



Länsstyrelsen  
Stockholm

# Study visit report Bulgaria

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration for Victims of  
Trafficking and Foreign Persons in Prostitution in Sweden

19-22 May 2014 / Sofia, Septemvri, Sliven – Bulgaria

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# Foreword

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Bulgaria is a source, a transit and destination country for women and children who are subjected to sex trafficking but also women, men and children subjected to forced labor<sup>1</sup>. In 2013 538 persons had been subjected for human trafficking in Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>.

During the last years Sweden has experience a rising numbers of migrants from Eastern Europe looking for new opportunities to support themselves and their families. Many of them belong to minorities who left their country due to discrimination and social exclusion. According to the latest study, made by the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, EU-citizens subjected to human trafficking in Sweden are for the most part from Bulgaria and Romania<sup>3</sup>. The study identifies about 30 children subjected to sex trafficking and between 40-50 children subjected to trafficking for other purposes<sup>4</sup>.

The aim of this document is to provide background information and best practice regarding the work against human trafficking in Bulgaria. The document is based on a study visit in May 2014 made by representatives from the social service and members of the National Task Force against Prostitution and Human Trafficking (NMT). The study visit was executed within the project; *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration for Victims of Trafficking and Foreign Persons in Prostitution in Sweden*; lead by the County Administrative Board of Stockholm in cooperation with IOM Country Office in Finland.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 2014, s.111

<sup>2</sup> The UNODC Global Report 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Utsatta EU-medborgare i Sverige, Lägesrapport ur ett människohandelsperspektiv, Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, Rapport 2014:10, s. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, s. 37.



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## May 19 / Monday

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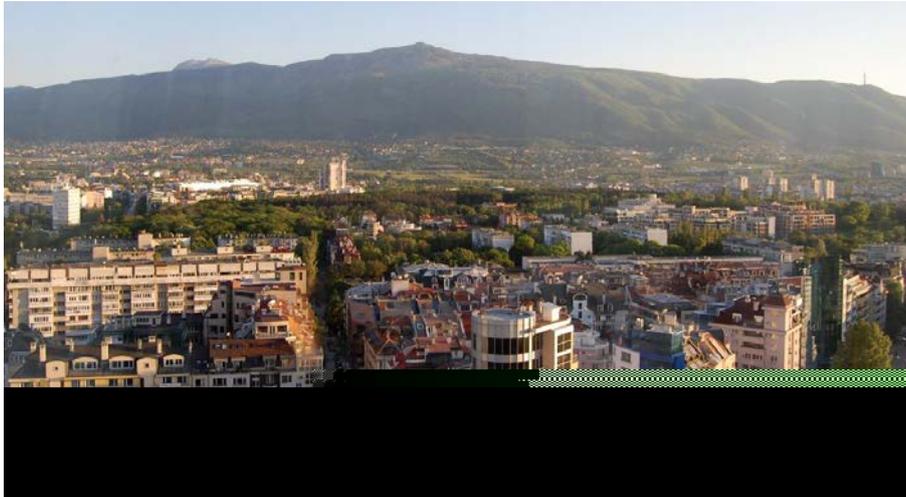
### **Meeting with Ms Chloé Taillard Yévenes, IOM Paris**

*IOM transit assistance to voluntary returnees and victims of trafficking” at Charles de Gaulle airport*

The meeting took place in the Terminal where we were waiting for the flight to Sofia. Originally we planned to meet Chloé there, but unfortunately she could not enter in the international area of the terminal. So two other IOM staffers joined us and took the whole group outside the transit area to meet with Chloé.

We had the meeting at a café where Chloé told the group about how IOM operations work at the airport. She provided some statistics concerning the number of returnees and the number of victims of trafficking returning through Paris. After that she answered questions from the participants and we went back to the gate with the help of the IOM personnel.

Despite this small detour, it was important for the participants to see how IOM operates in the airports and how returnees are assisted.



## May 20 / Tuesday

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### **Meeting with the State Agency for Child Protection**

*At the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy*

Bulgaria signed the CRC in 1991, but it took 10 years to transpose it into national legislation. The Bulgarian Child Protection Act entered into force in 1/1/2001. It recognizes children as bearers of rights, instead of solely an object of protection.

Working with children does not only require technical knowledge, but commitment as well. The State Agency for Child Protection is the only national body specialized in child protection. In 2008, it adopted a Child Protection Strategy, a 10-year plan. The strategy has, as its priority, the deinstitutionalization of child protection organizations. The National Child Protection Board has representatives from 28 regions and also has members from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education. The board develops policies regarding child protection. The agency has achieved many objectives concerning combat of trafficking in human beings.



As families and children start moving around the EU, the trafficking situation started getting worse. The main driver of trafficking is poverty. Bulgarian children have been forced to begging, petty crimes and sexual exploitation (sometimes even by their own family). Most children come from Roma minorities. They lack education, mainly because some families do not understand the importance of education for their children. Moreover,

they can be trained in pickpocketing from the age of 3. The training starts by observing other children pickpocketing. Girls are commonly exploited for this purpose; they start pickpocketing at the age of 10. They are more vulnerable to trafficking since they usually spend less time in school than boys. They stop pickpocketing when they turn 18, as they are afraid to go to jail, and then start training the younger ones.

Regarding the legal capacity of the State Agency for Child Protection, the Agency obtains information on victims of trafficking in human beings from the police. They follow families that take children out of the country for more than two years. The National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB) is also involved in this process. The agency provides licenses for organizations involved in the protection of children. They also ensure the quality of the service. In 2005, with the help of IOM, they started organizing the National Referral Mechanism. This is a quick and effective mechanism that includes institutions at a national, regional and local level.

Instances of trafficking in human beings abroad are commonly informed by diplomats, the NCCTHB and the international police. They coordinate the implementation of national phone lines, website and other information tools. There are 20 crisis centers in Bulgaria, including 5 that can accommodate families. Cases of trafficking in human beings are monitored for 1 year after the return. The government also imposes a 2 years ban for children willing to leave the country. In addition, the cases are reported to the prosecutor, who collects the necessary evidence for the case.

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Number of cases</b>	48	47	66
<b>Number of repatriations</b>	11	12	24
<b>Measures to prevent reincidence</b>	32	33	42

In 2013 there were 60 cases, of which 32 were girls and 28 boys. It was also noticed that there was an increase in trafficking for the purpose of begging. Common countries of destination include Greece, Spain, UK, Slovakia and Sweden (which had 4 cases). Concerning the types of exploitation:

- 10 were exploited for sexual purposes (all girls)
- 18 were exploited for pickpocketing (14 girls; 4 boys)
- 29 were exploited for begging (7 girls; 22 boys)
- There were also 7 cases of the so-called “children on the move”. Those are children that can be at risk as they travel with their families around the EU.

Current challenges faced by the State Agency for Child Protection:

- No resources to provide for returns;
- Little cooperation with competent authorities in countries of destination;
- Penal measures against parents need to be strengthened.

**What about cases where the child has moved to another country with a neighbor or a friend of the family and they have the authorization of the parents?**

In these cases the adult might have the power of attorney to decide on some issues for the child, but the authorization does not grant parental rights to the adult.

**Who should public authorities in the country of destination contact, in case they have a child at risk?**

Public authorities can contact the local Bulgarian embassy. They can also contact the State Agency directly, but diplomatic missions have an obligation to report to the competent authorities.

**Who is contacted after a case is denounced?**

Contact state agencies first and after authorities on a local level. State agencies compile all the information from foreign countries. In cases in which the child needs to return, the child would go through a risk evaluation. The risk evaluation provides information about the living conditions, family income, criminal records and the frequency of travel/moving.

**How to approach cases where adults are abroad but the children remain in Bulgaria?**

The same procedure takes place. The Agency will investigate where the child is living and the family income. It might happen that the child needs to stay with a guardian for a while in cases where one of the parents cannot be responsible for the child.

**In cases of exploitation for begging, is there an organized crime network involved or people travel on their own?**

Begging is usually organized and those begging need to pay a daily rate to the traffickers.

**Meeting at the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**

The presentation started with some statistics about the population in Bulgaria, 85% are Bulgarian, 10% Turkish and 5% Roma. The NCCTHB was established under the Council of Ministers, the office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Interior. The legal framework includes:

- Combat Human Trafficking Act;
- Section on the Penal Code;
- National Referral Mechanism.

The EU GRETA oversees the Commission. The Commission has received positive comments from GRETA. The Council of Ministers has a framework, which is a collective and coordinated body of organizations that work on counter trafficking, as seen in the Bulgarian National Referral Mechanism, see

<http://lastradainternational.org/lsidocs/Bulgarian%20NRM.pdf>.

In November 2013 the EU Directive 2011/36 was fully transposed, for example there is no criminalization of victims anymore. Financial compensation is provided to the victims, in cases where Bulgaria is the country of destination and when it is the country of origin. Bulgaria is mainly a country of origin, but in the last year it also became a transit country. In addition, it has been a country of destination during the summer. Sweden is one of the main countries of destination, especially during the berry picking season.

The Commission takes into consideration the changing nature of the crime of human trafficking; consequently, the Bulgarian response to human trafficking focuses mainly on the root causes of trafficking. Common root causes are:

- poverty;
- lack of information;
- lack of education;
- lack of labor regulation.

Some of the methods of recruitment include:

- marriage proposals;
- “lover boy” phenomenon;
- internet extortion;
- misleading advertisements for working abroad.

The main risk groups are:

- young women, 18-25, with mental disabilities (on sexual exploitation cases);
- people with disabilities;
- Roma minorities (for begging).

The National Program on Trafficking in Human Beings focuses on:

- development of long-term strategies to combat trafficking;
- updating legislation;
- Prevention (all following methods are complementary):
  - at schools and universities;
  - in Roma communities;
  - through communication campaigns addressing root causes;
  - through involvement with the private sector;
  - through involvement with international partners.
- Training and capacity building of:
  - non-state actors such as NGOs and religious communities;
  - government bodies and the judiciary;
  - refugee agencies.
- Reintegration and support:
  - the NCCTHB has 2 state owned shelters for adult female victims of trafficking, it also cooperates with NGOs if accommodation is needed;
  - there are other centers which can protect victims of trafficking, but they also serve people with other needs.
- Data collection:
  - NCCTHB is responsible for all data collection concerning trafficking in human beings (for example, in 2013 there were 29 cases of sexual exploitation related to Bulgaria);
  - the Commission provides official statistics both on official legal cases involving Bulgaria or Bulgarian nationals as well as those reported as alleged victims of trafficking;
- Some of the good practices include:
  - the creation of the website [www.antitraffic.government.bg](http://www.antitraffic.government.bg);
  - working with empowering minorities (so they can help the work within minorities);
  - work with teachers in high school and some universities;
  - meeting ambassadors of the main countries of destination for human trafficking, for example Sweden, mainly concerning berry pickers.

**In cases of exploitation for begging, is there an organized crime network involved or people travel on their own?**

Organized crime is often involved.

**How to approach Roma minorities?**

It is better to work with them instead of working for them, finding facilitators from the minority. Traditional Roma communities can be a barrier as well.

**How do cases of selling new born babies take place?**

Some pregnant women travel to Greece to give birth there. The men then register the child in Greece and in this way they can arrange to sell babies to other places.

**Meeting with the Border Police representative  
Mr. Svetlyo Tanev**

The Border Police was the first organization dealing with trafficking in human beings in Bulgaria. The army used to control the border areas until 1998, when the service was transferred to the Border Police. The Border Police serves along borders, including those at the Black Sea and also airports (even those used just for cargo). There are a total of 34 border offices in the country; they are responsible for 36 border checkpoints. On borders with EU countries the control is more rigorous and they use more developed equipment to prevent trafficking.

The Criminal Intelligence and Surveillance Unit are responsible for:

- all crimes related to the borders;
- cases of trafficking in human beings (when they have an expanded mandate);
- work in cooperation with the Migration Directorate;
- refugees, as they will be unified under the same agency. Bulgaria has been subjected to a major influx of refugees from countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Border Police is the most involved body with cases of trafficking in human beings. The staff members have been trained at a national and international level. The staffers need to be trained in both international and national legislation. They have also been working with several international organizations, for example IOM. The Border Police has been involved during the development of counter trafficking policies. It is also the body that is first involved on THB cases as international trafficking needs to go through borders. Both victims that leave the country and those who enter the country will meet border agents.

The Border Police has a victim centered approach, therefore it is important for the staff to be aware of THB indicators (which include all forms of trafficking, not only for sexual exploitation). The Border Police collects evidence for cases of human trafficking, so that they can be effectively prosecuted. There are several good practices collected by the border police while preventing trafficking, including cases being prevented at airports and other borders. For example, recently 2 girls were intercepted being taken to Greece. The most important issue for the Border Police is to prosecute traffickers and seek their conviction, in this way it has cooperated with EUROPOL and INTERPOL in some cases. They have also monitored cash flows through FOREX and Money Gram in an attempt to stop the cash flows to traffickers.

	2012	2013	2014 (until May)
<b>Number of cases</b>	56	51	-
<b>Number of victims</b>	147	197	-
<b>Number of traffickers detected</b>	91	109	-
<b>Number of active investigations</b>	-	71	57
<b>Number of charges pressed</b>	71	60	-
<b>Number of convictions</b>	6	8	-

*The statistics provided by the Border Police*

**Who is responsible for the investigation on THB, the Border Police or other bodies?**

The Border Police is often the first body to identify the victims. It can use all legal methods to collect evidence. After that the case is handed to the Office of the Prosecutor. The prosecutor in Bulgaria has investigative powers. Under Bulgarian Law, an investigator or prosecutor is supposed to initiate an investigation at the National Investigation Service. Many victims refuse to provide testimony; therefore it is not uncommon for police officers to testify in human trafficking cases.

**When there is a case of organized crime which body is responsible for the case, the Border Police or the Organized Crimes Unit?**

In cases where there are 3 or more persons involved, the cases are reported by the Border Police to the Organized Crimes Unit.

**What indicators are you looking for in cases of trafficking?**

- fake ID;
- person coming from risk areas (ex: Sliven);

- risk groups;
- newly issued ID;
- people who do not know exactly where they are travelling to;
- people who do not speak the language of the place where they are travelling to;
- people who do not know what they will do in the place where they are travelling to;
- small luggage;
- behavior at the border (anxious, providing short answers, evasive);
- lack of education;
- in some cases police officers can be tipped off.

**Are there any recent trends on trafficking in human beings in Bulgaria?**

- refugees in difficult financial situation are exposed and vulnerable;
- the police have been looking into cases of trafficking for the removal of organs;
- young Bulgarian girls being trafficked for removal of ovaries

**Are there any instances of national trafficking?**

- both domestic and international cases are criminalized;
- the Border Police also handles national cases when they take place 30 km from the border, as this area is under their jurisdiction;
- there have also been cases of labour exploitation of refugees;

**Field visit to Septemvri with health mediator  
Mrs. Sabire Ramadan**

Our group met at the municipal hall in Septemvri with the health mediator. From there we went to the Roma community. Almost 1/3 of the population in Septemvri is Roma.

When we arrived at the Roma neighborhood in Septemvri, nobody was expecting us. Since our group had nearly 30 people, we could have scared the community, but fortunately that did not happen. The interpreters were worried about the fact that the European Parliament elections were close, and several politicians had recently visited the community to buy votes, something that was distressing to the locals as they perceive politicians as opportunists. They told us that “politicians just visit them in times of elections”. Politicians also promise a lot of improvements for the neighborhood in order to get votes, but that never happens which leaves the local population rather skeptical of outsiders in general. We informed them that we were not politicians and everybody formed groups to talk with the

community. Some members of the community could speak Italian, English or Spanish so it was easier to communicate with them, others could communicate with the help of the interpreters from IOM.



There were general complaints about health insurance issues, as there is no universal health care in Bulgaria. Some members of the community complained about the lack of job opportunities even for higher educated Roma. For example, one person said he had completed high school and he would like to be a driver but he could not afford a driver's license. The place was poor and the visit helped the group to have a more nuanced view of the structural problems that the Roma face in Bulgaria.

One of the points mentioned by the elderly was that the government was better during the Communist Era. It certainly was not in many aspects but apparently it was slightly better for the Roma. They were forced to work, as anybody else, but at least they had a job and some money. Moreover, their children were placed in schools with Bulgarians and could benefit from a better education. With the fall of the Communism and the move to a more democratic society, the Roma people were once again excluded from the job market and from equal education opportunities. So there was some reason for nostalgia, which cannot be easily dismissed.

In contrast, some Roma took advantage of their freedom and travelled to work abroad, saved money and started their own business in the community. This was the case of one of the persons I interviewed. He grew up in that community and went to work in Spain. He saved some money and then returned to the community where he bought some land. Now he has two companies and always needs seasonal workers, but he complained that people in the community do not want to work for him. He said people prefer to steal than work for him and that it was actually hard for him to hire people there. But he was able to grow his company; he had built a new house, bought more land to expand his agricultural business and two new cars.

However, he was clearly an exception in the community. Most people would work for an average of 50 euros per month. Some said that was the reason they needed to go and steal in other places. This is also the reason why they go abroad to work for very low wages. Even lower wages abroad can be much better than the salary they can get in Bulgaria. They informed us that some of the places where they often go to work are Germany and Greece (for agricultural work mainly) and Poland and UK (working in construction sites).

Some of the children were happy with the school and they had learned to read. Families can get 18 euros/month per child from the government. Many children collect metal to recycle and in this way they get some money for their families. Some do not have their basic needs covered, such as electricity or running water. There were about 25 houses in the village that did not have running water (ca. 150 persons). Roma people that live in the countryside are usually better off than those who live in big cities. They have access to the fields, which means seasonal jobs and cheaper food. The situation tends to be worse for Roma that live in urban areas, as they are inclined to live in secluded areas or “ghettos”, with worse living conditions than those living in rural areas.

## May 21 / Wednesday

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### Field Trip to Sliven

*At the Nadezhda Roma Neighborhood with health mediator Ms. Natasha Todorova*

When our group arrived at the Roma neighborhood we first met a doctor responsible for a local clinic in the area. He told us about the current situation of the clinic, its budget, recurring needs and other important issues regarding the Roma neighborhood.

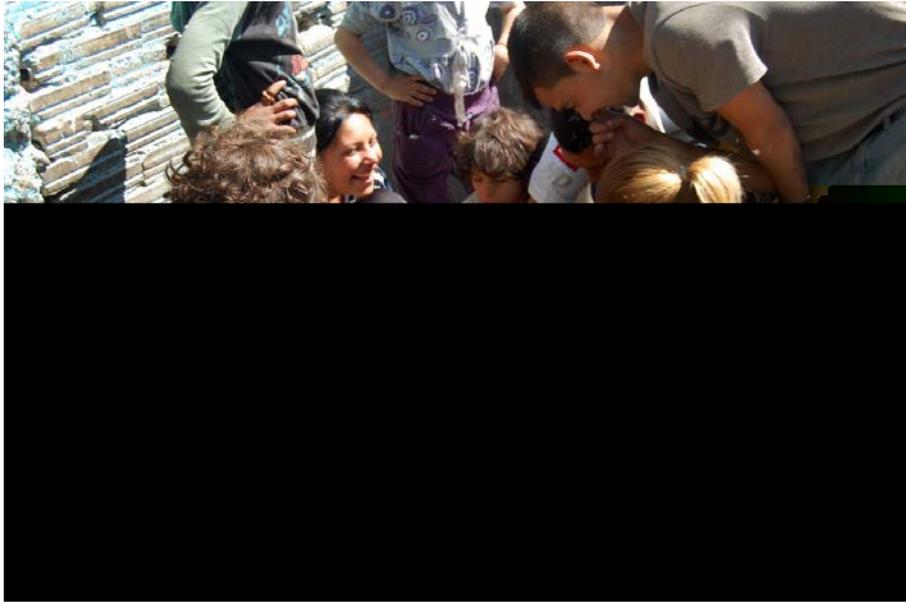
First he told us about the structure of the clinic. There is 1 doctor helping some days of the week and 3 health mediators who cover 2 Roma neighborhoods. They work directly with the population trying to figure out solutions for the families living in the community. Their work includes education, health advice, social work, reintegration and rehabilitation. The health mediators are a bridge between the Roma community and the services provided by the government. They inform people about their rights and duties. In order to do their work, they need to follow national and regional guidelines on how to conduct their work.

Most frequent health conditions in the neighborhood we visited are hypertension, diabetes, strokes, lung diseases and gynecological problems. Since most Roma in that neighborhood do not have health insurance, they would not have access to doctors and nurses without the local clinic. The clinic also offers prenatal services for women who do not have a health insurance. Additionally, the clinic provides health information for members of the community.

The budget for the whole clinic is 18000 EUR per year. Within this budget they need to handle STD cases and pregnancy. They perform ca. 8000 births per year. The child mortality rate is 21/1000. The work of raising awareness would be very difficult without the help of the health mediators; mainly because most of them come from the same community and understand the needs of the locals.

Following the initial briefing at the clinic, the group was divided in 3 and they followed the health mediators around the neighborhood. The same alert about potential tensions related to the EU elections was raised, but once again this did not stop the groups from visiting the neighborhood. During the field trip, the health mediators explained more about their practical work and the community itself.

Some Roma live in very poor conditions, but that depends on which subgroup they belong to. For example, musicians tend to be wealthier because they frequently play in weddings. The barefoot group was the poorest in the community. Different groups live in different quarters and



even though the groups hardly mix, they do live in peace. It is not uncommon for a Roma to get married with another Roma from the same group when the person comes from another city or country.

Boys usually study longer than girls and often complete high school. Girls tend to drop out on the 5th or 6th grade. That happens mainly because boys normally get married when they are 17 and girls when they are 14 or even earlier. Thus many girls need to drop out school in order to get married. Most children attend school from the age of 7, but the dropout rates are still very high.

The church has been an active player in the community, helping raising awareness about the rights of women, reintegration of former prostitutes, empowerment and education. Many of the Roma in the neighborhood were Turkish and in this way many were Muslims. Roma Muslims observe holidays and religious traditions, some have converted to Christianity recently due to the work of churches in the area. Nowadays, religious leaders are the most influential leaders in the community.

Many Roma die of treatable diseases. Poverty is the main problem of the community. We were invited by a local woman to visit her house. The house was very small, cold and humid. She told us that she did not have any money and that in order to get her documents she was selling her clothes. Poverty is widespread in the community but there are few places that look wealthier.

Mapping of problems can easily be done, as the groups that share the same quarter have similar difficulties. For example, from the quarter where the poorest people live, very few would go abroad to work. Usually those who have some money and education are more likely to go abroad. Therefore, the health mediators could focus more on prevention and awareness of human trafficking in those areas that had more vulnerable people.

In addition, we also learnt that there is more prostitution in wealthier areas. Both single and married women are exposed to prostitution in Bulgaria and abroad. Those who work abroad may be forced by their husbands to send money home in order to provide for their children.

### **Meeting with representatives from Médecins du Monde**

After the field trip our group went to meet with Médecins du Monde while the SMB group went back to Sofia to visit Fakulteta, one of the largest Roma neighborhoods in Bulgaria. Médecins du Monde has 4 workers in Sliven: 3 health mediators and 1 nurse. They started working in Sliven in 2009 and they are very active in Roma communities. As a matter of fact, all workers live in the Roma neighborhood that we visited. Médecins du Monde work mainly with health issues and the work in Sliven focus on family planning and prevention. Most public services do not reach the Roma, in this way health mediators are important to build a bridge between the government health services (for example vaccination) and the Roma community.

Médecins du Monde had previously done a project on pregnancy and hygiene; but family planning became a more pressing need in the communities they work, so now they have been educating people on how to use contraceptives. Their work has been successful and they currently cover not only Roma communities, but the whole region of Sliven. They do individual and family consultations for women who do not have a health insurance. They also refer patients to proper hospitals when needed. Médecins du Monde and the Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association can help funding health insurance for those who cannot afford it.

The education and awareness raising part of their work is done with different target groups. They are divided by gender and age, with classes for teenage boys, teenage girls, adult men and adult women. In cases where husbands do not allow their wives to participate in the classes, the health mediators talk with husbands or mothers-in-law to convince them of the importance of sexual education. They prioritize working with mothers-in-law, since they decide several issues concerning their households. Each group has 4 sessions in which they can learn about family planning, contraceptives and even human biology. Even though most Roma have children they do not know about their bodies and there is a lot of misinformation in this area.

Women willing to take contraceptives need to talk to the health mediators first. It is hard to motivate the Roma to participate in the classes, especially if they do not see any benefit in it. During the first course they gave small gifts to motivate the Roma, but now the gift is a consultation with a doctor. It is very hard for the health mediators to work in the community, yet even harder for outsiders. The Roma community does not easily trust in people that do not belong to their community.



The health mediators visit schools to raise awareness and one of their strategies to reach youngsters is through the film *The Young Bride*. They use the film to talk about the consequences of having early marriages and the risk of early school dropouts. They also teach girls in schools about contraceptives. Furthermore, they work on prevention and identification of STDs.

One of the health mediators started working as a cleaner in Médecins du Monde. She liked the work of the organization and decided to finish her studies in order to join the health mediators. She is currently working with the Roma musicians and the Turkish Roma. Since she has always lived in the community she could explain more about Roma traditions. The Roma neighborhood that we visited had 4 groups. The differences concern mostly the traditions that they follow, but there have been no conflicts between the groups. Some characteristics of the Turkish Roma are:

- lower rates of literacy;
- better lifestyle, mainly due to better hygiene;
- less children, but also more abortions;
- better income because they are more business oriented (also import and export goods);
- they have a higher level of professionalism (although some are traffickers or pimps);
- Roma traffickers recruit mainly Bulgarian girls for sexual exploitation, only on rare occasions they recruit poor girls from the community;

- Turkish women are more difficult to talk to as they do not like to share about their lives. They are often accompanied by their mothers-in-law;
- They consider themselves better than the Bulgarian Roma;
- Not all of them are originally Turkish, even though some speak both Turkish and Romani.

Both Turkish and Bulgarian Roma tend to get married very young. Girls usually finish primary school around the age of 13-14. If they want to go to high school, they usually need to change to another school which is far from the community. This can lead people to believe that the girl is indecent for the mere fact of “mixing” to other students, as Roma consider Bulgarians indecent. For this reason it can be very hard for a girl to get married after she is 14, since she is not considered chaste anymore. In addition, it is also harder for Roma to get married with Bulgarians.

The health mediators gave us an example of a girl who went to high school and completed her studies. When she returned to the neighborhood she was rejected by everyone. The mere fact that she had studied with Bulgarians implicated that her virginity was compromised. Therefore, it is common for families to arrange marriages for girls at an early age. Education is not the main threat in this case; it is more the implication that the girl might lose her virginity that becomes a problem.

However, some things are slowly changing. Different sub-groups of Roma have different opinions on education, for example musicians are more forward thinking. Yet, many girls are not allowed to learn how to play musical instruments. Some families are now challenging such traditions and have sent girls to learn how to play instruments outside the community. They are bullied because of that but they have the support of the local church which works towards empowering women.

Roma families only expect the girls to have children (especially boys) and take care of the family. Women that cannot have children can be divorced. The health mediators have also tried to teach that infertility is not just a problem for women. Selling new born babies is also an issue at the Roma community. The selling of children is not a Roma tradition but has happened due to poverty during the last two decades.

Human trafficking is quite common in the neighborhood, both concerning prostitution as well as selling new born babies. Some Roma communities are more literate, which helps when raising awareness about the risks of trafficking; however, there is also more prostitution in wealthier areas. There are other organizations working on trafficking in cooperation with Médecins du Monde. The organization Thirst for Life focuses on trafficking in persons and the Roma Health Mediators have a project targeting male prostitutes.

### **How to approach Roma communities in Finland and Sweden?**

- Find people from their community to work with them, as it is very difficult for outsiders to reach them. Working with national Roma communities might be the best option. Médecins du Monde initially tried to work with outsiders and it was not successful in Bulgaria. This scenario changed after they hired health mediators from the communities.
- Non-state actors, including NGOs and religious organizations, have had a positive influence in the community as Roma tend not to trust the government.
- Develop long-term projects. Training Roma so they can become health mediators has been a good strategy. If people trust the mediators they will eventually trust those behind the mediators. Roma mediators speak the language of the community and know its culture, so they can be more effective.
- Developing relationships and letting them get to know the social workers might help to build the trust needed.
- Trust is very important for Roma. More important than technical knowledge. Therefore, being friendly, smile and have a positive attitude helps more than anything else.
- The Roma will change when they see the benefits of changing.

## May 22 / Thursday

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### **Welcome and briefing at IOM Sofia**

The group had the last official meeting at the IOM office in Sofia. The participants started the visit by getting to know IOM's operational personnel at the airport in Paris and finished by visiting the local office in Bulgaria. This helped many to see how comprehensive the work of IOM is.

The IOM Officer in Charge in Bulgaria explained about the work of IOM in the country and opened the session for questions and also to hear about impressions of the participants. The participants noticed the level of poverty in the places where we visited, but also observed the efforts of those working to combat the root causes of human trafficking in the neighborhoods.

### **How does the reintegration of former prostitutes take place?**

It was explained that usually those who return do not know what to expect. Another challenge is that they are used to get "easy money". Since 2008 there has been no funding from the government for working with reintegration of former prostitutes. All IOM programs are funded by the IOM sending missions. Since 2011, the National Referral Mechanism has been a good tool and many governmental agencies have been trained by IOM to combat trafficking in persons. Also, since the ascension of Bulgaria to the EU, the number of returns has decreased as many victims of trafficking prefer to stay in the country of destination or move to other countries within the EU.

### **What about migration flows and referral of victims of trafficking?**

Migration flows are seasonal. Roma communities are very mobile and organized so they know where the best "job" opportunities are.

When persons become victims of trafficking, for instance when they do not receive the money they were promised, they can contact IOM in the country of destination. Nonetheless, IOM is commonly contacted by social workers dealing with such cases. The local office then does the risk assessment of the case and sends the information to the country of origin.

The country of origin on its turn will contact the local authorities, such as state agencies and police. They will also provide assistance at the airport and check the possibilities of shelter, medical and psychological support. After such analysis takes place, they can decide whether or not the country of destination can proceed with the case.



### **What are the most common methods of recruitment?**

Nowadays recruitment is not as violent as it was before. Traffickers realized that it is safer for them not to use violent means while exploiting victims. About 98% of the victims of trafficking in Bulgaria are Roma. The government estimates that there are about 33 000 children undocumented, something that can help traffickers while recruiting their victims.

### **What campaigns has IOM developed in Bulgaria?**

IOM developed a campaign sponsored by the UK concerning advice to migrants. In addition, a 24 hours phone line was created for people to call and ask questions about work regulations and conditions in the UK. The organization distributed flyers and material at local employment offices and on the internet. The campaign was very successful as it reached a targeted public. IOM Sofia believes that targeted campaigns are much more effective than general prevention campaigns, since the latter in most cases do not reach vulnerable people.

Most NGOs choose to work with prevention because it is easier than dealing with reintegration or addressing root causes of human trafficking. Projects on integration of Roma have also been problematic. The government and the EU have spent millions of euros on such projects without any success. Therefore, the majority of the society is not inclined to approve money being spent on integration of Roma as those projects do not seem to work.

Nevertheless, long term reintegration programs have been effective. IOM has worked with such methods and there are positive results from people that returned to Bulgaria and found accommodation, access to education, job training, among other activities. As an example, one victim of trafficking from Switzerland decided to return to Bulgaria through IOM. She had learned Italian and she liked photography. IOM found a job for her at an Italian restaurant and used part of the reintegration money to pay for her salary. The agreement was that she would work for 6 months at the restaurant being paid by IOM and if the restaurant liked her work she could be hired after that period. She managed to do a good job as a hostess and continued on her job. IOM also sponsored her with a course in photography

and now she also works as a photographer. She has her own company and her own website, which generates enough income for her. In this manner, IOM reintegration projects tend to be an effective tool to avoid re-trafficking of vulnerable persons.



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