

**Statement by the European Roma Rights Centre on the Occasion of the
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Human Trafficking and Roma: A victim's perspective

Research and media reports about human trafficking and Roma have focused on Roma as perpetrators. However, the experience of Roma as victims has, in most cases, been neglected.

In 2009-10, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and People in Need (PiN) conducted pioneering research on how human trafficking affects Roma as victims.

The research, carried out in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, indicated that trafficking in persons affects Roma disproportionately. This study also firmly establishes that trafficking is not a "cultural practice" of Roma. Rather, Romani individuals and communities are highly vulnerable to trafficking due to a number of socio-economic conditions such as discrimination, poverty and exclusion. Furthermore, Romani women and children are particularly vulnerable to this practice.

While Roma constitute between 3% and 10% of the population of these countries, estimates about the representation of Roma among trafficked persons in these countries are several times higher than the proportion of Roma in the general population.

Research indicated that Roma are perceived to represent 50-80% of trafficked persons in **Bulgaria**, up to 70% in parts of the **Czech Republic**, at least 40% in **Hungary**, around 50% in **Romania** and at least 60% in **Slovakia**.

Roma are trafficked for various purposes, including:

- sexual or labour exploitation,
- domestic servitude,
- organ trafficking,
- illegal adoption and
- begging:

The ERRC/PiN research indicates that trafficking for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation affects Roma most frequently.

Among a non-representative sample of 37 Romani trafficked persons interviewed during research for this study, 68% had been trafficked to another EU country, while 32% had been trafficked to another location within their own country. Twenty percent of the trafficked persons interviewed in this study were minors at the time they were trafficked. Forty-eight percent had been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and 35% had been trafficked for labour exploitation. Sixty-two percent of trafficked persons interviewed were female and 38% were male.

Romani women and children were trafficked in the highest numbers across these various types of trafficking; the only exception was trafficking for labour exploitation, where predominantly Romani males were represented.

The vulnerability factors identified in this study are closely linked to those commonly associated with non-Romani trafficked persons: there is no unique “Roma vulnerability factor,” and no indication that trafficking is a “cultural practice” of Roma. However, the research reveals that Roma are highly vulnerable to trafficking due to structural forms of ethnic and gender discrimination, poverty and social exclusion which result in low educational achievement and high levels of unemployment, exposure to usury, growing up in state care, domestic violence and substance abuse.

The existence of an adequate legal framework is a key element in the fight against trafficking. Analysis of anti-trafficking legal frameworks in Bulgaria and Hungary indicate that they do not fully comply with international legal standards. The participation of Roma NGOs in the National Referral Mechanisms (coordinating mechanisms that promote respect of the human rights of trafficked persons) and other anti-trafficking agencies is very limited.

While the legal frameworks in the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia appear to be in conformity with international standards, their implementation was found to be problematic. Few Roma are identified by police as trafficked persons and many are reluctant to report themselves to law enforcement agencies for fear of reprisal from their traffickers or of prosecution for the conduct of criminal acts they may have been implicated in as a trafficked person.

Similarly low numbers of Romani trafficked persons access victim prevention and protection services and general social welfare systems are failing to reduce the extreme vulnerability of Roma to trafficking. The overwhelming lack of support available to Romani trafficked persons negatively impacts their ability to re-integrate, leaving them highly vulnerable to re-trafficking.

Key Recommendations

The ERRC and PiN recommend the establishment, improvement and reinforcement of communication, links and collaboration, not only between Governments but also among specific authorities, institutions, and local and international Romani and non-Romani NGOs. To achieve this:

The European Commission, Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe should:

1. Set standards for the collection of internationally comparable data on trafficking, including data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, disability and other relevant factors, with appropriate measures to protect the personal data of trafficked persons;
2. Work with national authorities to develop and improve systems of social support to Romani communities at risk of trafficking as a preventative measure; and
3. Promote networking among Romani NGOs, Romani mediators and Romani community representatives and law enforcement and anti-trafficking authorities to combat trafficking in Romani communities.

National, regional and local Government actors should:

1. Transpose or adopt all relevant international conventions and directives including the EU Directive 2011/36 of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims;
2. Amend national laws to conform with international legal standards and effectively implement existing anti-trafficking provisions in all countries;
3. Amend national policy to reflect the apparent overrepresentation of Roma among trafficked persons and develop programming targeted at Romani communities;
4. Ensure the full and effective participation of Romani organisations in National Referral Mechanisms and other relevant anti-trafficking bodies;
5. Increase prevention campaigns and efforts in Romani communities, with a focus on segregated, socially excluded communities; and
6. Foster relations among law enforcement authorities, general social service providers and anti-trafficking services and mandate the recruitment of Romani professionals in these services.