

Researching Child Trafficking in South Asia UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, was established in 1988 to strengthen the research capability of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to support its advocacy for children worldwide. The Centre helps to identify - and research - current and future areas of UNICEF's work. Its prime objectives are to improve international understanding of issues relating to children's rights and to help facilitate the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in both, industrialised and developing countries.

Since 1998, the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre has been working on child trafficking in close collaboration with UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, and other partners. Activities started with research on the trafficking of women and children in Africa, and included a review of policy responses.¹ Currently, the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre is engaged in research activities on child trafficking in Europe and in South Asia. The research on South Asia is implemented in cooperation with the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia and UNICEF Country Offices in each of the eight countries covered by the research: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It is investigating the complexity of the problem from its origin to its destination, and is collaborative and undertaken with a view to identifying effective policy solutions. Future research by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre will expand the global perspective on child trafficking, initiated by an analysis of the situation in Southeast Asia.

About the South Asia Research

This research allows UNICEF to gather information about the trafficking of children in South Asia, and about policies and practices adopted by governments to prevent trafficking, respond to victims, and to follow up with various forms of repatriation and rehabilitation. Early findings indicate a vast range of policy responses. That there is great variation between countries is unsurprising, however, the project initiates a systematic analysis of this variation as well as the potential for synergy.

The first phase of the research laid the foundation for information sharing among stakeholders who are concerned, at many levels and in a variety of ways, with fighting child trafficking. Current research will further this aim, by means of ensuring that the database and website developed in the framework of the project (www.childtrafficking.org) are useful to those working in the area. Additionally, a careful analysis of the findings may inform the refinement of existing policies. Research and analysis may also inform the development of new policies in the prevention of child trafficking, and the protection and care of children who are victimised.

¹ See publications available online at www.childtrafficking.org

The research focuses on developing research methodologies for gathering specific and reliable data. A lack of reliable quantitative and qualitative data on trafficked children is one of the main constraints to effective intervention and evidence-based policy making. A lack of available information also limits the ability to determine if implemented strategies are indeed improving the protection of trafficked children.

A final report on the findings will include an analysis of trafficking patterns, relevant national and international legislation and other policy responses to child trafficking. The findings are based on a comprehensive secondary data review and on primary data collected by different partners, leading in the child trafficking issue. A process of collecting information, sharing information and then validating information is being followed.

The regional mapping will be complemented by a regional and national review of law and policies, including a critical analysis of the conceptual frameworks applied. Preliminary findings of this review recommend an approach to trafficking that includes prevention, protection and empowerment. An additional complementary factor to the research is the preparation of a series of case studies. These case studies focus on such issues as community policing and local community engagement in the prevention of child trafficking; cross border trafficking and bilateral arrangements between governments in the region and beyond to prevent child trafficking and assist victims of trafficking.

The Methodology

The methodology for this study builds on IRC research in both Africa and Europe. Most importantly, it relies on the partnership of UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, as well as National Committees. For the present research a particularly strong partnership has been promoted with UNICEF colleagues in the Regional Office for South Asia and the Country Offices in each of the eight countries covered by the research.

This includes: a desk review to establish a baseline of publicly-available information. Account is taken of studies, annual reports and other relevant documentation produced by governments, academic and research institutions, United Nations agencies, international organizations, regional institutions, and non-governmental organizations. A database is developed on the basis of the information gathered, and organized according to country. Generally the categories for information storage include: perceptions and analyses of the phenomenon, flows and patterns of trafficking, key players, current legal framework, policies, actions and programmes.

Recent and emerging policy and programming trends are reviewed and analyzed at international, national, and local levels. Information gathered is organized in such a manner to allow the sharing of data within a specific control and validation system. The use of multiple sources of information permits cross-checking of information collected and ensures that the different sources of information correlate with each other.

Consistent with the past experience, and based on secondary data collection, Country Reference Notes are produced, addressing general information on child trafficking in the

country concerned on: patterns, legal framework, and other policy responses. Draft Reference Notes are subsequently sent to UNICEF Country Offices as national focal points for review and integration.

Collaboration is of paramount importance. Technical research assistance is provided to UNICEF Country Offices and National Committees for UNICEF, as required. Research institutions, organizations, and experts involved in research on child trafficking in the particular region under research are contacted for information sharing and potential collaboration. Partnership with UNICEF Offices at New York Headquarters, regional and national levels is enhanced, as well as collaboration with other initiatives to monitor responses to trafficking in human beings.

Findings are analyzed to develop research papers, and these are included in the child trafficking website of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. They are further disseminated throughout UNICEF, as well as among partner organizations and to key policy-makers. Existing research methodologies that are used in child trafficking research and applied to existing data sources are constantly reviewed and adapted to the context under research. Particular consideration is given to methodologies employed in previous research on Africa and to the creation of synergies with the research project on child trafficking in Europe.

The afore mentioned Country Reference Notes are sent, together with a questionnaire on perceptions, actions and detailed data, to all the stakeholders identified at the national level. Each Country Reference Note, together with information collected from the stakeholders, is the basis for the preparation of Child Trafficking Country Information Baselines to inform regional and sub-regional preliminary analyses of child trafficking in the region.

The Report

A final report on efforts to combat child trafficking in South Asia will be published by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in 2007. It will analyze child trafficking trends and patterns in the region as well as relevant national and international responses to it. The outcome document will emphasize the many efforts that are being made by states and other actors, and will be of interest to policy makers, practitioners, advocates and researchers.