

Research on Child Victims of Trafficking in Romania

Trafficking is an acknowledged problem in Romania, though thorough mechanisms are being developed to fight child trafficking. Over the past 6 years in preparing for accession to the European Union, Romania has harmonised and strengthened laws on trafficking to meet international standards adhered to in ratifying the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime its two additional Protocols, the Palermo Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols, and relevant ILO agreements. The Law on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Persons clearly defines trafficking in children, and provides for higher penalties for offences against children under 15. Despite some overlapping with provisions of the Criminal Code yet to be adjusted, the legislation ensures specific safeguards for child victims of trafficking, including in judicial proceedings, which were further bolstered by the adoption of the law instituting the Agency for Victim Protection and the Social Reintegration of the Offenders. Though the agency is not only for victims of trafficking, it provides protection and assistance to child victims of trafficking and other crimes, with no obligation to assist law enforcement agencies.

Government coordination relies on the multi-agency Inter-Ministerial Working Group which promotes cooperation and coordinated action between the government and relevant NGOs. It initiated the creation of a monitoring body being the National Office for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings and Victims Protection Monitoring created within the Department for Fighting Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime. In 2006, the government founded the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP), within the Home Office, responsible for the coordination and assessment of prevention initiatives and victims' assistance programs. Together with the National Authority for Children's Rights Protection (ANPDC) and the Central and local General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection responsible for all children requiring state intervention, Transit and Emergency Care Centres and Border Police (where necessary), they make up the stakeholders who intervene to protect child victims of trafficking.

National Plans of Action (NPA) in 2001, 2004, and 2006 have provided the necessary impetus for action by government, international and national organisations towards the National Strategy for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings (currently for 2006-2010). In 2004, it planned the introduction of a national network of transit centres in nine different towns for the protection and assistance of returned children and for children trafficked into Romania. The current NPA calls for more effective inter-institutional cooperation and coordination specifically

in the field of trafficking in children and greater intervention in prevention by targeting vulnerable risk groups such as unaccompanied or institutionalised children.

Prevention is approached from many different levels, from the Ministry of Administration and Interior, Ministry of Education, ANPDC and ANITP, to local Municipal Councils, and from ECPAT, IOM, ILO-IPEC, and UNICEF, to local and international NGOs such as Save the Children Romania, Red Cross, Terre des Hommes. In particular ANPDC initiates prevention campaigns through “Programmes of National Interest” (PNI) for the general care and protection of children and the promotion of their rights. Overall, preventative intervention covers awareness-raising activities through media and targeted workshops for professionals, training for magistrates, professionals, teachers and volunteers who assist children at risk of trafficking, and job creation for youth, it is different in its international approach which has led to much investment from foreign governments, as well as bilateral information sharing.

The ANPDC is responsible for the repatriation of Romanian children from foreign countries, including child victims of trafficking, and normally depends on readmission agreements with those host countries. There are many services for the protection and rehabilitation of child victims, but it appears that the demand is greater than the supply, and quality varies from service to service. Firstly, Romanian law provides for individual plans of social reintegration and monitoring by the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection. There are approximately seven state-run shelters for victims of trafficking, none of which are exclusively for children, and the length of stay is dependent on cooperation with authorities. Trafficked children may access the hotline and Emergency Care Centres for both abused and trafficked children but which are run jointly with Save the Children Romania. A counter trafficking network of 20 Romanian NGOs has been established to provide reintegration assistance to victims of trafficking on the basis of bilateral agreements with IOM, including ADPARE, Caritas, Reaching Out and the Younger Generation Association. The reintegration assistance offered by IOM Bucharest in cooperation with local NGOs, is known to provide longer and more complex services than in government institutions, reliant on individual reintegration plans addressing victims’ needs. Ad hoc projects addressing NPA objectives for the improvement of the quality of services specifically for child victims of trafficking have been implemented, however it is the long-term commitment by NGOs and donors to rehabilitation of victims that is the backbone of child victim protection.

As mentioned earlier, the National Office for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings and Victims Protection Monitoring is responsible for data centralisation. The ANITP National Data Base on Trafficking, a centralised database containing statistical data and information on active NGOs and projects involved in trafficking in persons, became operational on 1 January 2007. It is also responsible for monitoring NPA implementation, for which it gathers the necessary information to produce half-yearly and yearly reports and to suggest improvements of the quality of action undertaken and services provided.

Acknowledgements

Save the Children Italy conducted this research as part of the Osservatorio Tratta project. We wish to thank Save the Children Romania, Terre des Hommes and Alternative Sociale for their contribution.

Methodology

This research was conducted principally by desk review, as well as via phone interviews and email communication with non-governmental organisations, international organisations and institutions.