CHILD TRAFFICKING IN CEE/CIS

HOW MANY CHILDREN? WHO ARE THEY?

In CEE/CIS, as in other parts of the world, there are no hard figures on the number of children who are the victims of this appalling and clandestine crime. While we don’t know how many children we are talking about, we do know what kind of children they are:

- They are adolescent girls aged 15 to 17, trafficked for sexual exploitation, and
- They are children under 13 years of age, trafficked for forced labour and for begging.

They are children who were vulnerable long before they were trafficked: children who grew up in institutions such as orphanages; children from violent and abusive homes; children from the poorest and most disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by every country in the region, is clear on the need to protect all children under 18 against trafficking and to make sure than any child who is trafficked gets special protection. Children have the right to special protection because of their age, because of their vulnerability and because of the severity of the violations they suffer.

UNICEF does not see trafficking as an isolated issue. We see it as a direct result of the intolerable abuse and neglect of children. That is why we focus on holistic approaches to prevent child trafficking – approaches that help governments strengthen the protective environment for all children. And the response must always be in the best interests of the individual child.

It is vital to think big – to see child trafficking in the context of a protective environment. If every element was in place, from strong legislation to strong families, every child at risk would be identified and would get the right kind of support. The challenge is to help governments, communities and families help children, long before they fall into the hands of the traffickers.

CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED BY TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE (MARCH 2005)

- Anti-trafficking responses rarely address root causes and are slow to adapt.
- Anti-trafficking activities are more repressive than empowering – they focus on preventing migration, prostitution and organized crime rather than empowering those affected.
- Demand generally means demand for the sexual services of women and girls. Yet there has been no proper research on the factors that fuel this demand.
- Some information campaigns create fear without providing answers. Some aimed at children fail to give them an understanding of how to protect themselves or the situations that pose a threat. Perceptions are dominated by dangerous strangers who snatch people from the street. In Montenegro, when asked how to protect themselves, children cite “not walking alone after dark”. UNICEF research in Moldova in 2002 found that children had heard of trafficking, but were still eager to migrate and were willing to take risks to do so.
- Failure to evaluate information campaigns makes it hard to see if they have worked.
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- Inadequate re-integration measures for children who have been trafficked. Children need long-term solutions that do not re-victimize them, but these are rarely on offer. In most cases children go back to their country of origin, and often to their family, without proper review.

The report called for:

- More focus on addressing root causes of trafficking as the core anti-trafficking strategy;
- More effort to empower victims and those at risk;
- More understanding of trafficking in the broad context of development, gender equality and poverty reduction;
- More research into the impact of economic reform and development programmes on trafficking and more cooperation between institutions and development agencies;
- Flexible programmes that adapt to the changing nature of trafficking;
- Continued strengthening of social protection systems to prevent child trafficking;
- More research into the factors that fuel demand, including the relationship between migration policies and the demand for cheap unprotected labour and services;
- More involvement of civil society in anti-trafficking initiatives;
- Long-term prevention for long-term solutions.

THE WAY FORWARD

The only programmes that really address the root causes of trafficking are those that focus on children. These programmes could be the blueprint to address human trafficking overall. They help vulnerable children and their families, support social assistance networks and services and support programmes to address gender issues, conflict resolution and life skills. They aim to address the root causes of trafficking, as well as providing information about trafficking itself.

Addressing the root causes of trafficking means strengthening social protection systems to ease the impact of poverty, to keep children in school, to pinpoint and address family problems. Investing in social protection systems in the countries of origin is crucial.

The trafficking of women and children is a gross manifestation of gender discrimination and the devaluation of women. Education that promotes respect between men and women and an awareness of human rights must underpin awareness raising campaigns. And awareness raising among children on trafficking must be part of a broader approach to help them make informed decisions.
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UNICEF RESPONDS

Our child rights approach to trafficking means ensuring a protective environment for all children. If systems perform as they should, children at risk will be identified, protected and assisted.

Elements of a protective environment:
- Attitudes, customs, behaviour and practices;
- Government commitment to protection;
- Open discussion of child protection (including media and civil society);
- Legislation and its reliable enforcement;
- Strengthening the capacity of service providers such as health workers and teachers;
- Improving children’s life skills, knowledge and participation;
- Effective monitoring systems;
- Services for victims of abuse.

UNICEF advocated for the inclusion of child rights in the European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. This now states that all actions against trafficking must take a child rights approach. It requires a pro-active approach to the identification of child victims and the presumption of childhood when there doubt. It says that children should not be sent home if this is not be in their best interests and that child victims must receive special protection measures.

UNICEF Guidelines

UNICEF has developed the Guidelines for Protection of the Rights of Children Victims of Trafficking in Southeastern Europe, endorsed by governments at the Stability Pact Task Force sub-regional Ministerial Forum in Sofia (10 December 2003). Today, more and more anti-trafficking practitioners are making use of the Guidelines, which provide a benchmark for the minimum standards for protection of child victims of trafficking. The aim is to ensure that their best interests are respected at every stage, from identification of the child as a victim to the need for their protection and security as potential witnesses in legal cases.

The Guidelines recommend:
- Pro-active identification measures of child victims;
- Positive presumption of age;
- Appointment of a Guardian;
- Special measures during questioning and initial action;
- Referral and coordination;
- Interim care and protection;
- A Temporary Humanitarian Visa;
- Individual case assessment and identification of a durable solution;
- The views of the child shall be respected and their best interests the priority.

The Guidelines are an important tool. The new European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings has included a number of their provisions, translating them into hard law. But they are only as good as their use in practice, and need more promotion and implementation.
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COUNTRY PROFILES

ALBANIA

The number of children trafficked from Albania may be falling. Terres des Hommes is seeing fewer children returning from Greece following campaigns that convinced the Greek public that money given to begging children went to the traffickers. As a result, begging rings stopped making money, leading to a fall in the number of Albanian children trafficked to Greece. International Social Services (ISS), a NGO that supports Albanian children returning from Italy, also reports fewer cases of returning children.

The signing of bi-lateral agreements between Albania and Greece in February 2006 should further diminish child trafficking across their borders. In relation to the protection of child victims, the agreements draw heavily upon UNICEF Guidelines for Southeastern Europe.

Internal issues include migration from poor northern areas to settlements around Tirana and Durrës. There are also the problems facing Roma people. Their children are rarely registered as citizens and miss out on a range of rights, including the right to education. Their children are more likely to be institutionalized, making them vulnerable to trafficking.

UNICEF backs a range of anti-trafficking initiatives from policy development and projects for trafficked children, to the promotion of birth registration among marginalized communities. In 2005, the National Plan of Action to Combat Child Trafficking was approved, inspired by UNICEF Guidelines. We support cross-border cooperation to combat child trafficking between Albania and Greece, including activities to identify and repatriate unaccompanied Albanian minors, and we provide technical support for the National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking.

UNICEF was instrumental in creating BKTF (Bashku Kunder Trafikimit te Femijeve -- All Together against Child Trafficking) a coalition of anti-trafficking NGOs who work on a four-pillar approach: prevention of trafficking by raising awareness; protection of children who have been trafficked; assisted voluntary repatriation of trafficked children; and reintegration into society.

UNICEF collaborates with The Hearth of Vlora Women to raise awareness among children of the Vlora, Fier and Lushjna regions. With the support of the schools and parents, the project is setting up systems to detect and help children at risk. Vera Lesko, founder of The Hearth, received the Anti-Slavery Award in 2003 for her work on behalf of Albanian trafficking victims.

ARMENIA

Armenia is a source and transit country for women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation mainly to the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Russia, Greece and other European countries.¹ Most victims are aged 15 to 32 years and come from poor rural or urban areas.

UNICEF is working with UNDP and IOM, as well as the Government and NGOs, on trafficking issues. Our child trafficking prevention efforts are partly financed by the US State Department, with funds used to produce communication materials, including a training manual on the prevention of child trafficking.

Last year, we trained 800 professionals working with children on their responsibilities on child rights, including the right to be protected from trafficking. Close to 500 children and care providers in orphanages and special schools have now seen a UNICEF-supported film on child trafficking, with messages reinforced through printed materials.

AZERBAIJAN

A survey by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) in 2003 reiterated the need to protect vulnerable children (street children, children in institutions) and women from trafficking. This study found that women age 19-35 are the most vulnerable to trafficking, though it also found cases of trafficking of children and men. Most of the young women trafficked ended up working in the sex trade, mainly in the Gulf. A National Plan of Action on human trafficking has been adopted by the Government.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The proportion of trafficking victims under 18 years of age is not growing, according to NGOs, although most women were under-age when first trafficked. For example, since 2003 the local NGO ‘Lara’ has been running a shelter for victims of trafficking in Bijeljina. They have assisted 23 victims, all of whom were foreign – from Moldova, Ukraine, Romania, Russia and Montenegro. None of them were under 18 years of age when they reached the shelter, but 90% were recruited when they were between 15 and 17 years of age.

UNICEF in Bosnia and Herzegovina has played a leading role in advocating for a child rights approach to the trafficking of children in South Eastern Europe since 2002. Children’s rights were rarely mentioned in the response to human trafficking when it began to increase over five years ago. In the first years of the response, the emphasis was on bar raids, victim testimonies and the establishment of assistance mechanisms for victims. Since 2002, however, there has been an increased awareness of the rights of child victims and the elements that must be in place to protect and fulfil these rights.

BULGARIA

According to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the repatriation of children to Bulgaria from the EU, there were 97 cases of unaccompanied children in 2003, 63 of whom were identified as victims of trafficking. All had been abandoned or sold in the Czech Republic, Austria or Poland and were repatriated. Their average age was 10-15 years and they were predominantly girls.

All cases of returned children pass through the Child Protection Department at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA). Half of the returning children are sent back to their families
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with a letter from the MLSA. Others need long-term support, including shelter, psychological support and education. The Ministry of the Interior has equipped a shelter for children in Sofia to be used by victims of trafficking and repatriated children.

The Government has adopted a National Plan of Action for Prevention of Trafficking of Human Beings, coordinated by a special commission. A special mechanism for the referral, care and protection of child victims of trafficking has also been adopted.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

In 2003, 132 foreign women were recognized as trafficking victims at the Transit Centre, down from 240 in 2002 – 19% were girls under the age of 18, while 3-4% were under 15. Roma children are thought to be particularly vulnerable to this kind of crime.

UNICEF has supported the recently established National Referral Mechanism for protection of children and women who are victims of trafficking. UNICEF will step up activities in 2006, boosting the capacities of social services, such as the Centres for Social Work, Day Care Centres, and Shelters for the victims of trafficking and violence. Lawyers, judges, social workers and the police will be trained on the minimum standards for the protection of child victims of trafficking. We are also supporting a national SOS Help Line and peer to peer education for 3,000 school children to help them protect themselves from trafficking.

MOLDOVA

Around 800,000 Moldovans are thought to be living abroad illegally and at least half of the country’s annual budget comes from remittances sent home by migrants via banks. It is thought that the amount that comes home without going through banks is more than 1.5 times that of the state budget.

Moldova has ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Additional Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea and has established a National Committee on Trafficking in Human Beings as well as four working groups on prevention, prosecution, protection and child trafficking (2004). A new Law on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by Parliament in October 2005. The Government is developing a Police Code of Conduct and Ethics and has announced the creation of an inter-departmental centre to combat human trafficking funded by the USA.

Moldova is implementing a National Plan of Action to combat trafficking, developed with UNICEF support and in line with the UNICEF Guidelines.

UNICEF is tackling the underlying problems that make women and children vulnerable to trafficking. Projects include: capacity building for health care workers to provide family education for better parenting, life skills education to prevent trafficking, youth-friendly centres, and community services for child victims of abuse, neglect and trafficking.
Family education is crucial. Staff in health, education and child protection are trained to provide parenting education in health care facilities and kindergartens to prevent violence, abuse and trafficking. More than 125 health workers have been trained and 6,000 families with children benefit from the project.

UNICEF also supports Life Skills Education (LSE) for children at risk, including those in Moldova’s 68 residential institutions. Children who leave institutions are highly vulnerable to traffickers. LSE raises their awareness of the risks and helps them understand their rights. LSE is now reaching more than 3,000 children aged 10-16.

UNICEF supports the establishment of Youth-Friendly Centres to help young people develop their skills and their ability to make informed decisions, as well as rehabilitation services and the creation of a referral system for children in especially difficult circumstances. We have supported the creation of a separate Mother and Child Friendly Wing at the IOM Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Trafficking to provide specialized services that focus on their specific needs.

A new project was launched in 2005 with Terre des Hommes (TDH) to prevent child trafficking and support the repatriation of child victims from the Russian Federation by strengthening social protection networks in three regions. To date, 31 unaccompanied/trafficked minors have been repatriated from the Russian Federation and most have been reintegrated into their families.

**ROMANIA**

Romania is a source, transit and destination country for trafficked women and children. Young and inexperienced Romanians may fall prey to traffickers as they try to escape poverty.

In the first quarter of 2004, 456 trafficking victims were identified, of whom 109 were children. It seems that more returned children have been identified as victims of trafficking in the last two years, as a result of intense activity by law enforcement agencies. Police say there were around 800 Romanian children and women trafficked within Romania in the period 2000-2003. As these represent only those who actually received assistance, the true figure is believed to be far higher.

Children sent back from EU countries are returned directly to their families by the police, without involving the National Agency for Child Protection and Adoption. If the police cannot locate the family, the child stays in an emergency centre for 24-72 hours until the Commission for Protection of Children makes a decision about permanent placement. Children usually go to placement centres operated by local authorities at local level.

In February 2006, Romania adopted a new anti-trafficking Plan and Strategy for 2006-2010 and conducted an evaluation of anti-trafficking efforts to date.

UNICEF supports the National Working Group on Child Trafficking and, in 2005, mobilized resources to assess the National Plans of Action to combat human and child trafficking.
UNICEF has established a new partnership with ILO-IPEC to implement child rights policies through community-based services to address the risk of trafficking.

We have drafted minimum standards and guidelines for services for child victims of trafficking and, in 2005, boosted the knowledge of some 100 professionals on the effectiveness of the referral system for children and women.

As well as raising awareness about trafficking in schools in three counties and in Bucharest, with a target group of over 10,000 children, UNICEF funds shelters for women and children who have been victims of trafficking. With support from UNICEF, the Reaching Out shelter in Bucharest offers advice and help to trafficking victims. They regain their self-esteem and confidence, and learn how to cook, cope with finances, and manage their lives. This is the only shelter in Romania that meets the optimal standards set by UNICEF.

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

The Russian Federation is a source, transit and destination country for women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation to/from the Gulf, Europe, and North America. It is increasingly a transit and destination country for labour trafficking within the former Soviet Union and from neighbouring countries. Many victims may come from the growing ranks of street children.

UNICEF leads the UN/IOM Working Group on Trafficking, which coordinates action, promotes greater awareness and defines communication strategies. As chair of the Group, UNICEF has taken the lead in advocating for ratification of the CRC Optional Protocol. The Group has initiated an Inventory on the Situation of Trafficking in Russia to be launched in 2006.

UNICEF and the US State Department co-hosted a conference on Child Trafficking and Pornography in Russia in September 2005 with the support of all Working Group members. Experts from the State Duma, Federation Council, Ministry of Interiors, U.S. government, UNICEF and NGOs discussed the ways to fight this social phenomenon.

With each child pornography Web site estimated to earn up to US$30,000 a month, Russia has seen a huge growth in this criminal activity. Victims are getting younger. Child trafficking and child pornography are profitable and can be closed down only by collective efforts.

UNICEF with ILO, UNFPA and IOM are now members of the State Duma Working Group on Trafficking which is drafting of revised legislation. As part of the UN/IOM Working Group, UNICEF has assisted the government Working Group in preparing a draft National Plan of Action.

**SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO**

A National Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings is being drafted, using the UNICEF Guidelines.

The shelter for victims of trafficking in Serbia had a total of 109 residents in early 2004, of whom six were children. According to the police, the number of children transiting or remaining in
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Serbia is higher than the number officially registered. It is thought that some children, mainly Romanian, who arrive in Serbia with their parents or other adults are later found alone, begging or stealing. Police are concerned that some of these children may have been trafficked. According to some research, children from Serbia are at risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation, begging, stealing or forced labour. The UNICEF report, Child Trafficking in Serbia, also points to the high risks facing children from the Roma community and street children.

Twelve women were identified as trafficking victims in Montenegro in 2003-2004, of whom three were children. As of April 2004, the shelter run by the NGO Women’s Safe House had assisted only two trafficking victims, one a Roma child in transit. NGOs fear that victims are not being properly identified but simply deported. Anecdotal evidence suggests that child trafficking is more common in Montenegro than in previous years, including internal trafficking of girls for prostitution and seasonal trafficking to the coast in summer.

There is no information about foreign children being sent to Serbia and no data on trafficking in women and children from Montenegro.

UN ADMINISTERED PROVINCE OF KOSOVO

The Province is a place of trafficking origin, transit and destination, as well as internal trafficking of girls and women for sexual exploitation. It is seen as a destination from Eastern Europe and a transit route to Western Europe. There is little or no data on the magnitude of the problem.

While the number of trafficking cases increased in 2003-2004, this could reflect a growing focus by the authorities. According to UNICEF, children make up 48% of the total number of assisted victims, but only 10.6% of foreign victims. According to the Centre for Protection of Women and Children, which has helped 469 trafficking victims since 2000, 59% were children. Family reunification is the only solution on offer.

A look at the family background of victims shows that most come from very poor and dysfunctional families, with low education. Many have experienced domestic or sexual violence within the family. Many child victims live in isolation from the rest of the community after being reunited with their families, which makes them vulnerable to being re-trafficked.

In April 2005 the Council of Ministers endorsed the Kosovo Plan of Action (KPA) to combat trafficking of human beings, drafted by the PM’s Office with support from UNICEF. The Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG) have established an inter-ministerial taskforce to combat trafficking and draw up a Plan of Action, with technical and material support from UNICEF.

UNICEF’s report, the Trafficking of Children in Kosovo, launched in March 2005, served as a catalyst for action, analyzing available protection and assistance for victims.

We provide training on the techniques for interviewing a child trafficking victim for social workers, Police, the Department of Justice, IOM, shelter providers, Judges and Prosecutors. Last year, 30
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Police officers from the Trafficking in Human Beings Section, 20 advocates from the Department of Justice and 20 judges and prosecutors from all regions were trained.

UNICEF also supports the Global Motion Theatre and Dance group, run by young people who give theatrical performances for other young people to raise their awareness on trafficking.

UKRAINE

Ukraine is a source country for trafficking. The scale of the problem is unknown, but available data indicate that most of those trafficked are women aged 22-27 years, that an increasing number are children and that many are from low-income households with a low level of education. Most child trafficking is believed to be for illegal adoption, prostitution or pornography.

In 2005, UNICEF supported and funded the creation of an alliance to help the Government draft a National Programme to Fight Trafficking in Human Beings (2006-2010) to complement the national strategy on fighting trafficking in children. A number of NGOs and international organizations took part in this process including Lastrada-Ukraine, OSCE and ILO/IPEC.

UNICEF has also produced a manual on the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings and Exploitation of Children for teachers, law enforcement authorities, social workers and university students, and an information booklet on trafficking issues for vulnerable young people.

For more information:

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