

## THE SMILE OF THE CHILD \_ GREECE

HDIM SEP 2018, WARSAW

Marc Van den Reeck, Honorary Ambassador  
Head of International Cooperation

### TRAFFICKING

Thank you, Mr Moderator,

Dear representatives,

Ladies and gentlemen.

With 500 staff, nearly 3000 active volunteers and more than 100.000 interventions per annum, 'The Smile of the Child' is the largest NGO in Greece working in the field of child care and child protection, combating violence, poverty, health problems and disappearance.

Our organisation is among other things the national operator in Greece for the European emergency line 116000 for missing children and the European helpline for children 116111. We also run a dozen of homes throughout the country, where we raise children who have fallen victim to abuse, neglect or violence. Those are all among the children who - at one point - were at risk of falling victim to trafficking.

On top of this, there are still more than 3500 unaccompanied children in Greece, while only about one third of them are in shelters and apartments. In the meantime, the influx of migrants and refugees from Turkey continues in impressing numbers, recently more than 4000 a month. Children have more than their share in this never ending flow. Statistics of our organization's emergency and helplines seem to indicate that the number of 'cases' of migrant and refugee children running away from shelters, reports on worrying cases of disappearance and parental abductions from shelters does not actually decrease, but increase in 2018 over 2017.

It is in this dual context, domestic and migration related, that we are involved in the combat against trafficking and that we wish to formulate a few recommendations.

1. More and more systematic effort should be made by competent authorities, but also

by relevant companies and by civil society organizations to train staff and volunteers in recognizing indicators of trafficking: police, airline and shipping crews, educators, etc. At our organization we have embarked on a training program for staff and eventually volunteers, to sensitize them and to enhance their ability to identify potential or real cases of trafficking. This is an elementary ingredient in a successful prevention policy.

2. Prevention of trafficking, particularly in the case of children -which is the angle of our organization -, is best promoted when children at risk, whether from a migration background or not, are being taken care of in a holistic way, catering not only for their basic material needs, but also creating for them an environment of well-being and emotional safety. At the Smile of the Child, we have raised nearly 900 children over two decades, in a holistic way, and we have not had to deal with runaway situations. The correlation is clear, we dare conclude.

3. Serious reflection is needed about what to do with children who live under protection, at the moment that they reach the age of 18. At The Smile of the Child, we do not expell them, we keep supporting them, to study, to work, until they are and feel actually fit to spread their wings and fly out. This is fully in line with what a family does with its children; and we want to be the reconstitution of a family for those children, who have lost their initial biological family to abuse, violence, migration or for whatever other reason. The question is not irrelevant at all in the context of the present exchange on human trafficking.

4. Cross-border cooperation among civil society organizations is crucial in order to contribute effectively to the protection and the recovery of children which have fallen victim to trafficking. It is therefore important that States and multilateral organizations also encourage and support the creation and maintenance of transnational networks, in which relevant civil society organizations can share good practices, coordinate their respective modus operandi and exchange case related information.

5. Similarly, cooperation of relevant civil society organizations and public authorities is of crucial importance, especially at the level of prevention. From year long experience we know that in a case of a child going missing, the first 24 hours are of crucial importance for the success of the search and rescue operation. In order to maximize chances, smooth and well-oiled communication and operational follow-up needs to be in place among all players, including the national emergency line operator, police force and other authorities playing a role in the search and rescue.

6. Complementarily to the latter point, it is also of considerable importance that authorities involve systematically and in a timely way the potential of relevant civil society organizations to contribute to the prevention of specific cases of trafficking and to the protection of victims. Although our working relationship with police and other

competent authorities in Greece is open, structured and constructive, we evaluate that at local level and in specific cases there often is still room for substantial improvement, and we sense that this is the case in other countries as well. Sensitization of all actors, not only at policy level, but also at the local and operational level, of the need to cooperate, involve all capacities and share information, is an objective that in our perception does deserve to receive more policy attention at the public level.

Thank you.