

Research on Child Victims of Trafficking in Ukraine

Ukraine is known to be sensitive to the issue of trafficking, though its focus on trafficking of women appears to overshadow that on children. It does not have systematic legislation on children's rights protection, therefore their protection depends on several different laws some of which are in the process of updating, particularly to improve action on children and border crossings, as well as illegal adoptions. Trafficking as a crime is punished under the Criminal Code and more severely where minors are involved. Exploitation of children for a profit and engaging a minor in criminal activity also come within the Criminal Code. There is a further law on the protection of childhood which was adopted in 2001 and amended in 2005 to include the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In this way, Ukraine seeks to satisfy the international conventions it has ratified such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Optional Protocol, the Palermo Protocol and relevant ILO Conventions.

Comprehensive State Programmes on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (CSP), basically National Plans of Action (NPA), for the periods 1999-2001, 2002-2005 and 2006-2010, have sought to address the trafficking issue on an operative level. They involve the collaboration of approximately 20 Ministries, local governments, international organisations, donors and NGOs. In the latest CSP, children are specifically targeted through the implementation of measures to prevent trafficking through education courses for children, and assistance and protection services to trafficking victims through the development of a mechanism for social-psychological rehabilitation of child trafficking victims. By a Cabinet of Ministers Decree in 2007, Parliament approval of the latest CSP was urged, however it is not yet forthcoming. There is also criticism that budget allocations have not been made accordingly, and that funding will therefore be lacking for its implementation on the ground. And it will not be complete without the long-awaited approval of the CSP for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide the necessary boost to legislation on social protection.

Government coordinated action to assist child victims and potential victims of trafficking relies on the Social Services body for youth called "Services on the affairs of minors" under the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sport, the State Institute of Development of Family and Youth, the Council of Ministers of AR Crimea, State Administrations of Ukraine, Kyiv City and Sevastopol City State oblasts and acting with Police and the Ministry of Education. It has also instituted coordinating bodies on trafficking, such as the National Council on Counteraction Trafficking in Women and Children, and others that do not specifically cover child victims. In terms of prevention, the government has established Centres of Social Services for Youth (SSY) in 1800 cities to provide courses for the unemployed and monitoring for disadvantaged children

and families, including the running of a database of potential victims of trafficking who are provided with counselling and advice. There is also a national toll-free hotline as well as regional and SSY hotlines.

Awareness-raising campaigns are run by the government, international organisations and NGOs, singularly and in partnership, such as the Ministry of Education, IOM, La Strada, Women's Consortium of Ukraine (WCU), Caritas, and Help Us Help the Children. Activities include youth education programmes including specific programmes aimed at orphans, the publication of manuals for school students on the prevention of trafficking and social assistance for victims of trafficking, educational films aimed at children, information campaigns on national television and radio, and training modules on child trafficking for teachers and journalists. IOM has also developed a network of organisations working on trafficking, and publishes information on its activities through its counter-trafficking newsletter.

For protection and reintegration activities, the main actors are IOM, La Strada-Ukraine, ILO, OSCE, and Winrock International. IOM administers 6 shelters, 2 of which were government initiated, though they are not specifically for children. There are other NGOs, such as Caritas, who provide shelter and complete psychosocial counselling, but they deal with lesser numbers of children. The "Road to Life" NGO concentrates solely on reintegration strategies for orphan victims of trafficking. There do not appear to be any state-run shelters exclusively for child victims of trafficking, though there are approximately 5 public shelters for victims of trafficking of all ages. It is of serious concern that some victims may be held in transit centres for young criminals. Where children are not reunited with their families, they may be sent to "boarding schools" where there is a risk of re-trafficking.

Recently the NGO, La Strada, as part of a project with government and NGO partners on instituting a National Referral Mechanism (NRM), recommended that the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports take the lead in organising and coordinating assistance specifically for child victims of trafficking. Currently this coordination is lacking, and despite the good work of hotlines and shelters, particularly those with international funding, it is recognised that in implementing existing government decrees relating to trafficking, child protection, health services etc, with child victims of trafficking in mind, more can be done.

Finally, the NPA includes the aim of monitoring and analysing experiences of rehabilitation centres for trafficking victims and centres of socio-psychological rehabilitation of children, to be conducted by those in charge of social services, non-governmental and international organisations.

Acknowledgements

Save the Children Italy conducted this research as part of the Osservatorio Tratta project. We wish to thank International Women's Rights Centre "La Strada - Ukraine", Women's Consortium of Ukraine, IOM, Caritas and Help Us Help the Children for their contribution.

Methodology

This research was conducted principally by desk review (see main documents listed below), as well as via phone interviews and email communication with non-governmental organisations, international organisations and institutions.