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THE TRAFFICKING OF ROMANI WOMEN AND CHILDREN: STILL A PROSPEROUS BUSINESS

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One of problems concerning the trafficking of women is still the **lack of enough comprehensive data**. Most of the statistics are based on the cases of victim assistance after Romani women and children have been trafficked. However, no information of the total number of women and children vulnerable to trafficking exists. Regarding the collection of data we can not and should not neglect another concept inferred by the OSCE AP to combat trafficking in human beings, namely that the most vulnerable segments of the population should be identified and specially designed measures should be undertaken. This is a **human rights issue** which involves vulnerable segments who are of Roma and non-Roma origin.

De-segregation of data would better assist those who are at a higher risk, especially for Romani women and children from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Their social vulnerability and subjectivity to discrimination further complicate their situation. This requires a special tailored approach and measures which take into account cultural specifics in order to achieve higher results and complete reintegration of these women and children in society.

Roma children are an even more threatened segment within this group. Norbert Ceipek, the head of the Augarten crisis centre in Vienna has recently quoted data pointing that **98 % of the Bulgarian trafficked children sheltered there are Roma children**. The Augarten Center deals with children victims of trafficking that have come to Austria as a country of destination.

Two weeks ago the Ministry of labor and social policy in Bulgaria has opened the first and, as of now, only crisis center for children victims of trafficking. A weak point in the approach of this Center is still the non-comprehensive approach towards Roma children and the lack of adequate co-operation with civil society organizations familiar with the cultural specifics of these children as recommended by the OSCE Action Plan on THB. **No Roma organizations or specialist work in the Center**. The specialists working in the Center recognize this as an obstacle in their work since they can hardly find “common language” (literary speaking also) with these children which could facilitate their social reintegration. This illustrates the necessity of employing Roma social workers and experts in this field. This should be recognized and institutionalized yet at the national level by the governmental institutions working on these problems.

Another acute problem which has been neglected so far by both, national and international institutions is the trafficking of babies (including the trafficking of pregnant mothers whose babies are sold abroad). For instance, a new-born Roma baby is sold for adoption for around 20 000 Euro.

Two years ago Bulgaria had no legislation addressing baby trafficking. It does now but this is directed only to the criminal organizations expanding this business. Harder and more severe measures in this direction would be a step forward. But this business will still flourish if the western states do not take their responsibilities as well and introduce severe legislation measures also for those who are buying the babies and thus feeding the market needs in this direction.

Recommendations:

- 1. A straightforward policy should be developed at the national and international level taking into consideration the cultural and social profile of the most vulnerable groups subject to trafficking. This means de-segregating data to show who is most vulnerable to trafficking.**

- 2. A set of measures should be developed at the national level to foster the adequate re-integration of children and women victims to trafficking. Social services in countries of origin, like Bulgaria, need to become more inclusive towards Roma communities.**

- 3. Programs and projects should include Roma experts as equal partners with organizations working in the field.**

- 4. Tougher measures (including legislation) should be developed at the national level in both countries of origin and destination. In addition, those responsible in countries of destination for fueling the demand for trafficking of babies should face criminal prosecution.**