



## **SUMMARY**

# **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: EFFICIENT RESPONSE TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN SERBIA**

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The project 'Improving prevention, protection and integration of victims of human trafficking through the development of local social policy - strengthening the coordinating role of the social welfare centres at the local level' was supported by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Social Affairs, and Veterans of Republic of Serbia.

## INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE RESEARCH

A victim of human trafficking can be anyone you have met: a woman, a man or a child. Signs that someone is the victim are sometimes visible, and sometimes they are not. People exploited through human trafficking can be next to you in the supermarket, in the bus, or in the school. Very often they refuse to accept their status of human trafficking victims, and defend the traffickers. Key reason is the fear for their own security or security of their families. According to the estimates in the 2013 annual report of the US State Department of State (TIP), around 27 million of people worldwide were exploited in 2012, but only 46,570 victims were identified. When converted into numbers there is on average 3 victims of human trafficking on every 1,000 persons.

Through labour, prostitution, or criminal activities the traffickers exploit men, women and children using force, fraud, and coercion. In this crime, people are treated as property, deprived of their human rights, which drastically shortens the lifespan of victims of human trafficking.

Beside the human rights violations, human trafficking is one of the most profitable criminal acts of modern time. International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that forced labour in 2013 brought 150, 2 billions of US dollars, and most of it was the result of sexual exploitation (ILO, 2014). Serbia is also one of the countries exposed to this phenomenon and is increasingly the country of origin of the human trafficking victims. As for the structure of victims in Serbia, it has been changing over time: 89% of the victims were sexually exploited in 2004, while 41% of victims were exploited through the sex industry in 2013, while the share of victims of labour exploitation, begging and forced marriages has increased.

Most victims of human trafficking are recruited in communities in which they live and most often by the persons they know. This raises the question how local communities and institutions on local level can address the problem. The Public Policy Research Centre, in partnership with the national Centre for Human Trafficking Victims Protection conducted a research on the potentials of institutions at local level for combating human trafficking. The qualitative and quantitative research was conducted within the project 'Improving prevention, protection and integration of victims of human trafficking through the development of local social policy - strengthening the coordinating role of the social welfare centres at the local level' which was funded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Social Affairs, and Veterans. The project in all its phases has been supported by the professionals from the social welfare centres, police, schools, branches of the National Employment Service, prosecution, courts, non-governmental organizations and local self-governments, as well as citizens.

## METHODOLOGY

The research included desk analysis of the legal and institutional frameworks for human trafficking victims' protection in Serbia, analysis of good practice in addressing the problem from other countries, two surveys and individual and group interviews.

The qualitative part of the research consisted of 21 interview with persons in risk of becoming victims of human trafficking: preliminary results have indicated that women of 20-30 years old, with low level of education and no employment, and Roma girls age 14-18 are significantly more exposed to risk factors that characterize human trafficking, so they were in the focus of research. In addition, we have conducted 27 interviews with representatives of the institutions in local communities and non-governmental organizations.

Quantitative part of the research was conducted through a survey which included 600 citizens. The survey assessed the views of citizens on human trafficking and their attitudes towards human trafficking victims. Another survey with 41 professional from the social welfare centers evaluated how much do they know about human trafficking. Surveys and interviews were conducted in June, July and August 2014.

Research findings were discussed in two rounds in each of the following cities: Pirot, Smederevo and Sremska Mitrovica. Professionals from social welfare centres, police, schools, branches of the National Employment Service, prosecution, courts, non-governmental organizations and local self-governments, have participated in the discussions. In the first round the focus was on the attempt to achieve common understanding how local community should and could address the challenges of human trafficking. The second round of the discussions examined what these institutions could do to improve readiness of the community to combat human trafficking.

## SELECTED FINDINGS - WHAT HAVE WE FOUND OUT?

### I. Prevention and identification of victims of human trafficking

Local community's capacity for the prevention of human trafficking could be observed through the level of citizens' awareness of the phenomenon and characteristics of human trafficking, ability of the system to promptly recognize and address the problem of citizens who are in a vulnerable position, and fight of the community against the corruption and crime which fundamentally endanger citizens' security. These are all mechanisms that counter the economic demand for human trafficking. This research focused on the analysis of the first two aspects.

When we talk about the level of the community's awareness we all first think how much citizens know about human trafficking, what the risks are for them, and how the victims are recruited. If citizens are informed about these topics, it is less likely that they will find themselves in a potentially risky situation leading towards the abyss of human trafficking.

- Research findings indicate that 94.4% of the interviewed citizens know about the existence of human trafficking. However, most of them do not know the key characteristics of human trafficking except that it is about selling people.
- Citizens' views are mostly shaped by stereotypes which are induced by sensationalistic coverage of the media. So, 25.4% of the citizens see human trafficking as sexual exploitation of women and girls abroad, which is often related to abductions. Three most common other answers are: kidnapping and missing of children (7.5%), organ trade in Kosovo (7.5%) and stealing of newborns from hospitals (5.6%).
- Citizens have no insights about the facets of human trafficking so that they could suspect that some situations are human trafficking cases. Only 20.6% of the citizens think that they could recognize human trafficking specifics, but the most common answer to this question was that they would have recognized the victim by a) intuition, b) generally by their behaviour, or c) based on respondents' life experience.
- If case they recognized a human trafficking situation, 87% of citizens stated that they would have reported it to the police.
- Mere 3.9% of the citizens understand that victims are recruited also by false job offers and promises about better life, and only 1 interviewee has indicated child begging as a form of human trafficking.
- 20.3% of citizens have expressed social distance i.e. intolerance towards having neighbors that are the victims of human trafficking that are just left from the chain of human trafficking.
- Prejudices towards the victims are present among the citizens and professionals also: 31.7% of professionals and 50.5% of citizens consider that the victims themselves have partly contributed to what has happened to them.

If citizens are not capable to recognize human trafficking situations, what affects local community's capacity for preventive action, and to what extent do institutions in local communities work proactively? Functioning of the local level institutions, i.e. social welfare centres, police, schools, branches of the National Employment Service, prosecution, courts, non-governmental organizations and local self-governments, primarily depends on the level of their understanding of human trafficking, and then on the development of the system of identification of victims. Our research findings have shown that:

- Professionals from social welfare centres understand that human trafficking is an act of intent\*, that victims do not need to be aware of their position, and that often human trafficking takes part within the territory of Serbia. They also know that besides physical coercion, traffickers use other methods of control.

- Professionals from social welfare centres and police can primarily recognize risk situation and human trafficking act. However, very often they do not clearly differentiate begging and human trafficking, and human trafficking and smuggling of persons.
- Professionals from social welfare centres lack clear picture how they should act during their first contact with the victim of human trafficking – and when in the process of protection of that person they should contact national Centre for Human Trafficking Victims Protection.
- Employed in schools, branches of the National Employment Service, prosecutors' offices, courts, non-governmental organizations and local self-governments are lightly and unevenly informed about the problem and phenomenon of human trafficking.
- None of the enlisted community's institutions apply methods of proactive identification of groups that are in high risk of becoming human trafficking victims.

These research findings indicate that citizens' capacities to protect themselves and help others in their local environments are limited. In addition, institutions in local communities are reactive in relation to the identification of human trafficking victims. Therefore, numerous actors in a given local community are in inferior position when it comes to identification and preventive action in the process of human trafficking.

## **II Protection of victims of human trafficking**

Activities related to combating human trafficking are mostly organized and implemented at the national level, but the reaction and protection is also expected in the local communities also. Protection of identified victims falls under competence of central institutions, which through budgetary support enable their care in local communities in which victims have been identified. Ministry of Labour, Employment, Social Affairs, and Veterans has in 2012 established national Centre for Human Trafficking Victims Protection. The Centre coordinates provision of social services to human trafficking victims, cooperates with social welfare centres, housing institutions, other organs, services and organizations, with the aim to ensure best interest and security of human trafficking victims.

- According to the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims Protection's data, victims are mostly referred to them by the police (72.2%) and social welfare centers (21.2%) in contrast to the education and health care system which did not refer single victim in the year 2013, as of when the Centre collects this data.
- Although social welfare centres play important role in the system of victims protection, their part is often exaggerated by the other systems. Unclear mandates and roles of other social security systems in this domain only add to the problem.
- Representatives of these institutions in local communities often and foremost see themselves as executors of the national level decisions, and not as decision-makers in their surroundings.
- Coordination of institutions at local level is not developed and is organized on a case-by-case basis. Systems' connections are based on personal contacts and ad-hoc common actions. This is not enough for planned improvement for combating human trafficking.
- Professionals from social welfare centres, police, schools, branches of the National Employment Service, prosecution, courts, and local self-governments do not see how combating human trafficking\* can become a goal which could unite community. In their words, community resources are limited, and annual level of identified human trafficking victims is low. Therefore this topic is not a priority.
- When combating human trafficking is set in the framework of prevention and integration, focus shifts and the field of action extends to include numerous groups in risk, which every system according to its mandate could easily recognize. Thus, professionals from social welfare centres easily identify and understand how a victim of violence, which has no possibility of economic independence, and for whom a system did not find

suitable solution (e.g. eviction of the perpetrator of the violence from home, restraining order) can become a human trafficking victim. Therefore representatives of the institutions have expressed the view at this stage it would be more appropriate carry out mapping i.e. identification of potential victims in their communities, which would be treated by appropriately designed actions of local self-governments.

These research findings indicate that the role and mandate of social welfare centres and other social and human security mechanisms is not clear to other representatives of the state and public institutions, but also to local self-governments, and citizens. Through interviews, and even more through discussions at round tables, participants have reached common understanding that limited possibilities of professionals to help beneficiaries may result in backing down to their role of professionals, wearing the mask of profession and retreating from the essential role of those who are entitled to help. In that sense, professionals are in conflict between their wish to help and limited resources at their avail, and are often limited by the mandate of the institution they represent.

### **III. Integration of victims of human trafficking**

When we talk about inclusion mechanisms it is important to stress the twofold role they play in relation to human trafficking. One of the main factors leading to human trafficking is the perception of the person that for her/him there is nothing but walls, with no doors of the community opened leading to a possibility to live decent life in that community. For that reason, citizens can even consciously decide to get into risky situations for which they know that could lead into human trafficking. In such cases prevention is primarily about creation of possibilities for an accessible and adequate education, and access to skills in demand and labour market. At the local level educational institutions and branches of National Employment Service are providers of these activities.

For that reason mechanisms that enable social inclusion of discriminated persons, persons in disadvantageous socio-economic position, or persons who are in any other way powerless, have both preventive and integration role. However, these integrative systems are slow-paced and give long term results.

When it is expected that community creates solutions for a specific problem and with a few resources, one may ask what could be done. Coordinating role of the social welfare centres in protection of victims of human trafficking also gets under review as there is a question which systems and which actions should be coordinated.

Our findings indicate that:

- Local communities still don't have resources which would enable inclusion of human trafficking victims, or of citizens who are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities in society. Neither prevention mechanisms, nor mechanisms for integration of victims, are developed to their full extent.
- One of the pillars of social inclusion is quality education. Although interviewed women and girls are aware of the importance of education for their independence, and the risks stemming from the lack of it, which could lead to any form of victimization and abuse, they don't see that they receive enough assistance in gaining the education which can prevent from this trap.
- Local labour market is not developed and thus does not offer enough possibilities for employment of citizens in unfavourable position. Practice of corporate social responsibility is not developed in researched communities. Interviewed participants have stressed that Roma women who quit school are particularly vulnerable.
- Professionals from the National Employment Service besides motivational training have not indicated any other type of support for long-term unemployed with the aim to develop their work habits and provide working experience. Programs of the National Employment Service are centralized and cannot be adjusted to the needs of certain vulnerable groups looking for employment.

In the context when not all children have access to education of the same quality, and there is no interaction between labour market and education, and demand for labour force stalls or decreases, we can say that two main channels of inclusion are blocked for citizens in unfavourable position, including human trafficking victims. Development of these two mechanisms cannot happen overnight and takes time which these citizens don't have. It is therefore necessary to look for and develop alternative inclusion mechanisms which can be faster in reaction.

## NEXT STEPS: RECOMMENDATIONS

These research findings picture features of three communities in Serbia that we have decided to assess, therefore here we present only one possible scenario. Usefulness of these findings for actors in some other communities in Serbia depends on the similarity of factors related to human trafficking. Despite the difference, we have noted some problems are common in all three communities, such as:

1. Insufficient citizens' awareness and knowledge about human trafficking;
2. Retroactive response of all social and human security institutions towards the human trafficking victims;
3. Unclear roles and mandates of these institutions in local communities;
4. Insufficiently developed mechanisms for integration of vulnerable populations, and citizens in unfavourable position, including the victims of human trafficking;
5. Lack of community mechanisms which would enable development of local responses to human trafficking.

As research findings demonstrate, anti-trafficking activities are mostly initiated and developed at the national level, but answer is expected from the local level actors too. But for this to happen, it is necessary to clearly define mandates of both national and local institutions and nominate lead/responsible ones in different phases in combating human trafficking: in prevention, protection and integration of victims.

- ❖ Social welfare centres, police, schools, branches of National Employment Service, prosecutors' offices, courts, non-governmental organizations and local self-government, as well as citizens, cannot each for themselves combat human trafficking. On the other side, their common and coordinated action is not possible in every phase of the process due to different mandates and the target groups. It is thus important to identify which institutions potentially can be so-called coordinator of the activities in a certain phase.
- ❖ When we talk about prevention, the role of local actors is the most important. Through local budgets, local self-governments can support information campaigns for general population about human trafficking, and for vulnerable groups, such as women age 20-30 with low level of education and no employment, and Roma girls, age 14-18, which are exposed to risk factors that are characteristic for human trafficking.
- ❖ Non-governmental organizations could also play important role in informing the public and citizens through the traditional and informal channels of communication, such as door-to-door actions, street manifestations, and social networks.
- ❖ As already said, education and health care institutions have not referred single victim in 2013 to the national Centre for Human Trafficking Victims Protection. Still, school and health care institutions could be crucial actor for recognizing the attempts to recruit children in human trafficking chain. Change in attitudes of school children, and specific health problems, can indicate some irregular activity and help social protection system and judiciary to react in time.
- ❖ Social welfare centres are important ally in prevention when it comes to persons who are already in the system of social protection. Many beneficiaries of the system are in multiple ways vulnerable and exposed to the risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, so the social welfare system can, with little procedure improvement, act in time and adequately react to threat.

- ❖ As previously mentioned, it is often expected that social welfare centres coordinate the actions of prevention, protection and integration of human trafficking victims. But, according to their mandate and focus, centres could only play coordinating role when it comes to the protection of the single victims. Once different systems have identified potential victims, centres can work on their protection and care. However, integration function is the responsibility of other actors in the society.
- ❖ Integration of the identified victims of human trafficking into society is one of the main challenges for local community. None of the institutions can alone succeed in that task. For example, it is necessary to engage employment service, local self-government and private sector companies, just when it comes to the activation and employment of these persons. Victims often need housing and that issue should be solved together by social welfare centres and local self-government which usually provide financial support. Many victims need health care and psychological support. In other words, integration of victims is an expensive activity, and whenever possible local communities should therefore focus on prevention.
- ❖ As resources of local communities are limited, activities should be prioritized. In the context of presented findings, our conclusion is that actions against human trafficking should be devoted to the development of mechanisms best suited to the needs of that community, whether in the domain of prevention, protection or integration.
- ❖ Lastly, it is shown that integration of vulnerable groups in society is not a mandate of any of the institutions we assessed. At the same time, there is no investment into linking of institutions and their coordination and this is exactly the activity which needs further support and financing either from the national or local level. Our recommendation is that projects fostering synergies in planning and implementation of activities within wider community system shall be further developed and supported.

In the end, it is important to emphasize that these recommendations are not universal, but represent synthesis of the research and recommendations of civil society, and professionals working in the social protection and human security institutions in these three cities. We therefore hope that these research results will serve primarily as a framework for action in the field of combating human trafficking, and that they will provide ideas about what could be done in different local communities.