



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Presentation by Ms. Eva Biaudet, OSCE Special Representative and
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**Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons Conference, Vienna, 26-27 May 2008
Child Trafficking: Responses and Challenges at Local Level**

Introduction

Dear Minister Thors, dear Astrid,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I want to start by warmly thanking Minister Thors, the Secretary General and Ambassador Strohal, for their opening remarks and all other speakers and participants for being here today. I especially appreciate the presence from so many OSCE capitals. I am also very grateful that Minister Thors is here today, which reflects the Finnish Government's determination to actively combat trafficking in human beings and the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship's decision to have the fight against human trafficking as one of its priorities.

I consider it a privilege to be able to share with you a few thoughts on the, for all of us, worrying topic we have come here to discuss - child trafficking.

Abuse of children takes many forms in today's societies, one of its most brutal manifestations being child trafficking for different disgusting purposes; sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, petty crimes, organized begging, the removal of organs, and illegal adoption. The problem we face in tackling these, for us all, incomprehensible violations of human dignity, is definitely not a lack of international legislation or a lack of political commitments - but one of ineffective implementation by responsible actors at national and local levels.

In trying to respond to the need for increased action, I have selected combating child trafficking as a priority for this year, building on previous work undertaken by the OSCE. My

aim is to highlight the moral responsibility and the legal obligation every participating State has to protect every single vulnerable and exploited child, without discrimination and regardless of immigration status.

In my presentation, I intend firstly to reflect on the reality vulnerable children are facing in the OSCE region, and secondly bring forward some ideas on measures that need to be taken as a matter of urgency, first and foremost by governments and local authorities, to fight child trafficking in a more responsible manner.

Vulnerable children – A reality check

We know that children become vulnerable to trafficking for very many different reasons. Social and economic marginalisation, gender based violence and restrictive migration policies put especially children at risk. Children belonging to ethnic minorities, such as Roma, are particularly vulnerable. On a more individual level factors such as inter-personal relations, family living conditions and the individual hopes of children are important.

But unfortunately I am also very much aware of, that we know too little about child trafficking. Nevertheless, based on the scattered information we have, we can identify at least two specific groups of trafficked children. Girls in their high teens being exploited sexually, and younger boys and girls being exploited for organised begging and petty crimes. In addition we know that also boys are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, but so far our knowledge of this is very limited.

The reality in the OSCE region, when looking at how we treat children isn't beautiful. States violate trafficked children's rights by detaining them, punishing them, deporting them and returning them without proper risk assessment or a best interest determination. When it comes to available services there are numerous examples of child victims that have been treated as adults, received no assistance, have been criminalised and expelled as illegal migrants – to a future with great risks of re-trafficking and violent reprisal from traffickers.

A typical example from many EU-countries is teenage girls with forged documents who are sexually exploited in the prostitution business. When these children are confronted with the police they are expelled if they are irregular migrants or left on their own if they are EU

citizens. Another example is boys below the age of criminal responsibility trafficked for petty crimes. When these boys are caught by the police they are taken to a shelter for children, but they often escape within the next 24 hours back into the traffickers hands and are moved elsewhere to continue being exploited.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are all aware of the increasing numbers of foreign unaccompanied children reaching OSCE countries. Of course one cannot easily establish, in a verifiable way, how many of them that are trafficked but one can argue that although many maybe children with their own migration project they are also extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that governments establish effective guardianship systems and stop the return of children before a safe and sustainable living environment – a durable solution respecting the rights of the child - has been secured. This will promote a better response to the phenomenon of unaccompanied children disappearing.

Also Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, has voiced his deep concerns over the special vulnerability of foreign unaccompanied children, often arriving as asylum seekers. These children are generally perceived only as smuggled and therefore not provided adequate protection. Research however shows that they often are likely to be on the way to be exploited in the sex-trade or domestic servitude. Hammarberg emphasises that, “a child who finds him or herself in the care of the state should be afforded an equal level of protection and rights” [as Nationals], and “particular attention needs to be paid to the prevention of disappearances”. We know that unaccompanied minors consequently are particularly vulnerable and the least we can do is to ensure that accommodation centres are staffed by experienced and professional personnel.

Trends and patterns

I'm an optimist and a fighter. But sometimes I question both my conviction and my strength. The UN study on violence against children from 2006 for example indicated that the sexual exploitation of children, despite all our efforts, is increasing. The study voices serious concern over growing criminality related to child trafficking for sexual exploitation, sex tourism and internet related child pornography.

A report released by Save the Children Europe in December 2007 indicated that internal child trafficking was increasing in South-Eastern Europe - children moving from rural areas to bigger cities ending up exploited by traffickers. This is of course of particular concern since a lot has been done in the past decade especially in this region.

The Dutch National Rapporteur on human trafficking, Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen, who to my great satisfaction also is present with us here today, in her recent 5th report of 2007, refers to a study by ECPAT, Defence for Children International and UNICEF of exploitation of children in the Netherlands. She says the report gives “an alarming picture of what can happen to children in the Netherlands”. The report, based on information from 230 child victims, gives us important information about who the exploited children are. 73% of the cases involved exploitation in prostitution, 17% involved other forms of exploitation and 9% a combination of the two. Over 90% of the children exploitation sexually were girls, the youngest of them only 13 years old. 36% were Dutch nationals and 13% irregular migrants. The study could further establish that in almost half of the cases emotional dependence contributed to the victims’ vulnerability. Other factors making these children vulnerable to exploitation were lack of identity documents, bad family circumstances, threats by pimps or family members, financial difficulties, drug addiction, sexual abuse and homelessness.

Regarding other than sexual forms of exploitation the same study found that it related to illegal adoption and domestic work, but also included the transportation of drugs, deception by offering children a ‘football contract’, exploitation in cleaning work and the catering sector, exploitation in crime, and arranged marriages. These exploited children came from 17 different countries and only 5% were Dutch nationals, whereas over 1/3 were irregular migrants. More than 1/3 of the children trafficked for other than sexual exploitation were boys – nearly 2/3 were girls.

Dear National representatives,

I want to emphasize how invaluable these kinds of studies are and I want to reiterate how important it would be that all countries would establish a national reporting mechanism, as minister Thors also stated in her opening remarks. A national reporting mechanism is

essential for gathering information systematically, identifying gaps, and making it possible to have national and local policies that are based on evidence and real needs.

To find a solution to the problem of children being exploited in OSCE countries, we of course cannot limit ourselves to the geographic area of the OSCE. To illustrate this problem I will present you with the example of young African boys being deceived by men running illegal "football academies" in West Africa. According to an article in the Guardian, in Ghana alone there are approximately 500 of these so called "academies", run by men who claim to be former football professionals.

The business of these so called "agents" is in demanding high registration fees from parents and looking for new stars from whom they can cash in money for if the boys are able to make a deal with a club in Europe. But in most cases parents are simply deceived into debt-bondage. These exploiters offer to smuggle the children to Europe with a promise, that they will be able to sign up for some European club. Many parents, believing or hoping that their children will become successful, think that the risk of taking them out of school and later sending them away from home, is worth taking.

The most talented boys are bought and signed up in binding contracts as young as seven years old. As teenagers they are sent to Europe, often illegally on dangerous boat trips via the Canary Islands to mainland Europe. In one particular case, a leaking fishing trawler with 150 young African men and boys was discovered - 15 of the boys believed they were going to test play for some of the major football clubs in Europe.

Engaged NGOs are very concerned over these illegal "academies", calling it football-related trafficking and outright slave trade, leaving these homeless children abandoned and vulnerable to exploitation across Europe. One NGO is saying boys as young as 14 are ending up on the streets, worse off and in more danger of being exploited than they would ever be at home. The same NGO says it is following over 800 boys aged 10-18, who's hopes of becoming football stars have not come through. Many of these boys prefer to stay illegally in Europe, still having hopes they eventually will become successful or sometimes simply too ashamed to return.

Organised begging

Another problem, involving both trans-national and internal child trafficking is organised begging. In large parts of the OSCE region, including rich countries, exposed people are a part of every-day life. People living on the streets can expect very little from society. In almost all major OSCE cities we are faced with adults and children living on the money they get by begging. This has led to professional begging and people being trafficked and exploited for begging. This business is often very organised, involving organised criminal groups.

It is inconceivable to me, that at the same time when we in the OSCE region have become more and more prosperous, we have created the conditions for such “new forms of slavery”. In my opinion, allowing this is a violation of the human dignity of these persons. But we do not help these people by giving them money - on the contrary, we uphold the structures keeping them marginalised. Some cities try to tackle this problem by forbidding begging. Indeed the street is no place for children to be. Intervention is necessary and screening for trafficking should be an obvious measure.

Measures we need to take: Local Ownership - Resources - Listening to the children

Dear friends,

I now want to speak about local ownership. When it comes to human trafficking, what we decide here at the OSCE at governmental level has very little relevance if local authorities don't assume their responsibility. I am convinced that most OSCE countries already have the capacities needed at the local level to improve the situation of trafficked and exploited children. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Local authorities, in both countries of origin and destination, need budgeted resources to be able to respond to the growing number of children exploited sexually, for organized begging and for committing petty crimes. We simply have to put in more money into child protection and specifically into specialized services for these specific children. And we need to ensure that all children, also irregular migrants, are among the individuals we are trying to identify.

We need to train personnel and fund specialized NGOs and we have to become better in recognizing signs of vulnerability in early stages and intervene immediately.

Based on research, we know that exploited children often don't identify themselves as victims, they distrust authorities, and often decline assistance because they feel they are being patronized by service providers portraying them as helpless victims. Therefore, we have a big challenge in getting better at designing strategies that take the views of these children into account. Service providers, whether they are authorities or NGOs, need to speak the same language as these children, understand their priorities and offer them alternatives corresponding with their needs in a gender and age sensitive way. If we want results, these children cannot only be treated as beneficiaries of assistance but have to be an active part of the solution. The key words to successful integration, being it in the country of origin or destination, are safety and empowerment.

Shared responsibility – Safe return or safe stay?

Ladies and gentlemen,

Countries of origin and destination share responsibility for the flourishing of child trafficking and therefore together have to seek durable solutions to protect children from exploitation. However, unless countries of origin address the issues of poverty among and discrimination against large populations, unsafe living environments for children and failed social support for families, children will continue to be trafficked and exploited.

Authorities have to guarantee safe living environments for children of parents who have migrated. Especially vulnerable groups such as Roma, orphans and street children have to be provided basic life skills, helping them access social protection and economic opportunities. Sensitization campaigns against racism and intolerance are needed among the mainstream youth population. And the most important prevention measure of all is simply to ensure that children at risk are in schools.

Regarding the issue of returning child victims to their home countries or not, the paramount consideration has to be finding a long-term solution guaranteeing the safety, wellbeing and development of the child. Children have a right to return home, but only after assessing his

or her case individually, taking the child's view into account. If basic needs such as physical and mental treatment and education cannot be guaranteed in their home country children cannot be returned and have an unconditional right to stay.

In my view it is time to introduce trans-national shared responsibility also between authorities at the local level. We need direct exchange of knowledge and professionals, for example social workers and police liaison officers enabling practical assistance in a flexible manner, when needed to protect a particular child.

Obligation to protect

Ladies and gentlemen, finally,

When it comes to protecting children, I want to reiterate that there is no margin of appreciation. Every single country has a moral responsibility and legal obligation to actively seek to identify and protect every single vulnerable child, without discrimination and regardless of his or her immigration status. My firm hope is that all participating States soon will adhere to their political and legal obligations and that we no longer shall hear about migrant children having been deported without proper investigations into whether the child could have been a victim of trafficking. These children, like all other children, based on universally accepted Human Rights principles have a legal right to education, medical and psychological treatment and safe development.

Thank you for your attention!