



General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 May 2023

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-second session

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Multifaceted Phenomenon Of Human Trafficking

Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) is a Catholic International Association that since the early 90s, has been committed to defending the victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation at the front line at several levels, running different recovery and supporting programmes that welcome survivors of sexual exploitation in protected houses and provide legal and psychological assistance and healthcare.

Global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising poverty, as well as gender inequality, discrimination, and wars, expose every day many children and young girls to the risk of falling victim to sale and sexual exploitation.

Indeed, according to data, between 2019 and 2021, child trafficking and exploitation were concentrated in mainly low-income regions, in which scarce accessibility to the education system, together with lack of social protection and isolation, made several children more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

The multifaceted phenomenon of human trafficking keeps capturing more and more victims aged below 18. According to the most recent European Commission statistics (2021), a quarter of the approximately 14,000 cases identified as human trafficking victims are children. However, these statistics are not exhaustive, as they refer only to emerging and identified cases, while instead, many exploited young girls and children remain under the strict control of their exploiters.

Criminal networks have been evolving and became skilled at adapting to the changes of the world, taking advantage of the wide and marked inequalities affecting society, and putting in place new illegal and cruel ways of exploitation.

In European countries, the emerging “lover boy method” has been pushing several young girls into trafficking nets; the latter are misled by false promises of alleged boyfriends, and then forced into prostitution, suffering sexual abuse and violence.

In Italy, young girls and women from Nigeria continue to be among the main victims of trafficking, followed by an increasing number of young women from Côte d’Ivoire.

In this regard, APG23 has promoted the European project “Right Way, building integration pathways with victims of human trafficking”, focusing on a specific target group, the Nigerian women, and aiming at developing a holistic and durable integration pathway for victims of trafficking.

The outcomes of the project have underlined that among the young victims coming from Nigeria in need of support, we must pay attention not only to unaccompanied minors but also to the victims’ children taken in anti-trafficking reception facilities with their mothers. The increasing number of these children represents a new element of concern.

Indeed, these children are often a result of violence suffered during the travels, or in the period in which the mothers experienced sexual exploitation.

The fear of threat, the need to pay off the “debt”, as well as the belief of being unable to take care of the child without a man’s support, are among the main factors that undermine the integration and the effectiveness of the social and economic inclusion pathways, especially concerning Nigerian girls.

Motherhood is a frequently an underestimated topic in projects for the recovery and integration of women survivors of trafficking; despite the opportunities of building a new life, these girls continue to be at risk of re-trafficking because of the pressures from traffickers who ask them to leave the reception system. Moreover, children are often used by the exploiters, as a threat to control their mothers.

Therefore, more and more frequently, these girls leave the protection system, run away from the shelter with their children, and disappear in the tight network of trafficking; all traces and records of them and their babies are completely lost.

Sadly, these “invisible” children become easy prey for traffickers.

Many of them are never found; without the protecting net of the anti-trafficking system that kept them safe, the little ones run several risks such as, inter alia carelessness, paedophilia, sex abuse, and organ trafficking; moreover, they are witness of sexual exploitation, abuses and violence suffered by their mothers forced again into prostitution.

The topic of invisible children has not been widely analysed and understood but must be explored to further understand recidivism during the integration and to avoid the increase of this phenomenon.

The issue of the invisible children together with re-trafficking are phenomena that are increasing not only in Italy but also in Europe. In fact, according to data, in several East European countries, several girls and women are at risk of re-trafficking. Legal framework gaps, scarce, uncoordinated, and inadequate services for trafficking survivors, especially for foreigners and children, together with the lack of sufficient funding for assistance and protection services, leave most victims without support and susceptible to re-traumatization.

The Right Way project, which ended in 2020, has underlined the key elements of the integration process and model pathway to support the economic and social integration of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, based on victim-centred and gender-specific approaches.

The project has shown us how relationships, shadowing, and support are the essential keywords in avoiding the risk of re-trafficking, especially for young mums and their children.

According to our experience, economic aid, housing, and work support are not sufficient to guarantee a full recovery, integration, and an effective long-lasting result. The pressures these girls are subjected to from traffickers, overcome their wish for a new life.

For this reason, work experience should not only be economic support, but should aim at strengthening self-esteem, and facilitating active inclusion in the host society.

In this regard, it is imperative to build a social and legal framework aimed at filling the legislative gaps to avoid the risk of re-trafficking and creating real opportunities in building a new inclusive perspective of life. At the same time, it is paramount to strongly fight the demand, punish the traffickers and even the clients and build awareness concerning this grave violation of human dignity.

As Pope Francis reminds us “trafficking in persons and other contemporary forms of enslavement are a worldwide problem that needs to be taken seriously by humanity as a whole: since criminal organisations employ global networks to achieve their goals, efforts to eliminate this phenomenon also demand a common and, indeed, a global effort on the part of various sectors of society”.⁽¹⁾

In conclusion, we, as APG23, would like to reiterate that only through long-term strategies and mechanisms for protecting, rehabilitating, and reintegrating survivors of trafficking is it possible to realise real social inclusion able to tackle the criminal trafficking network.

Furthermore, we reaffirm the need for anti-trafficking measures to discourage, reduce and eliminate the demand, and punish the clients, in line with the example of some European countries that have implemented the so-called “Nordic Model”, a political and cultural approach that claims to defend gender equality and rejects the idea that women and children are commodities that can be bought, sold, and sexually exploited.

(1) 3 October 2020 | Francis (vatican.va)