

Researching Child Trafficking in Europe 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 investigating the complexity of the problem from its origin to its destination and covering more than 50 countries.² This research has been collaborative, and undertaken with a view to identifying effective policy solutions. A similar initiative is underway in South Asia at present, and there is expressed interest in Southeast Asian research as well.

About the European Research

Against the backdrop of a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world, Europe too is undergoing enormous change and confronting challenges. Accompanied by new threats to the rights and well-being of European children, are great possibilities for preventative actions and solutions. The trafficking of children for various forms of exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation, is a human rights violation to which the European community is turning its attention, and on which the ongoing research on child trafficking in Europe focuses.

This research allows UNICEF to gather pan-European information about the trafficking of children, 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

¹ See publications available online at www.childtrafficking.org

² Concurrently, work is underway in South Asia, in collaboration with the UNICEF regional office in Kathmandu, Nepal.

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.

Finally, the research focuses on developing research methodologies for gathering specific and reliable data. The lack of 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 of 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 was followed.

In each of the European countries included in the research, a knowledgeable focal point was identified to validate information on child trafficking collected in the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre database. Focal Points are Child Protection Officers in UNICEF Field Offices, experts from National Committees for UNICEF, other UN Agencies and international organisations, international and national NGOs, Government representatives and academics. They supported the research of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre by validating information on patterns and flows of child trafficking, legislation and other policy responses to child trafficking in their respective countries and provided additional, updated information.

The Report

The final report on child trafficking in Europe by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre will be published in 2006. It will be the first-of-its-kind study giving such a wide-ranging overview on child trafficking trends and patterns in Europe as well as relevant national and international responses to it and will inform policy makers, practitioners in the field and researchers alike.

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