



---

## ASSISTANCE OF THE CHILDREN TRAFFIC VICTIMS – INTERVENTIONS AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY EVALUATIONS

---

Daniela NICOLĂESCU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Child trafficking is a crime with very serious consequences on the side of the victims. The instruments developed in order to recover the victims of child trafficking developed much during the past decade, but the essence of the multidisciplinary interventions performed by the teams of specialists remains. This paper shows the evidence collected during the case studies performed from 2004 to 2006 within the regional Transit Centres for the unaccompanied children who were victims of human trafficking, operating in Romania. Given the complexity and particularities arising from the approach of each individual situation, the recovery of the children who were victims of human trafficking needs the development and operation of a distinct approach, specific to these social groups, within the multidisciplinary interventions.*

**Keywords:** *child trafficking; recovery; multidisciplinary; victims.*

### Introduction

Most certainly, human trafficking cannot be dissociated from the international migration; very often the victims of human trafficking are immigrants by intention, whose migration strategy failed. According to Lăzăroiu (2000), human trafficking can be seen as “*failed circulatory migration*”.

The problem of the victims of human trafficking increased very much in scale lately, which determined the NGOs and the services of social work to adopt distinct working methodologies for the different categories of victims of this phenomenon. While, migration usually involves the circulation of the human capital from east to west and the circulation of the financial capital from west to east, in the case of the human trafficking, this path is cut off.

In Romania, the problem of human trafficking reached the public agenda in 2001, in terms of the prevention and control of human trafficking and of the social protection

---

<sup>1</sup> Children Rights Expert, Bucharest, Romania. Email: nicoldana@yahoo.com

of the victims (Ferdean, A., 2008: 99). The multiple dimensions of the phenomenon allow multiple analytical perspectives: legal, economic, psychological, and sociological and of the human rights (National Agency Against Human Trafficking, 2006: 7-8).

The victims of human trafficking suffer dramatic consequences in terms of “their long-term individual objectives of development – dignity of the persons as human beings and their image in the community (Petrescu, C, 2005: 253).

Child trafficking is a serious crime which has major and long lasting consequences on the victim. This is why the assistance of the children who were victims of human trafficking must be an enterprise with multiple interventions of multidisciplinary teams. Child victimization requires special attention within the context in which the dynamics of life within the modern society is continuously confronted with situations in which the life and physical and psychical integrity of the child are endangered (Zamfir, E., 1995), either because of neglect, or as consequence of abuse in all its forms.

According to an estimation from 2009, the “children represent about 15% of the total number of human trafficking victims identified each year in Romania” (Gavril, I. G., Tamaş, A., M., 2009:11).

The working instruments used to assist these victims evolved much over the past 20 years on the background of an increased attention of the authorities and of the associative structures, both in the countries of destination, and in the countries of origin.

This article which relies in the case studies performed in 2004-2006 within the zonal Transit Centres for the unaccompanied children who were victims of human trafficking, operating in Romania, I am making an exposition of the dimensions of the interventions conducted in the case of 15 children, victims of child trafficking.

## **Context of the operation of the Romanian transit and protection centres for the children victims of human trafficking**

The protection of the unaccompanied children in distress on the territory of other countries or victims of the human trafficking has been a concern for the National Authority for the Protection of Children Rights, as shown by the start in 2004 and 2005 of the National Interest Programs PIN 415 and PIN 3. In 2007, the National Authority for the Protection of Children Rights and the organisation Save the Children<sup>1</sup> decided to make a survey of the operational efficacy of the transit centres with the purpose of improving and developing their activity so that they can provide as complete as possible services for their beneficiaries. These protection centres address exclusively the children victims of human trafficking, who are unaccompanied and repatriated. They operate as transit structures, according to the provisions of Law 272/2004. They provide swift intervention and special assistance ensuring protection and assistance for a period of 15

---

<sup>1</sup> ANPDC, Save the Children, Evaluation of the activity of the transit centres established within the framework of the National Interest Programs 415/2004 and 3/2005 (period 2004-2006), 2007.

days, with the possibility of extension up to 90 days if no solution is identified for the children. In 2007, the capacity of the transit centres was of 118 beds. The zonal Transit Centres for the unaccompanied children and for the children victims of human trafficking operate as structures of temporary protection during the early stages of the recovery intervention (emergency assistance). Their residential structure resembles the family pattern, the children receiving shelter and special assistance for a period of 15 days. Once these protection centres were established, they needed a common operational methodology, which focused on the component of repatriation of the unaccompanied children victims of human trafficking identified on the territory of other states, on their accompaniment up to the transit centres and of working with them during their stay in the transit centres in view of their integration.

The total number of beneficiaries of the transit centres from 2004 to 2006, was of 661, with an average of 60 assisted children per transit centre. The transit centres which provided assistance to the highest number of children were those from Arad, Oradea and Bucharest which covered together 85% (559) of the total number of children beneficiaries of the assistance specific to this program.

#### Length of the period of assistance and protection of the children victims of human trafficking within the transit centres

CENTRE	Total number of children assisted by each centre from 2004 to 2006	Length of the period of assistance and protection in the transit centres	
		Average number of days per child	Total length of the period (col. 1 × col. 2)
1. ARAD	337	Not specified*	Not specified
2. IAȘI	19	120	2280 days
3. GALAȚI	20	5**	100 days
4. PIATRA NEAMȚ	12	180	2160 days
5. SATU MARE	12	45	540 days
6. ORADEA	116	9	1044 days
7. BUCUREȘTI	106	14	1484 days
8. TIMIȘOARA	1	60	60 days
9. MEHEDINȚI	14	Not the case***	Not the case
10. BOTOȘANI	24	1	24 days
11. SUCEAVA	0	0****	0 days
12. GIURGIU	-	*****	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>324 children (661-337 Arad)</b>	<b>23.74 days/child (7692:324)</b>	<b>7692 days (8 centre)</b>

\* „The period of assistance varied, with the particular case, from several hours to several days; the cases in which the children asked for assistance benefitted of services in agreement with the legal provisions, until their situation was solved; \*\* „There have been cases when they remained for just 5 days, but we also had cases when they stood for more than one year because the penal trial was very long”; \*\*\* It was not the case because „all the parents agreed for the reintegration of the child within the family after repatriation”; \*\*\*\* The centre had no beneficiaries;

\*\*\*\*\* The centre had no beneficiaries

Source: ANPDC, Save the Children, 2007.

The other 8 centres provided assistance to an average number of 13 children per unit. The transit centres from Timișoara and Suceava were on the bottom positions from this point of view, with 1 and 0 assisted children, respectively. From the total number of children who benefitted of special assistance, 103 (16%) were children victims of human trafficking in Romania (34) and 69 were victims of human trafficking in other countries. A total of 22 cases ended in court; in 7 of these cases damages were demanded, but in just one instance, assisted by the lawyer of the organisation Save the Children, Romania, the court ruled in favour of damages (Galați).

The survey of the transit centres activity included investigations at the transit centres and at the partner institutions, which used for the interviews open question questionnaires specific to the two groups of analysis. The “face to face” interviews were conducted with the representatives of the transit centres and of the partner institutions, at their headquarters (for the interviews at the transit centre, there also was the possibility of filling in the electronic version of the questionnaire).

## Multidisciplinary interventions – case studies

Within the process of operationalization and operation of the transit centres we conducted specific interventions for the psycho-social recovery of the children victims of human trafficking. These interventions were performed by a multidisciplinary team which I coordinated throughout the implementation of the program run by the Organisation “Save the Children”. This team used the services of a psychologist, two social workers, a psychiatrist and a legal advisor. The evaluation performed on each individual child included specialised interventions in different areas (social work, psychological assistance, medical and legal assistance).

The evaluation and intervention activities during 15 cases of children victims of human trafficking required a large volume of working hours of the multidisciplinary team, but the result in most situations, reintegration of the children within their families, or their return to school education, provided particular professional and personal satisfaction.

A general view of the 15 cases operated throughout the 6 months of interventions included in this investigation, show that all the children beneficiaries of special interventions were girls, victims of human trafficking in Romania, and that they originated from different historical regions of Romania.

Depending on the age criterion, we noticed that just one victim was aged 14, one was aged 15, five of them were aged 16, and eight were aged 17 (at the moment when they entered the transit centre).

**Age of the subjects**

Age of the subjects	Number of subjects
14 years old	1
15 years old	1
16 years old	5
17 years old	8

In terms of their area of residence, 7 children came from urban areas and 8 children came from rural areas, while in terms of the geographical distribution, most of them came from the counties forming the historical region of Moldova (2 – Iași County, 2 – Bacău County, 1 – Botoșani County, 1 – Neamț County, 1 – Galați County, 1 – Brăila County), 1 – Bistrița Năsăud County, 1 – Teleorman County, 1 – Bihor County, 1 – Constanța County, 1 – Sibiu County, 1 – Ialomița County, 1 – Bucharest.

#### Residential area of origin

Urban	Rural
7	8

Even though the children were protected by the laws governing child protection, among the 15 cases assisted during the period of our survey, we had a girl aged 17 who was married at the age of 12 according to the rules of the Roma community; when she was admitted into the transit centre she was divorced and had a child 2 years old. No other assisted person had been married, or had given birth to children.

#### Marital status

Married	Single	Divorced	Remarried
0	14	1	0

The educational status of the children victims of human trafficking show that at the time of their recruiting, most of them were attending school, therefore didn't drop out of school: just one girl, aged 17, had just graduated 4 elementary grades; a girl aged 14 graduated 6 classes; 3 girls graduated 7 classes; 4 girls graduated 8 classes; 3 girls graduated 9 classes and 3 girls graduated 10 classes.

#### Educational status of the subjects

Graduated classes	Number of subjects
4 grades	1
5 grades	-
6 grades	1
7 grades	3
8 grades	4
9 grades	3
10 grades	3

Regarding the social assistance provided to the subjects of my investigation, the following facts resulted from the analysis of the individual situations:

- Situation of the family of origin – it resulted that in just 6 cases the children victims of human trafficking came from nuclear families, having brothers and sisters (except for one case). We also identified four subjects who lost one of their parents (death due to serious illnesses), three subjects had divorced or separated parents; one girl whose parents were unknown had been adopted by a family (which dissolved subsequently – during the period of our survey the adoptive mother was prostituting in Turkey), while both parents of one girl were missing from home (the father was in custody, while the mother was admitted in a psychiatric facility for alcohol addiction associated to problems of mental health).

**Situation of subjects' family of origin**

Subject	Situation of the family
1.	Retired parents, 2 brothers
2.	Mother dead, father – jobless, 3 sisters
3.	Mother – separated, father – worker, no brothers or sisters
4.	Separated parents, mother – retired (illness), father - worker
5.	Mother –dead, father – worker, 1 brother, 2 sisters
6.	Mother – household worker, father – sells second-hand cars, 4 brothers, 3 sisters
7.	Divorced parents, mother – tailor, father – driver, no brothers or sisters
8.	Mother – worker (remarried), father – dead, 1 brother, 1 step sister
9.	Parents – unknown, adoptive mother (divorced and remarried) – prostituting in Turkey, step father– in custody, 1 step brother
10.	Mother – admitted in a psychiatric facility (alcohol addiction), father – in custody, no brothers or sisters
11.	Mother – household worker, father – sick in bed (work accident), 10 brothers (1 dead)
12.	Mother – worker, father –truck driver, no brothers or sisters
13.	Mother – jobless, father – dead, 2 sisters, 1 step brother
14.	Mother – household worker, father – driver, 1 brother
15.	Mother – tailor, father – farm worker, 1 sister

- Incomes of the family of origin – we noticed that only four subjects came from families with medium incomes and who had proper households; at the opposite end there were three subjects who could make no reference to the incomes of their family of origin (jobless, living from the state allocations for the children, from seasonal work or from just one pension); the family members of the other 8 subjects had incomes at the level of the minimal threshold and were living in precarious households (some of them didn't have electric power, most of them were heating with fire wood and had no running water).

### Incomes of the family of origin

Subject	Family incomes
1.	Medium incomes, medium household
2.	Minimal incomes, apartment with 2 rooms, modest
3.	Minimal incomes, minimal household
4.	Minimal incomes, minimal household
5.	No incomes (living from the state allocations for the children), precarious household
6.	Medium income , apartment with 7 rooms, bathrooms, kitchen
7.	Minimal incomes, small household, precarious situation
8.	Minimal incomes, apartment with 2 rooms, modest
9.	Minimal incomes, precarious household
10.	No incomes (pension of the grandfather), modest one-room apartment of the grandfather
11.	Minimal incomes, precarious household
12.	Medium incomes, medium household
13.	No incomes (seasonal work), precarious household
14.	Minimal incomes, apartment with 2 rooms, modest
15.	Medium incomes, apartment with 2 rooms, modest

- Meetings with the social worker with the view of social integration – for the 15 cases of reintegration of the children victims of human trafficking, we planned and conducted 253 meetings: 202 with the subjects, 23 with the members of the families of origin and 28 with representatives of the local authorities (mayoral departments , deconcentrated services, police, church, etc.)

### Meetings with the social worker in view of social integration

With the subjects	With the members of the local family	With local representatives
202	23	28

- School reinsertion/professional orientation/social reintegration – of the 15 girls victims of human trafficking integrated in the program of assistance, 8 were supported to go on with their school education, 7 attended various vocational training courses (4 of them are also going on with their school education), while the remaining 4 girls didn't go on with their studies due to various reasons (1 school dropout, 1 admitted to psychiatry unit, 2 working, 1 in Romania and 1 in Spain). At the end of the 6 months of survey we noticed positive outcomes in terms of social reintegration in 13 cases and a negative outcome in two cases (re-trafficking in Romania and admission in the psychiatry unit).

**School reinsertion/professional orientation/social reintegration**

School reinsertion	Professional orientation	Social reintegration
8	7	13

The following facts resulted from the analysis in terms of psychological assistance delivered to the subjects of my survey:

- Meetings with the psychologist – for the 15 subjects of our survey we conducted a total of 187 meetings of psychological counselling and therapy; one girl refused this form of assistance (on grounds that “only God can help me with this”).
- Psychological diagnosis – 7 of the 14 subjects who received special assistance were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder; 3 – with acute reaction to stress; while the others were diagnosed with other disorders – affective disorders, hypersexualisation and general anxiety
- Evolution of the subjects during the psychological assistance – in most cases there was a good cooperation with the subjects, so that at the end of the period, except for three cases which didn't participate or leaved the program, we managed to solve the acute problems challenging them.

The health assistance provided to the 15 children, victims of human trafficking referred to HIV check-up, check-up for sexually transmitted diseases (STD), psychiatric check-up, health insurance, family planning and contraceptive products.

- HIV check-up: all subjects did the HIV/AIDS check-up, just one girl was positive and she received subsequently the adequate treatment.

**HIV check-up**

Positive	Negative
1	14

- STD check-up: the 15 were checked-up and it resulted that 8 of them had sexually transmitted diseases (an extremely serious disease in one case - tertiary syphilis)

**STD check-up**

Positive	Negative
8	7 Papilloma Virus, primary syphilis, tertiary syphilis, chlamydia

- Psychiatric check-up: all the girls were evaluated by the psychiatrist and the results were negative for 14 of them; just one case needed specialised psychiatric



intervention (girl with tertiary syphilis who was subsequently admitted to the Special Centre from Techirghiol).

#### Psychiatric check-up

Positive	Negative
1	14

- Health insurance and family doctor: all subjects benefited of family doctors services with the support of the social worker (just one of the subjects had family doctor when the program started).
- Family planning and contraceptive means: all girls received contraceptive means and, depending on the particular situation, family planning meetings.
- **Legal counselling** about their traffic-related experience – in 6 of the cases the subjects were part in the criminal case prosecuted against the traffickers, which presumed legal counselling so that they know what rights and duties they have in their position of witness in the criminal case. Four of the subjects received legal counselling about the status of human trafficking victim. There also were some other situations: two subjects needed protection from the specialised police department (General Directorate for the Control of Organised Crime and Drug Addiction), while other two subjects received special support for the termination of parental rights of the father of the child born during their marriage, and assistance to get custody of the child.

#### Legal counselling related to their traffic experience

Provided due to their participation as witness in the criminal prosecution trial	Provided in relation to their status of human trafficking victim
6	4

## Conclusions regarding the evaluation of subjects

Within the context of child trafficking for commercial purposes, we could notice that the *gender differences* are very important. The different social roles of the girls and boys and the differences of status vary with the culture and traditions. The girls have to endure more difficulties than the boys, they are more exposed to sexual exploitation, and this fact may be the result of the vulnerable role which the society bestowed on women.

The girls coming from modest and large families undergo special risks, particularly if the girl is the eldest of the brothers and she has to care for her younger sisters and brothers. The eldest girl of the family is responsible for the care of her younger siblings, for the household chores (cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, etc.). Her involvement

in these activities of “invisible” work affects her cognitive, social, emotional development and the quality of her life. Also, her academic performance is also affected by the very short time she has available to study, read, learn or for leisure time.

There is a trend of higher demand on the human traffic market for girls aged 14-17. Very many girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation. The most destructive consequences in view of the associated risks are: the unwanted pregnancies and the sexually transmitted infections, which may affect their reproductive capacity. Social reintegration can be extremely difficult for the girls victims of human trafficking because of the feeling of shame and guilt which they have, due to the negative attitudes of the family and community. The adverse reactions of the community are the consequence of the same gender differences between girls and boys, the girls being bestowed a role of inferiority.

Another factor which increases the vulnerability to traffic consists in the **living conditions within the family**. The family is the first environment which any child gets to know, it determines the emotional structure of the child and introduces the child into society. Hence, one of the most frequently met behaviours is the one in which the child starts working to help his/her family. This behaviour is the consequence either of the poverty, which requires work from all the family members, or of the cultural values which consider that working make the child responsible in his/her future status of adult person, or of the psychical state of health of the parent. Thus, for the people whose families live in rural areas, work starts very early in their life, by their almost daily presence, next to the parents, in the agricultural or household activities. Initially, the child performs easy tasks, but the level of difficulty increase gradually. In such situations it is very hard to draw a line between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, things being different for each individual child.

The low educational level of the parents and their scarce knowledge about rearing and educating a child bear a negative impact on the children and on their future. The parents with a low educational level provide their children with a limited perspective on the importance of education and don't encourage their aspirations for educational or professional accomplishment. Thus, if the parents attended school for a short period, if ever, they don't understand the need of education for their children. Such an example is the situation in which the parents send their small children to work in unskilled activities, for other people, hoping they will thus learn to support themselves and will have a better life as adult people; or, they are knowingly involved in internal traffic networks to make more money. This induces in the child the wish to make easy money and the next step is the involvement in external trafficking networks. The educational level of the children and teenagers is low because they dropped out of school, while their parents too have a very low educational level or are even illiterate.

Most children come from disorganised families whose poverty is worsened by the manifestation of the social stress – alcoholism, physical and/or verbal violence, sexual aggression. The relations of the child with his/her family are very weak, which makes these children to be much more vulnerable to the influences of the environment external to the family.

Another relevant aspect is the fact that a child who is victim of human trafficking is confronted with learning experiences which develop in him/her specific abilities, different from those of a child who didn't have such experiences. These abilities (to negotiate, to relate, which form personal coping resources), are protector factors for the children and they are extremely important resources within the process of rehabilitation. The analysis of the development needs of the child will identify these personal resources which can facilitate the process of rehabilitation of the child victim of human trafficking. The most frequent disorders which appear in comorbidity or in the post-traumatic stress are: abuse or addiction of substances; anxiety; panic with or without agoraphobia; general anxiety; obsessive-compulsive neurosis; social phobia. The intervention involves compulsorily the intervention of the associated disturbances.

The analysed subjects show us that the trafficking history and the forms of abuse which the child endured while being trafficked have disastrous consequences on the emotional balance and on the general behaviour of the children. Most times, behind each history of traffic is a history of abuse in the family, in the group to which he/she belongs. In the case of the traffic history too, like in the case of the intra-family violence, one may speak of a "learned impotency". This means that the victim initially tries to get out of the relation, but this attempt is gradually smothered by the support systems – institutions, extended family, friends, etc., which is why the child returns to the initial relation. We may speak here of the so-called "attachment to the abuser (trafficker)", or of the "Stockholm syndrome", which is the highest obstacle in our work with the children victims of human trafficking. The analysed subjects show that most children have been the victims of repeated experiences of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse, which increased their risk of becoming again such victims. The most important factor which maintains the risk of becoming again such victims has been identified in the dysfunctions at the level of the perception of the risk situations. A child, victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation runs an even higher risk of being involved in illegal activities such drug smuggling, because of the cognitive underestimation of such risk situations.

### **Final remarks**

Child trafficking requires particular attention and specific responses due to the vulnerability of the children to the traffic. The individual national states have to guarantee and protect the rights of the children, as it is stipulated in the UN Convention of the Rights of Children, as well as in other international instruments (Nicolăescu, D., 2004). Because the children, victims of human trafficking, is a problem of the space and time in which we are living, solving it using as low as possible human and social costs presumes knowledge of the underlying mechanisms, of the forms of manifestation, of the amplitude and of the predictable effects. It is also necessary to design and apply a distinct approach, specific to these social groups (Nicolăescu D., 2011: 126) within the multidisciplinary interventions aiming to recover the victims of child trafficking. Within this context, the scientific analysis by the development and adoption of optimal quality standards which are to be used as scientific instruments adequate to the problems of the children who were victims of human trafficking and of the Romanian population, will standardize the interventions and will generate a distinct approach, characteristic to such types of abuses.

## References

- \*\*\* Agenția Națională Împotriva Traficului (2006). *Raport privind situația traficului de persoane în România*. București
- \*\*\* ANPDC, Salvați Copiii (2007). Evaluarea activității centrelor de tranzit care au fost create în cadrul Programelor de Interes Național 415/2004 și 3/2005 (perioada 2004-2006), 2007
- Ferdean, A. (2008). Assistance and protection for victims of human trafficking in Romania. *Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială*, 22, 98-107.
- Gavril, I. G., Tamaș, A., M. (2009). *Traficul de copii în România: studiu asupra procesului de recrutare*. Buzău: Alpha MDM
- Lăzăroiu, S., (2000). Trafic de femei. O perspectivă sociologică. *Sociologie Românească*, 2, 55-79.
- Nicolăescu, D. (2011). Children, victims of human trafficking, as social unit. *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, Nr. 3/2011, 113-127
- Nicolăescu, Daniela, (2004). Suport de curs pentru formarea personalului care lucrează în domeniul protecției copilului: *Traficul de persoane în lumea modernă*, iunie 2004 în cadrul Programului de Interes Național 415 – Serviciu de asistență și reintegrare pentru copiii victime ale traficului sau neacompaniați, Salvați Copiii și ANPDC.
- Petrescu, C. (2009). Traficul de femei – o problemă a societății moderne. *Calitatea Vieții*, XVI, nr. 3-4, 2005, 253-271
- Zamfir, E. (1995). *Situația copilului și a familiei în România*. București: Editura Alternative