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Human Trafficking in Romania: An Analysis of Prevention and Outreach Activities

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ROMANIA: AN ANALYSIS OF PREVENTION AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is a growing problem in Romania and around the world. Romania is considered a transit and origin country for human trafficking. Most victims are transported externally to more developed countries, although many victims will stay within Romanian borders. The Romanian government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders are making efforts to prevent trafficking. This descriptive study, based on a series of qualitative interviews, examines the actions NGOs, governmental organizations, and church leaders in Cluj County, Romania are taking to prevent trafficking. The strengths and weaknesses of existing programs, as well as recommendations for future action are discussed. A model for prevention, intervention and recovery of victims is also presented.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking, specifically related to sexual exploitation, is a growing concern internationally. It is defined by the United Nations as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim for the purposes of exploitation, which includes exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices, and the removal of organs (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006, p.xii).

More specifically, the United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) describes sex-trafficking in its most severe forms as when "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age" (Department of State, 2007, p.7). Prior to the TVPA, there were no laws protecting victims of trafficking. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004), the TVPA goals are to "prevent human trafficking overseas, and protect victims and help them rebuild their lives in the U.S. with Federal and state support" (para 3). Human trafficking has become a widespread international organized commercial activity and is most prevalent in the lesser developed countries. An estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year in this modern form of slavery (Department of State, 2007). The United Nations estimates that human trafficking generates \$7 to \$10 billion a year for traffickers, making it the third most profitable illicit activity after arms dealing and drug trafficking (Department of State, 2002).

While there is no single "typical victim", human traffickers generally target women and children, using powerful tactics to lure their victims into forced labor or sexual exploitation (Department of State, 2007). Victim profiles are based on a variety of factors: the background of the victim, age, gender, socio-economic status, and level of education. Beyond kidnapping, common schemes include recruitment to work abroad and promises of a better life. In another common scenario, a man may seduce a woman to fall in love and once she trusts him enough to hand over her passport, he sells her. Women are targeted as victims more often than men, but women act as tools to recruit and traffic victims as well (Surtees, 2005).

The United States' initial response to human trafficking was the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 1994. Since 2001, the U.S. Department of State has released an annual Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report in order to detail trafficking activity globally (Department of State, 2001). The 2007 TIP Report categorizes countries by level of compliance with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). There are four levels of compliance: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, or Tier 3. A country in Tier 1 is in compliance with the minimum standards outlined by the TVPA, which according to the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (2007) include:

1. The government of the country should prohibit severe forms of trafficking in persons and punish acts of such trafficking.
2. For the knowing commission of any act of sex trafficking involving force, fraud, coercion, or in which the victim of sex trafficking is a child incapable of giving meaningful consent, or of trafficking which includes rape or kidnapping or which causes a death, the government of the country should prescribe punishment commensurate with that for grave crimes, such as forcible sexual assault.
3. For knowing commission of any act of severe form of trafficking in persons, the government of the country should prescribe punishment that is sufficiently stringent to deter and that adequately reflects the heinous nature of the offense.
4. The government of the country should make serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons (Minimum Standards, para 1).

When a government is categorized in Tier 2, the government is not in full compliance, but is making a conscience effort to meet the minimum standards (Department of State, 2007). According to the Department of State TIP Report (2007), Tier 2 Watch List means a country's government is not in full compliance with the minimum standards and are making efforts to meet them but:

- The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or
- There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or

The determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year (p. 29).

If a country falls into the category of Tier 3, the government does not comply with the minimum standards and is not making an effort to meet those standards. In certain cases, countries which lack data may be classified as a special case and not assigned a Tier placement (Department of State, 2007).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ROMANIA

The root causes of human trafficking consist of a complex mix of social and individual factors. Social factors include, but are not limited to, low economic opportunities, low levels of education, underrepresented minority populations, gender differences, and family instability. Individual factors often include a desire to work abroad and going through loopholes to do so or having unreliable relationships that

It is quite difficult to enumerate the victims of trafficking in Romania, especially since Romania integrated with the European Union. The dissolving of the borders with other European countries has led to the near impossibility to obtain actual data of victims transported abroad (Gina Pop, personal communication, June 27, 2007). The data that is available is based on information collected from those who have been rescued from trafficking. In Romania, the most frequently targeted groups for trafficking are the marginalized groups including the Roma community, women, children, and those who are impoverished. For example, in 2004, 79% of victims were women. In 2003-2004, about half of the victims of trafficking in persons were originally from rural areas, but were recruited in urban areas. On average, the level of education of victims of sexual exploitation was equivalent to a middle school level of education (Surtees, 2005). Although it is impossible to know the true number of people being trafficked, in 2004, 456 victims were identified in Romania. Between 2000 and 2004, 1,054 victims were assisted in Romania, of those 1,023 were originally from Romania and 31 were from other countries (Limanowska, 2005; Surtees, 2005).

Human trafficking involves many forms of exploitation, including involuntary servitude, labor. Sexual exploitation, and sexual exploitation is the most common in Romania, surpassing delinquency, begging or forced labor. Sexual exploitation accounted for 85% of assisted victims in 2004. The majority of the assisted Romanians trafficked for sexual exploitation in 2004 were aged between 18 and 25 (62%) (Surtees, 2005).

In the human trafficking business, some countries serve as transit countries (from which humans will be taken) and other countries are destinations for these modern day slaves. Romania is both a transit country, from which victims will be recruited and then transported to countries such as Italy, Spain, and Germany. Romania is also a destination country for internal trafficking. The fall of communism in Romania followed by the booming need to globalize resulted in the highly facilitated transportation of victims across international borders. Romania lacks the necessity of visa restrictions and allows free entrance into the Schengen Region which makes monitoring for victims nearly impossible (Limanowska, 2005).

Romania is subject to the United Nations and the protocol established by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). In order to protect and assist victims and their families, the Romanian government passed Law no. 678/2001 in 2001 to combat all forms of human trafficking. To measure whether or not victims are protected, an additional law, Law no. 211/2004, was passed. In 2005, an additional piece of legislation was passed, Law no. 211/2005, which requires victims to be informed of their rights, have access to counseling and free legal assistance available to them (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, 2006). These laws are a good step to begin protecting victims; however, lenient punishments for traffickers who are caught have yet to be addressed. When traffickers are convicted, jail time varies from three to twelve years; however few traffickers receive the maximum punishment.

While law enforcement is essential, prevention should be the basis of any program aiming to address the root causes of human trafficking (Limanowska,

2005). Governments, especially those like Romania, face numerous difficulties due to populations at high risk, socio-economic problems, differences between segments of the population, massive migration, unemployment, and low levels of education. These risk factors contribute to an increased vulnerability to trafficking and create an increased need for a wide range of prevention activities.

TRAFFICKING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Romania has little information available to its citizens regarding services for victims of human trafficking and the actions that should be taken if a citizen encounters a victim of trafficking (Limanowska, 2005). One way to prevent human trafficking is to educate youth about the common lure tactics of traffickers, the effects of becoming a victim, and what actions need to be taken to help victims. One intervention option is to provide shelters to which victims can escape. In 2005, Romania had nine shelters for sexual exploitation victims where victims could go temporarily. In addition to being a place to stay, shelters also provided legal assistance and medical assistance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) assists victims financially until they leave the shelter. There are two types of shelters in Romania: government run and NGO run. The NGO shelters are more likely to offer middle to long-term stays and offer reintegration services. Currently, Law 678 encourages Romania to have 10 temporary shelters for victims to turn to. However, while staying in the government-run shelters, victims must cooperate with authorities; otherwise, the shelters will not receive funding (Surtees, 2005). Although the shelters are vital, low levels of funding, lack of rehabilitation, and short-term stays threaten their ability to truly help victims reintegrate.

The 2006-2007 Romanian National Action Plan strongly focuses on prevention of trafficking. The objectives consist of raising awareness and reducing the risk for vulnerable populations, especially the Roma communities, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. Prevention campaigns consist of educational materials about human trafficking; training individuals who may come in contact with victims, including a section in all schools' curriculum; generating economic and social opportunities to decrease poverty, the unemployment rate, and discrimination among the minority groups; and improving gender equality. Efforts are being made to have the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons and the National Authority for the Protection of the Children's Rights to collaborate in order to meet the needs of the human trafficking victim (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, 2006). Any efforts related to these objectives will strengthen the ability to reduce human trafficking in Romania.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to offer a description of the current prevention and intervention activities related to human trafficking in the Cluj County region of Romania. Attempts were made to determine the key practices and stakeholders, describe the barriers encountered in prevention of human trafficking, and offer recommendations based on this analysis.

INTERVIEW METHODS

After obtaining IRB approval via Babes-Bolyai University, interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of four professionals who work directly to combat and prevent human trafficking in the Cluj County region and four local religious leaders. On-site semi-structured personal interviews were conducted during June and July 2007. The interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Romanian and were then fully translated to English to facilitate analysis. The organizations and public institutions interviewed were chosen based on upon previous efforts regarding prevention programs. The organizations and public institutions included were Artemis Center, Ratiu Center for Democracy, the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, and County Police Department for Analyzing and Preventing Criminology. Religious leaders within Cluj included one each from a Baptist church, a Catholic church, an Orthodox church, and a Pentecostal church. The religious institutions represented were chosen based upon the majority percentage of religious affiliations of individuals in Romania.

Participants were asked to participate and informed that they could refuse to answer any questions. Permission to use names in the final report was requested and received from all participants.

RESULTS

The organizations represented in this study sample were all from the Cluj County region. The NGO activities in this area are unique as they are mostly focused on prevention. Respondents comments were coded into three categories: Outreach and Education Activities; Funding Issues; and Religious Community Response.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

The Ratiu Center for Democracy located in Turda and The Artemis Center in Cluj have both developed and contributed to campaigns in their immediate region. One activity by the Ratiu Center, assisted by 18 volunteers, set up booths downtown in Turda and asked people to fill out questionnaires about human trafficking in order to gain a better understanding of what the public knew about the topic. They also used this information to write a theatrical play about human trafficking. Recently, they have toured schools with their performance. The group also traveled to Bucharest to film the play and participated in a recorded debate. Brindusa Faur Apostol, the project coordinator in charge of the human trafficking campaigns within this organization, hopes to reach as many teenagers as possible with the theatrical play. Creating a theatrical play about this topic is also a plan for the Artemis Center, who has already tested the effectiveness of such an activity by creating and performing a play on domestic violence.

Eva Laszlo, psychologist from Artemis Center for Counseling against Sexual Abuse and Violence in Cluj, was one of the 30 participants at the IOM rehabilitation workshop that trained individuals from professions in psychology, criminology, medicine, and social work in order to prepare other individuals for reintegration assistance. Laszlo used information from this workshop to develop a rehabilitation counseling orientation within the Center. Artemis encountered their first victim of trafficking in 1999, and between the years 1999-2001, they housed 16 victims of trafficking in their shelter.

Since this shelter closed (due to lack of funding) they have continued to provide social, psychological assistance, support, and accompaniment to the doctor, police, and legal adviser for at least 26 victims (personal communication, June 15, 2007). Both organizations, along with the public institutions, have been involved with the development and distribution of print materials to education youth about avoiding human traffickers (see Figure 1). These have been posted and distributed around coffee shops in Cluj and around Turda. As the intention of this project was to gather different and relevant perspectives, the team juxtaposed the nongovernmental approach to the one pertaining to the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (NAATP), a government funded agency dedicated to prevent human trafficking in Romania and the County Police: Department for Analyzing and Preventing Criminology. Cooperation between the two organizations is very close and both can assert their collaborative efforts in prevention activities. Anamaria Simon, the Coordinator of NAATP Cluj Regional Center spoke about numerous prevention projects and campaigns developed at the national and regional level and during the last year through the medium of regional centers throughout the country. These included NGOs, shelters for victims of trafficking, and professionals in the medical field. The Department for Analyzing and Preventing Criminology helps combat human trafficking by collaborating with the institutions and NGOs that are or could potentially be involved. Gina Pop, the Coordinator for Preventing Criminal Acts in Cluj County, also mentioned collaborative efforts made with the Ratiu Center for Democracy and the Artemis Center. One event included an educational program that involved students from the Art and Design University who painted pieces on human trafficking which were displayed in the Center for Tourist Information in Turda (personal communication, June 27, 2007). The NAATP's efforts in preventing human trafficking include a hotline for victims, relatives, or for the general public who want more information about human trafficking as well as tips about working abroad. NAATP's efforts are dedicated towards reintegration assistance, but efforts have not included a shelter in this region, professional counseling services from psychologist, or assistance from social workers. The moral support that they provide for victims is very helpful, though, as the criminal trials can last up to one year and traumatized victims can give up if they are not morally supported (Gina Pop, personal communication, June 27, 2007).

FUNDING ISSUES

Lack of funds was a difficulty frequently cited by both the NGOs and public institutions. Governmental agencies lacked funds as Cluj County was not considered as high of a risk area as other areas in Romania; therefore, financial requests are rarely funded (Ana Maria, personal communication, June 27, 2007). Also, due to the lack of partnerships among organizations there is competition for what limited funding is available. Due to lack of funds, volunteers must play an instrumental role in the NGOs' activities. To limit this financial competition and strengthen their position to help victims, agencies are in the beginning stages of creating a regional network in Transylvania. This attempt was spearheaded by the Department for Analyzing and Preventing Criminology and The Ratiu Center for Democracy along with assistance from other agencies. The County

Police Department for Analyzing and Preventing Criminology and the NAATP are specifically motivated to collaborate because of the general lack of funding in the western part of the country. Because there is more trafficking activity in eastern Moldova, most funding is focused there. A functioning network of NGOs has been built in eastern Moldova with the help from the NAATP, which is currently developing programs, most of which are national, but focused mainly on the target population in eastern Romania. However, these programs are less appropriate to the Cluj County region in Western Romania where the target population is different, thus the messages are less effective.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY RESPONSE

A third piece of this project was to seek out the position of the Church, as an institution, toward human trafficking. Local leaders of the Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches were interviewed. The first two were the most representative churches of the Romanian population, and the second two were included in an attempt to comprehend the large spectrum of possible interactions with trafficking. Awareness of this critical issue, as well as the strong belief in human value and dignity, led all four church representatives to collaborate and to be involved in a regional network. Only one of the church leaders (the Catholic priest) had been approached by victims. He had encountered two cases of trafficking and he emphasized his resentment towards the impossibility of helping them more. He spent time talking to them and gave them money to buy a train/bus ticket that enabled them to get to a safer place (personal communication, July 12, 2007). All four religious leaders asserted that the Church can be included in prevention programs and should play an important role. Although priests do not receive any special training regarding human trafficking in seminary school in Romania, a step forward has been made by IOM who approached the Orthodox Church to inform the priests about human trafficking and to train them to respond if a victim does approach them. The Orthodox priest reported that although no victims have approached him personally and he believed none of his colleagues had been approached. Still, he and his colleagues address human trafficking in their sermons because they wanted to offer a perspective about this problem especially to the youth in the church (personal communication, July 12, 2007).

One issue that the religious leaders mentioned was that there is often no distinguishment made between a prostitute and a victim used for other types of labor by the NGOs, but Church representatives revealed that they believed it was important to distinguish between the two. They each stated that they make a distinction between the two and the treatment they would offer. All leaders strongly discouraged prejudging and disrespectful actions towards any human being, despite past events.

THEORETICAL MODEL

Based on the interviews, a theoretical model of organized intervention was developed, dividing the responsibilities and time-framing them, identifying which entity should be involved at which time and which organizations can be contacted for support (see Figure 2). There are three phases in which those stakeholders can take action in: prevention, rescuing, and recovery. As a first step, all organizations can be involved in a

Ho et al.: Human Trafficking in Romania: An Analysis of Prevention and Outreach prevention and outreach campaign to raise public awareness about the problem and the opportunities for intervention. Any prevention campaign should systematically address each risk factors and target the messages towards individual audiences with a high risk of being trafficked, according to the characteristics of that region. National campaigns are often not well targeted to one audience. Since their spectrum is too large, the message does not get through. For example, when designing a campaign in a region where most of the young people leave the country for work have only middle school education, the activities need to aim at discouraging school abandonment among students. It is also important that these materials be displayed in places frequented by the target audience, such as bars and coffee houses, rather than on the streets or during social events.

While all stakeholders should be involved in prevention activities, only NGOs and public institutions are responsible for intervention activities. The last phase of action is recovery. During this phase all stakeholders should be present. NGOs can help assist and reintegrate victims into society by offering social and psychological assistance as well as opportunities to develop professional skills. Public institutions can make sure victims get their lives back together and punish those individuals who committed crimes against them. Religious leaders are able to help restore faith in the victims and offer spiritual guidance. Individuals within churches and in the general community can provide support and welcome victims so they can be reintegrated into the community. Existing victims need to have a support system; if they do not, then they will be more vulnerable to be trafficked again.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations for improving prevention and intervention activities

1. Encourage government officials to help strengthen international borders. Border control and security is a major concern because the borders are open.
2. Include additional information on human trafficking in school curricula to educate youth.
3. Create a regional network of organizations committed to the prevention of human trafficking to collaborate and share resources.
4. Promote hotlines to assist families, victims, or individuals who might encounter a victim.
5. Inform professionals and the general public on what should be done if they encounter victims that need help.
6. Include individuals from the target population in all outreach efforts.
7. Continue efforts to form a centralized data system and increase inter-institutional cooperation. A national database would allow access and constant exchange of information between NGOs and at the same time monitor the implementation of the National Strategy against Trafficking in Persons.

CONCLUSION

Human trafficking is a major issue worldwide and specifically in Romania. NGOs and public institutions are making efforts to prevent trafficking among youth, but there needs to be a stronger focus on prevention. Partnerships need to be formed and NGOs

and public institutions need to create a network that makes it more convenient for them to work together. NGOs and public institutions should also include churches in their network, as well as prevention campaigns.

If churches, communities, schools, NGOs, the Romanian government, professionals working in occupations mostly exposed to vulnerable populations, and the youth in Romania collaborate, then prevention activities would reach far more people. When someone becomes a victim, the key stakeholders can intervene to assist the victim. A protocol needs to be created, so when individuals encounter a victim, they have been properly trained to respond effectively. The future of trafficking lies in the hands of these stakeholders, their ability to reach out to potential and current victims, as well as the government. Their collaboration is essential to end the tragedy of today's version of slavery.

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FIGURE 1. A BOOKLET INCLUDING 10 COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING. THE TEXT TRANSLATES AS “YOU COUNT, NOT THE PROMISES!” AND THE GRAPHIC SHOWS A FEMALE FIGURE WITH VARYING AMOUNTS OF ROMANIAN LEI DRAWN ON HER BODY PARTS.



Figure 2. A model identifying the type of action each stakeholder can take to prevent or intervene in human trafficking

