Child trafficking among vulnerable Roma communities – evidence from Bulgaria

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CONFRONT research approach

**Preliminary mapping**
- Desk research
- In-depth interviews
- Analysis of official statistics on registered victims

**Selection of vulnerable communities**
- Number of cases related to child trafficking
- Community-based services (access)
- Reliable civil society partners

**Field research**
- Participatory research
The study

Data gathered in 8 Roma communities: Stara Zagora, Pazardjik, Shumen regions in 2015

Forms of exploitation covered:
- Child trafficking for begging
- Child trafficking for pickpocketing
- Child trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys and transgender persons
Why Roma?

- Roma constitute about 90% of the underage victims of trafficking for begging, pick-pocketing and sexual exploitation of boys
- Traffickers usually are also from Roma ethnicity
- Trafficking often organized by family/clan based organisations
- The vulnerability factors are reinforced among the poorest and most marginalized members of the Roma community
Official statistics on child trafficking

Average: 10% of all registered victims
Official statistics on child trafficking (2013)
Child Trafficking for begging

- About 10-32 registered cases per year (2011-2013)
- **Profile of victims:** boys and girls, 0-16 years of age, usually accompanied by an adult (usually parents, relatives)
- **Recruited through:** debt bondage, also early marriages
- **Source regions:** Pazardjik & Pleven region
- **Destination:** Greece, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden
- Young children more “effective” in begging as well as children with disabilities
- Phenomenon of “poverty travellers” involved in begging – difficult to distinguish between begging for survival and begging as trafficking
Child Trafficking for pickpocketing

- About 11-18 cases registered per year (2011-2013)
- **Profile of victims:** predominantly girls, 13-16 years of age,
- **Family background:** well-off families, closed communities (Kaldarashi, Burgudjii);
- **Recruited through:** usually early marriage, violence not used as a means of coercion
- **Source regions:** Roma communities from Pleven region (50% of all cases)
- **Destination:** Sweden, Italy, Spain, UK
- “Rotation system” of girls – movement to different country, once in contact with police.
- Profits of 350 euro / day (*Drehscheibe* shelter in Vienna)
Child trafficking for sexual exploitation of boys and transgender persons

- Between 10-14 cases registered per year (2011-2013). None of the victims referred for assistance.
- Profiles of victims unclear;
- Life stories and testimonies reveal elements of coercion and exploitation;
- Methods of recruitment: unclear, “loverboy” method;
- Risk groups: children victims of sexual abuse, children raised in state institutions, children involved in prostitution prior to trafficking abroad;
Vulnerability factors – poverty, social exclusion

- Persons living in households at-risk-of-poverty – 49 % of Roma
- Households living in severe material deprivation - 82% among Roma compared to 37% among non-Roma
- Loan sharks and family indebtedness (often linked to alcoholism and drug addictions)
- Segregation - Roma often live in segregated communities/remote rural areas/ghettos
- Social exclusion - no access to healthcare and other social services
Vulnerability factors – education, unemployment

- Low educational status and high illiteracy rates, especially among women, which influences the educational level of their children. 87% of Roma and 44% of non-Roma are not attending school; 21% are illiterate, 0.9% among non-Roma
- Segregation in schools – very low quality of the education provided, high drop-out rates and practically no re-integration
- Roma have overall very high unemployment rates - 56% in Bulgaria
- Even when they have work it is usually low paid and precarious
- Lack of perspectives - determined by low education levels
Vulnerability factors and links to forms of exploitation

- Early marriages, child labour and poverty migration – parents are less aware of the possible exploitation when they give their children away to relatives or in early marriages
- The low level of education of parents and children make them especially vulnerable to deception
- Physical or mental disabilities have traditionally been exploited in begging, also in sexual exploitation
- Early marriages in many cases linked to trafficking for pick-pocketing
Key conclusions

- Child trafficking disproportionately affects Roma communities in Bulgaria
- Both victims and perpetrators are predominantly from Roma ethnicity
- Trafficking often organized by family / extended family members
- Hard to distinguish survival strategies from trafficking
- No specific “Roma factor” behind the phenomenon
- Multiple vulnerability factors linked to different recruitment strategies and forms of exploitation and trafficking
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