next placement. This period of uncertainty of the child's future affects the victim negatively and would be a serious cause of anxiety for any adult or child.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

¹⁰⁵ Methodology for case management of children at risk.

¹⁰⁶ Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States* CSD 2013, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

¹⁰⁷ According to a SAA report, social workers work on between 50-70 cases. „Натовареност на ОЗД“ и кадрово обезпечаване на дейностите по закрила на детето (2008), p. 3. There are no recent publicly available assessments, though interviews conducted for this research reveal that case overload continues to be a problem for social workers.

¹⁰⁸ Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

Box 6. CASE OF HIGH RISK FAMILY REINTEGRATION

The following case was described by a former director of one of the crisis centers for child victims of trafficking and of abuse. No claims are made that the case is representative of the assistance and reintegration provided to all child VoT. Yet, it illustrates that the lack of communication between the crisis centre personal and the CPD of the child's residency could lead to decisions that may have dramatically negative consequences for the child. Having in mind that the reintegration path in the family is the most common durable solution for most child VoT, the existence of such cases should be considered as a red light to all stakeholders involved in child protection and assistance.

A 16 year old girl was repatriated from France as a victim of sexual exploitation and then referred to a crisis centre in Bulgaria. The young girl had a baby, cared for by her parents.

According to crisis centre personnel, the family was sponsored by the traffickers in the winter months on the condition that the child is returned from the crisis center to the family as soon as possible. Both the family and the elderly man displayed concern about the situation of the child and frequently visited the crisis centre. The parents were especially cooperative, they took part in consultations, made sure that the child received all the necessary medical and psychosocial assistance. As the child had previously left the country legally with their consent, they assured that they regretted their actions. Three months after the placement in the crisis centre, the CPD managing the case assessed that the family had the necessary capacity to take care of the child and the girl was reintegrated in the family. The decision did not coincide with the opinion of the crisis centre director, who deemed that return to the family would put the child at risk of re-trafficking. As there is no effective monitoring of the reintegration of the child in the family, the fate of the young girl today is anybody's guess.

The lack of thorough assessment of the child victims' family environment, including verifying criminal records or other indicators for possible involvement or complicity of the parents with trafficking, may also dictate a course in maintaining connections between the child and family, while putting the child at risk. Interviews with CT experts and service providers reveal that in many cases, involving child victims of trafficking of Roma origin, the connection with the parents remains very active during the crisis centre stay and reintegration in the family is pursued without careful consideration of the child's best interest.¹⁰⁹

The connection with the children placed in crisis centres is especially actively pursued by families of children trafficked for pick-pocketing. Parents or caretakers attempt to establish collaborative relations with the crisis centre personnel and act in a "socially acceptable" manner.¹¹⁰ According to previous studies and expert interviews, the families have access to considerable financial resources and a vested interest to the return the child to the family in the shortest possible period.¹¹¹ Different

¹⁰⁹ Interview LCCTHB, Interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014, as well as in Center for the Study of Democracy (2013). *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

¹¹⁰ Interview Crisis Center Nadezhda, 2013; Interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014.

¹¹¹ Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7, Interview LCCTHB member, Pazardhik, 21.05.2014, interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014.

strategies are used to pursue the termination of stay in the crisis centre. Such strategies involve influence over public officials – judges, prosecutors and social authorities.¹¹² According to a SACP expert, such pressure is especially acute in the Pleven region, the predominant region for victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing. According to the interviewee, the families have found ways to exert pressure on relevant institutions to ensure that even the stay in a crisis centre is circumvented and the children are directly returned to the families.¹¹³

Reintegration into the families is the most common durable solution for Roma child victims of trafficking, in many cases regardless of the individual circumstances of the child. The exact number of such re-integrations is difficult to establish, as there is no available data on the long term durable solutions pursued for child VoT. Notably, this prevents any assessment on the effectiveness of such reintegration.¹¹⁴

In line with the basic principles of child care, children placed outside of their families or relatives should be referred to alternative services for child care, such as foster care, family type accommodation centres or institutions for children deprived of parental care.¹¹⁵ In practice, due to the underdeveloped network of alternative family type care in Bulgaria, the placement of child victims of trafficking in institutionalized care remains a common practice. For instance, an assessment of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee based on data collected at on-site visits of 12 crisis centres in 2011 reads that 40 % of the children assisted were consequently placed in specialised state institutions, and only 15 % were referred to community based services.¹¹⁶ Although there might be an increase of the referrals to family type services in the past two years, crisis centre personnel shared that there is still a lack of available services of the consultation of families (in the case of family reintegration) or for the care for children outside the families in regions such as Peshtera. The other alternative path that is still pursued in some cases, i.e. the placement of child victims of trafficking in state institutions is problematic in more than one way. For one, the institutions are notorious for their poor quality of childcare. Moreover, institutionalised care is determined as one of the factors increasing a child's vulnerability to trafficking.¹¹⁷

Finally, if any efforts in child victim assistance are to be taken seriously, then urgent steps need to be made in developing the final stage

¹¹² Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

¹¹³ Interview SACP expert, Sofia 11.2014.

¹¹⁴ The Agency for Social Assistance registers "child at risk" who receive support from the child protection system but does not differentiate between the different types of risk or abuse/exploitation. The Agency maintains statistics on the child VoT assisted/monitored by the Child Protection Divisions, however, this data is not disaggregated by the type of service offered or by the reintegration option pursued.

¹¹⁵ Official response, Agency for Social Assistance (03.09.2011), p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Гергинова, Е., Петров, С., *Кризисните центрове за деца в България – между социалната услуга и институцията*, БХК – София, 2011, с. 28. [Gerginova, E., Petrov, S., (2011), *Crisis Centers for Child in Bulgaria – Between the Social Service and the Institution*, BHK – Sofia, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ National Commission for Combatting and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings (2011), *Report*.

of support – i.e. monitoring of the reintegration of the child victim of trafficking for one year. Currently, this phase of assistance exists only on paper, while its actual implementation is challenged by several difficulties. For one, case overloads and or the lack of experience, prevent social workers from pursuing active relationships with the families of reintegrated child victims of trafficking. Other reasons include lack of confidence of social workers in working with Roma communities, lack of motivation due to high levels of stress and low levels of pay¹¹⁸ and thus a lack of willingness to engage in difficult fieldwork among marginalised groups. The lack of willingness to work with a social worker can also be present on the side of Roma families themselves. The assessment of the workload and qualifications of the social workers is a current objective of the social assistance reform, which is delayed in its achievements for various reasons that are beyond the focus of this research. Possibilities to address the second challenge – i.e. the willingness of social workers and Roma families to work together in a reintegration and prevention path, are the subject of the next chapter.

¹¹⁸ Interview ASA expert, 6.2014, Stara Zagora.

6. ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN DEVELOPING MORE SUSTAINABLE RESPONSES AND MECHANISMS

6.1. Who/what is the community?

The word “community” is derived from the Old French *comunete* which is derived from the Latin *communitas* (from Latin *communis*, things held in common), a broad term for fellowship or organised society.¹¹⁹

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care, community is: *“usually seen as typified by social relationships based on commonality, either derived from living in a particular geographical location, such as defined urban neighbourhood or a village, or sharing a particular interest(s) or goal(s), for example, on the basis of ethnicity, gender or membership of a professional association. It often has powerful symbolism and rhetoric attached, often functioning as an ideal-type, and conveying notions of engagement, cohesion, solidarity, and continuity, its existence seen as reflecting well on the society in which it is located”*.¹²⁰

This complex and unifying term is often in itself inhabited by different groups and power relations. Anthropology research helps point to the complexity of the term and further brake it down: *widespread use of the word “community” often masks a multiple reality in which there are diverse types of communities, as well as differences within communities*.¹²¹

This way of looking at the concept is particularly useful when describing ethnic groups, where people belong and share, at the same time, several identities. It is important to pay attention to the fact that among disadvantaged groups, such as the Roma, very often there is an internal heterogeneity within the group. As a consequence, people may be discriminated against on several grounds. Multiple factors of vulnerability, as discussed in the previous chapter, multiply the possibilities for discrimination, as well as the directions from which discrimination happens.¹²²

As was already discussed, the voice of the Roma is starkly missing from the anti-trafficking debate, their participation in policy development is lacking and their role in prevention, assistance and monitoring mechanisms is unexplored. The aim of the current initiative was to help to start bridging this gap: by working with and in selected Roma communities to re-

¹¹⁹ Oxford Dictionary. Definition of *community* in English. 13.11.2014, available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/community>

¹²⁰ Harris, J. and White, V..A Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care, 2013 Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹²¹ Brown, P., “Who is the Community?/What is the Community?”, Brown University (2005).

¹²² Fremlova L., Georgescu, M., Hera G., Marin L., Miletic, G. (2014), Equality: Young Roma speak about multiple discrimination.

6.2. Model of community involvement in monitoring and reintegration of victims of trafficking

enforce their already existing capacity to actively participate, by identifying a good practice for effective community involvement in the fields of prevention, monitoring and long-term reintegration of trafficking victims and to propose a mechanism for the introduction of this practice.

Chapter 5 above presented the existing *Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Unaccompanied Children and Child Victims of Trafficking, returning from Abroad* and identified that despite the well-developed inter-institutional anti-trafficking responses, the most acute deficiencies can be observed in the last two stages of protection – finding a long term durable solution and monitoring of reintegration assistance.

Previous reports have established that Local Child Protection units do not effectively monitor the process of reintegration after the child has left the crisis centre and they also experience difficulties in work directly with the families.¹²³

There are a number of reasons for this gap, from administrative overload, understaffing of local social services, lack of desire of officials to go into the Roma communities, to more systemic problems related to often prevailing prejudices and attitudes towards the Roma in institutions that are tasked with providing services for them. There is as well the lack of Roma officials in these local institutions, who can ensure access and trust in communities, as well as contribute towards an understanding of the context.

In addition, it was pointed out earlier in the research that the families of victims are in many cases involved or complicit with the act of trafficking. Accordingly, putting the victim back in the family environment upon return from abroad can have a lot of undesired consequences. The result from such reintegration in the family can be re-trafficking of the child.

A good practice in reducing the risk of child neglect and abandonment for adoption was found in the operation of a Family-Consultation Centre for children and parents in Novi Pazar. The center is part of a growing network of facilities in the region of Shumen set up by UNICEF in 2011. There are currently three such centers in the Shumen region – in Shumen, Novi Pazar and Veliki Preslav, as well as a “field office” in the village of Kaolinovo (Shumen region).

The Centre provides integrated services and programmes for parents with the aim of prevention of the abandoning of young children (between the age of 0-3), improving the capacity for child protection and developing the system of foster families in support of the process of de-institutionalisation of care homes. The services are pro-active and delivered directly to the identified vulnerable families.

¹²³ Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Assisting and Reintegrating Child Victims of Trafficking, Improving Policy and Practice in the EU Member States*, ISBN: 978-954-477-199-7.

The team of the Centre is comprised of social workers, a psychologist, a nurse, and social assistants. Approximately half of the staff come from the community, are known and respected there, speak the language and benefit from a higher access and trust by the families than outside officials. The staff and center premises are hosted by Haiachi, a Roma women's collective, which is well known and has worked in the Roma community of Novi Pazar since early 2000.

An essential aspect of the work of the Centre are the **mobile visits**. Teams comprised of a social worker and a nurse have the aim of reaching the most vulnerable and often remotely living families, map them and identify the need for support they have so as to continue to care for their children and inform them about the available social, health and psychological consultations available at the Centre. The support provided is ongoing and includes access to social, health and housing benefits, support for pregnant women who have no insurance, visits by mobile gynecological units, regular checks for newborns, diagnosis of children with disabilities and support for parents caring for such children.

A possible role of the Family Consultation Center or similar service providers in the monitoring of the reintegration of children victims of trafficking should be given due consideration. More active role of the community centers in this phase of reintegration could substantially help reduce the risk of re-trafficking and increase the sustainability of the support.

Participatory research exercises with community members in Stara Zagora established that the role of the Roma mediators of community organisations could be strengthened beyond mediation and assistance in providing access to communities. Roma experts should rather be directly involved in institutions responsible for child protection and social assistance and should partake in the development and implementation of policies as well as in the mechanisms for support. On a local level, this would mean that experts from the Roma community are part of the permanent staff of the child protection units. Thus the expert's trust and knowledge of their own Roma communities would help significantly in fulfilling their responsibilities, including in preventing child trafficking and monitoring family reintegration of child victims of trafficking. This will help to strengthen the response in one of the weakest institutional settings.

CONCLUSIONS

The report has looked at three specific forms of child trafficking – for **begging, for pick-pocketing and for sexual exploitation of boys** and the way they manifest themselves among Roma communities. Against a background of limited available data on the socio-economic profile of victims and difficult access to Roma communities, the study has provided findings on vulnerability factors, mechanisms of recruitment and of exploitation of Roma victims based on **participatory research methods**.

The **profile of the children** victims of begging exploitation is girls and boys, between 8-16 years of age, trafficked typically to Greece, Austria and other EU countries such as Sweden, UK, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain. Although the caseload of referred victims does not provide information on the ethnic belonging of the victims, stakeholders assess that the large majority of the victims for trafficking for begging exploitation are Roma.

Most children beg accompanied by a family member or relative. While the first identified cases of child begging in Austria in 2003 – 2004 demonstrated clear involvement of trafficking networks, more recent reports on Bulgarian children identified begging in Thessaloniki, Greece, the link to organised criminal networks was unclear. Particular efforts are needed on behalf of law enforcement and child protection authorities to determine the exact circumstances of child begging. Indicators should be developed and applied to determine whether the begging activities were carried out to provide income to the family or if they were induced by organised criminal networks.

Children victims of trafficking for pick-pocketing are typically girls, between 13-16 years of age, identified abroad, accompanied by family or relative. According to experts, most victims are of Roma ethnicity, originating from Kardarash Roma subgroup. While there is no in-depth information the socio-economic profile of the victims of child trafficking for pick-pocketing, reportedly, gender affects significantly the degree of education of the victims. Roma girls tend to have lower education levels than the boys and are typically withdrawn from the education system by fourth grade in order to commit petty crime. Further empirical research is needed to test this hypothesis and to develop adequate assistance measures.

While victim caseload 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, such reference point is missing with regards to boy victims trafficked for sexual exploitation. Court decisions for the period 2011 – 2013 show that boys are between one fifth and one third of the underage victims trafficked for debauchery,

with between 10 and 14 such cases registered each year. However boy victims of sex trafficking abroad are not referred to assistance by national authorities and service providers. Thus, there is no information on the socio-economic profile of such victims based on victims' caseload. Fieldwork in three Roma communities established that young men and transgender persons of Roma origin are especially vulnerable to trafficking in persons. Testimonies of transgender persons revealed that they had been involved in providing sex services at age of minority.

The over-representation of the Roma among trafficking victims calls for heightened attention on the particular **factors that make the ethnic group vulnerable** to trafficking. The study concludes that there are no specific culturally ingrained practices that make Roma vulnerable to trafficking. Rather, socio-economic factors, resulting from a history of social exclusion of the Roma, make the minority group especially vulnerable to trafficking. Other factors, which heighten the risk of trafficking among any ethnic group, such as history of physical and sexual abuse, growing up in state institutions and previous involvement in prostitution, also increase the chance of Roma children falling victim to trafficking. Among Roma communities, early marriages and reliance on loan sharks for money can be employed as recruitment strategies for child trafficking.

Bonded labour and early marriages are common strategies for recruitment of Roma child victims of trafficking for begging. Children could be rented by an indebted family to persons, operating begging network, in order to pay out their debt. Further research is needed on how recruitment strategies have evolved in the last several years and how they have affected groups that are especially vulnerable to trafficking, such as impoverished Roma families, living in irregular camps abroad.

The study established that early marriages into a family operating a pick-pocketing network is the most common recruitment strategy employed for Roma children victims of petty crime. Use of force is rarely applied as a mechanism for coercion for conducting petty crime. Rather, children's emotional ties to the families and their lack of perception of the exploitation as such ensures that the victims perform the expected pickpocketing activities. The lack of perception of exploitation makes both begging and pickpocketing difficult to identify as a form of trafficking, as children are not inclined to trust authorities and service providers. In addition, in the case of pickpocketing, children are only identified if caught committing the crime. The lack of evidence collected on family involvement in the crime, makes them vulnerable to further exploitation.

Little information is available on the mechanisms of recruitment and exploitation of boy victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, as the research did not find any evidence that such victims are referred and assisted. Testimonies of Roma transgender persons involved in the sex markets abroad demonstrate that traditional methods of coercion, such as threats, taking away of personal documents and demands for repayment of non-extinguishable debt are employed by pimps who are responsible for the "oversight" and accommodation of the youth abroad. Reportedly,

the intermediaries profit significantly from the sex services of Roma transgender persons, retaining between 100 – 50 % of the profits.

The study identified deficiencies and possibilities for improvement in the mechanisms for **protection and assistance** of Roma child victims of trafficking. While Bulgaria is among the only countries in Europe to have a special coordination mechanism for referral and assistance to child victims of trafficking, deficiencies exist in the actual implementation of the mechanism. The most acute weaknesses can be observed in the last two stages of protection – finding a long-term durable solution and monitoring of the reintegration assistance. These deficiencies have especially negative impact on Roma child victims of trafficking.

The lack of adequate information sharing and effective cooperation between local stakeholders involved in the provision of interim assistance to Roma child victims of trafficking seriously challenge the identification of a durable solution, grounded on the child's best interest. As per key principles of child protection, the durable solution for most child victims is reintegration in their families. However, as risk assessments are rarely conducted and potential involvement or complicity of parents or caregivers in the crime of trafficking is neither refuted nor confirmed, the reintegration of children in the family sometimes leads to re-trafficking. The lack of effective monitoring of the reintegration for one year also erases any chance for prevention of re-trafficking and ensuring more sustainable long-term support of the child victims.

Aiming to address deficiencies in the provision of assistance to Roma child VoT, the report outlines two mechanisms to involve the Roma community in protection and support of victims. The potential of Family Consultation Centers or similar community based service providers in monitoring of the long-term reintegration of children victims of trafficking and of abuse and should be further explored. Finally, any improvement of the functioning of the child protection and social assistance systems and their effects on Roma could be expected only after Roma experts take an active role in the formulation of the policy and the delivery of services. In the specific case of child trafficking, the employment of Roma experts in the local child protection departments would serve to diminish the lack of trust in the institution by the local communities. Involvement of Roma experts as social workers at the child protection departments would also address one of the main challenges faced by the personnel – the difficulty in accessing marginalised Roma families in need of assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendation

The analysis on the available infrastructure for social assistance should pay specific attention to the need for further development of facilities related to the protection and assistance of children victims of trafficking and of abuse. Thus, Community Support Centers, Family Type Accommodation Centers and Family Consultation centers should be established in places where crisis centers for children victims of trafficking and of abuse exist.

Specific recommendations

Identification

Significant efforts are needed to improve identification of children victims of trafficking for the three forms.

- Specific focus needs to be given to recognising indicators of child trafficking for begging. Trainings should be organised for stakeholders, including law enforcement, service providers, NGOs, social workers and child protection authorities to recognise indicators of exploitation of children for begging. Specific attention should be given to differentiating begging as family subsistence strategy from exploitation of families and children from third parties.
- 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.
- Stakeholders involved in interviewing delinquent children should develop specific indicators and questions related to children committing petty crime, aiming to clarify the role of adults accompanying the children abroad.

Return

- Stakeholders should ensure that careful risk assessment is conducted prior to return of the child in the country of origin.
- The results of the risk assessment should supplement the documentation of the child and should be considered by the stakeholder involved in the child protection in the country of origin. The risk assessment should be updated and completed during the child's accommodation at a crisis center.
- Cooperation between service providers and child protection authorities should be strengthened through networking events. The networking events should aim to improve information exchange, to develop common operational principles and guidelines for arranging supplementing information of each child VoT.

Assistance

- Cooperation between Crisis Center personnel and Child Protection Departments should be improved through regular informal and formal meetings, networking and capacity building activities.
- Child Protection Departments at the place of residency of the child should establish regular contacts with the crisis center personnel during the child's stay at accommodation facilities. The feedback and assessment of the crisis center personnel should be taken into account with regards to the decision of the long-term reintegration of the child. The main outcomes of the consultations between the two sides should be reported in the respective documentation.
- Child Protection Departments at the place of residency of the child should establish regular contacts with the family of the child and in view of assessing parental capacity. Where such structures exist, the CPD should seek to involve Family Consultation Centers and Community Support Centers in establishing contacts and working with the families of Roma child VoT. The CPD should communicate the outcomes of the family consultations with the crisis center personnel and the CPD leading the case of the child VoT.

Long term reintegration

- Child protection authorities (social workers at the child protection department at the place of reintegration of the child) should effectively monitor the reintegration of the child for one year, in line with the coordination mechanism.
- Child protection authorities should develop methodological guidelines for monitoring of the reintegration of child VoT, with special focus on child VoT from marginalized communities.
- Social workers should report on family visits and results of the monitoring and should inform all parties participating in the Mechanism for Coordination in Cases of Children at Risk if there are any indicators for risks of re-trafficking.
- Child protection authorities should seek cooperation with the Family Consultation Centers and the Centers for Community Support with the aim of effectively supporting the families in caring for the child and in view of monitoring the reintegration of the child.

ANNEX. LIST OF EXPERT INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee	Department	Region
1. Senior Expert	State Agency for Child Protection	Sofia
2. Senior Expert	National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Persons	Sofia
3. Senior Expert	Bulgarian Helsinki Committee	Sofia
4. Programme Director	National Network for the Children	Sofia
5. Chief Expert	Child Protection Directorate at Agency for Social Assistance	Shumen
6. Senior Expert Social studies and Civic education	Regional Inspectorate on Education	Shumen
7. Police inspector/Tracer	Sector "Countering Criminality" Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior	Shumen
8. Police Inspector	"Child Pedagogical Unit", Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior	Shumen
9. Expert	Family Consultation Center Shumen Municipality	Shumen
10. Health Mediator	Cultural Club "Ekipeya"	Shumen
11. Head of Department	Health and social work at the Municipality of Stara Zagora	Stara Zagora
12. Police Officer	Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior	Stara Zagora
13. Expert	"Child Pedagogical Unit", Regional Inspectorate on Education, Kazanluk	Stara Zagora
14. Expert	"World Without Borders"	Stara Zagora
15. Expert	Child Protection Directorate at Agency for Social Assistance	Stara Zagora
16. Health Mediator	Nikolaevo	Stara Zagora
17. Police Inspector	"Child Pedagogical Unit", Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, Kazanluk	Stara Zagora
18. Member of Commission, Representative of the Fund	Local Commission for Combating Trafficking, Fund for Crime Prevention IGA – Pazardjik	Pazardjik
19. Police Inspector	Combating juvenile delinquency, Sector Sector "Countering Criminality"	Pazardjik
20. Police Officer	Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior	Pazardjik
21. Social Worker	In-Home Care, Municipality Pazardjik	Pazardjik

Interviewee	Department	Region
22. Senior Expert	Organisation of secondary education, inclusive education and special schools	Pazardjik
23. Expert	Agency for Social Assistance Pazardjik	Pazardjik
24. Social Worker	Crisis Center for Children Victims of Abuse and Child Victims of Trafficking	Peshtera
25. Health Mediator	Municipality of Peshtera	Peshtera

In addition, 4 focus group discussions and 18 life story interviews were conducted with members of three Roma communities.

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