

Mission of Latvia to the OSCE

ENGLISH only

Latvia: Country Report on Trafficking in Human Beings

11 October 2002

Institutional Framework

The Ministry of Welfare and Vice Squad within the Ministry of Interior are involved in issues connected with trafficking in human beings. The Ministry of Welfare is engaged in this issue from the point of the gender equality.

In June 2001, at the Women and Democracy Conference in Vilnius, the Nordic and Baltic Ministers on Gender Equality decided to carry out a joint Nordic-Baltic information campaign against trafficking in women. The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Welfare from Latvian side are involved in this project (Nordic-Baltic campaign).

Legal framework

Since March 2000 the law has provided for an administrative punishment for violating rules concerning the limitation of prostitution, but in the year from March 2000, administrative punishments were levied against only 79 prostitutes. In 1999 there were 13 administrative cases involving pimping and one about the involvement of minors in sexual activity. One criminal investigation was launched on the trafficking in women in 2000.

In 2000 the Criminal Law was revised to make it illegal to send forcibly a person to a foreign country for the purpose of sexual abuse came into force (Article 165 of the Criminal Law). The liability is envisaged about the trafficking in human beings to a foreign country.

In April 2001 the Cabinet of Ministers adopted new regulations on limiting prostitution. The Vice Squad experts within the Criminal Police Department consider that the new regulations will be a tool in limiting prostitution only if a network of Vice Squad officers is organized in all of Latvia.

The new rules on prostitution say that in local government territories that have more than 20,000 residents, local governments must specify locations at which prostitutes can play their trade.

The Ministry of Interior and other Ministries elaborated in 2000 a programme to limit and control prostitution.

The preparations for signing the UN Trafficking Protocol are underway and it is expected that Latvia would sign the protocol yet in 2002.

Fight against trafficking in human beings

Recognizing the trafficking in human beings as a serious problem in Latvia, with a view to resolve it, the government of Latvia has allocated 16 additional staff units and has allocated the necessary financing for the Vice Police. To suppress trafficking in human beings the following goals have been set up:

- a) harmonization of legislation with EU standards;
- b) establishment of specialized unit;
- c) improvement of international co-operation;
- d) information campaigns with a view to inform potential victims about existent threats;
- e) co-operation with NGO's.

On the operational level the specialised institution – Vice Squad of the Criminal Police Department has been founded in March 1999. Since that time the administrative capacity of the Vice Squad has been strengthened by regional units and enlarged staff of the police

officers. It co-ordinates the investigation in all cases of pimping, recruiting and trafficking. The mandate of the Vice Squad includes the fight against following types of crime: child pornography, on-line child abuse in the Internet, pimping, and all kind of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Its responsibility is to collect information on persons involved in prostitution, pimping, sale, advertising or distribution of pornographic materials; to create a data base containing information on prostitutes, pimps, persons and companies actively involved in trafficking of human beings, in the involvement of minors in prostitution and in the production and dissemination of pornographic materials; to prepare reports on the situation and an evaluation of the threat;

Vice Squad carries out also information analysis. The results of investigations on suspicious companies and travel agencies, which act as recruiters, are being published. This covers also labour recruitment agencies, which offer fast and easy earnings without identifying concrete work responsibilities as well as prostitutes who have worked abroad and are recruiting women for work abroad. The information is actively disseminated among the public through mass media.

The statistics show that there were 12 criminal cases initiated in 2001. Making use of the new Criminal Law Article 165 "Trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation", the number has increased by 11 criminal cases in comparison with the year 2000.

The Criminal Procedure Code provides the special procedural protection for witnesses and victims. The Witness Protection Bureau of the Criminal Police Department is responsible for the implementation of necessary protection.

There exists close co-operation among State Police and other state or municipal institutions and non-government institutions (NGO). NGOs participate in training seminars for police officers dealing with investigation of the trafficking cases providing them with knowledge and information gained by working directly with prostitution and trafficking victims. Police on regular basis passes NGOs information about victims, who need help.

Awareness raising campaigns

The Nordic-Baltic campaign on trafficking in women, carried out during 2002 in all Baltic States, is co-ordinated by NGO's and financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Each state carries out the campaign according their specific conditions and needs.

Latvian campaign includes a TV programme about human trafficking and youth going to work aboard, production of small calendars with information about what to be aware of before signing employment contracts abroad, a radio program by and for students. The campaign includes also a seminar on trafficking in human beings for government officials, and seminars for students.

The aim of the campaign is to raise the awareness about trafficking and inform adolescents, especially young girls, about trafficking in women.

A TV Programme "Temats" has been created within the framework of the campaign. In this programme you can watch discussions between experts and public about hot problems in the society. There are two experts who illustrate the situation in Latvia and to whom main questions are directed. There are also experts sitting in the public and participate in the discussion. The aim of this programme is to inform the general public about the situation in Latvia and the global tendencies on trafficking in human beings. This programme has been recorded in co-operation with Latvian State Television and Division of Public Relations at the Ministry of Welfare.

Training seminar for governmental working group and NGO's "Human trafficking: Aspects of the problem, possible solutions and co-operation"

The Minister of Welfare has formed a governmental working group with representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Science, NGOs, municipalities, etc. On November 27-29, 2002 a training seminar for the members of this group will take place.

It should be mentioned that stereotypes about human trafficking are still widespread. This is the first seminar in Latvia on trafficking in women, where different officials from different organizations take part, which is organized by Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with NGOs.

Explanation about human trafficking, dimensions of the problem, legal acts, main ways of recruiting and smuggling, portraying of victims and work with victims, international cooperation between police force from Latvian and other countries will be the main themes in the seminar. Concrete cases of trafficking and documentary films will be showed and discussed. At the end of the training seminar there will be the last lecture (group work) on possible measures each institution represented in this seminar could do in the future.

The aims of this seminar are:

- To give knowledge and skills on human trafficking, especially on trafficking in children and women.
- To raise awareness (understanding) about importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in dealing with trafficking.
- To establish network between working group members for more effective cooperation in future.

Partners of this seminar are:

- **Ministry of Welfare**
- **Youth Health Centre Council of Latvia "Project for Prevention of Adolescent Trafficking" (PPAT)**. PPAT is being developed in response to a growing body of evidence that indicates that 1) trafficking is a burgeoning problem in Latvia, 2) the problem of trafficking is not being adequately addressed in Latvia, and 3) victims of trafficking in Latvia tend to be under the age of 25.
- **Latvian Gender problem Centre "Gender" project "Stop II Programme 2001"** Information campaign to raise the awareness of the public opinion to prevent and fight the trafficking of human beings. Dissemination of European approaches to care and support for victims through seminars and a web portal.

Other activities include: seminar for policemen and border guards and seminars in secondary schools.

Involvement of NGOs

There are a few non-governmental organizations in Latvia that are directly related to prostitution or to risk groups.

The "Gender" NGO has the closest links to prostitutes. The NGO provides education to prostitution rights on the street. Prostitutes can receive health check-ups at the centre, as well as help from a psychotherapist. The centre has opened up a well-appointed facility. It is meant for victims of human trafficking when they return to Latvia.

The NGO "Skalbes" provides psychological assistance over the phone to women who have suffered from violence.

International co-operation

Information exchange proceeds mainly through the Interpol Bureaus in the EU Member States as well as in the candidate countries.

Within the framework of the Task Force of the Baltic Sea Region, a special working group has been established to prevent trafficking in women. Representatives from EU Member states, the candidate states as well as from Russia participate in this working group. Such working group gave an opportunity for the Latvian experts to intensify co-operation and information exchange with the colleagues from the so-called destination countries.

State Police have had quite close and successful co-operation with German and Denmark police authorities. As a result several criminal cases were initiated and persons arrested. Though there is necessity to establish close contacts with Switzerland police authorities.

In the framework of the operation *Spanish Route*, which works on Daugavpils - Germany connection, 5 pimps were arrested and charged in Kassel, Germany, several others identified, 6 recruiters charged in Daugavpils, Latvia; approximately 140 victims identified.

In 2001, in Denmark Latvian and Danish joint operation was completed within Baltic Task Force framework, which resulted in arrest of several criminals in Latvia and Denmark. During this operation, based on common agreement approved in Task Force, Latvian Police officer participated as a liaison officer. From 18 prostitutes arrested in Arhus 16 were from Latvia. Danish and Latvian Police exchanged information on possible human traffickers and their victims. In the result of this exchange of information in the beginning of August Latvian police arrested a group of two persons, who was dealing with women recruiting and trafficking for sexual abuse to Denmark and Germany. Responding to the offers of Danish and German pimps, in two years time, both these persons recruited and sent women to the above-mentioned countries.