

Child trafficking in Vienna – Repatriation of affected Romani children into their country of origin, Romania, as a lasting solution?



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Austria is affected by child trafficking not only as a transit country but also as a destination country. This is especially true in the case of Romani children from Romania, which are mostly subject to child trafficking for work exploitation (stealing and begging) or for sexual exploitation, picked up in Vienna and repatriated to their country of origin. Social work at present does not play a major role in dealing with this topic, although it

has the necessary methodical preconditions to increase its role.

Slavery is the oldest form to exploit human beings, but its significance gradually increased during the 70ies and became to-date, in comparison, more diversified in its various forms and shapes. The three most common forms are coerced prostitution of women and children, bonded labor and compulsory labor (see Arlacchi 1999: 15ff).

Trafficked children mostly find themselves in slavery-like work relations (cf. Berker 2003: 14). This is marked by the complete dominance of the child by another person, with economic exploitation as the goal (cf. Bales 2001: 13). Children are retained by exploiters, completely inferior to them and treated mostly beneath human dignity (cf. Berker 2003: 14f).

According to BM.I et al. (2008: 3), human trafficking is a severe violation of human rights and of human dignity. “Human trafficking is ... one of the severest criminal acts worldwide“ (orig. “Menschenhandel ist [...] eine der schwersten Straftaten weltweit“; BM.I. o.J.: 1).

Various international organizations, for example Amnesty International, ECPAT – End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, ILO – International Labour Organization, IOM – International Organization for Migration, Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Menschenrechte, Terre des Hommes International Federation, UNICEF- United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, etc., deal with the problem of child trafficking.

“Die Drehscheibe” – center for unaccompanied under-age victims of child trafficking

“Die Drehscheibe” (German for “the hub”) is a youth welfare institution of the Vienna City Administration, under the responsibility of the 11th municipal department (MAG11). Five social pedagogues, one social worker and a head pedagogue are active there. The institution is open 24 hours, continuously staffed and always accessible for the authorities.

The most important tasks of “Die Drehscheibe“ include:

Taking up all unaccompanied under-age children picked up in Vienna (exempt for asylum seekers as there are special institutions for them), taking a passport photo and registering the child in health insurance, providing their supply as well as protection and support. If needed, psychological and medical care is arranged, as well as contact with the embassies from of the country of origin, the accompanied repatriation of the children to the social authorities, the supervision of the care in the country of origin over a period of six months (“Monitoringberichte”: monitoring reports) and the control of the reports by personal visits in the various centers (cf. Ceipek 2009: 2f).

This institution is the only in Austria specifically for under-age subjects of child trafficking. “Die Drehscheibe” originated 2003 in a case of need and by the personal effort of Norbert Ceipek. The institution is short in resources, however, thus various problems result. Many of

the children taken up quickly disappear from the institution again, as they are under big pressure from the child traffickers and hardly establish trust. Measures like care in their native language were installed to reduce this problem, but this measure could not be continued due to short resources (cf. ECPAT et al. 2008: www.ecpat.at/fileadmin/download/BS-ECPAT_Austria_Fact_Sheet_DE_FINAL.pdf).

“Die Drehscheibe” has established over the years a close cooperation with many countries of origin of the affected children. In several countries, especially in Bulgaria and Romania, many crisis centers have been opened which especially care for repatriated children.

Monitoring reports were agreed upon in the cooperation, which are delivered over at least six months after repatriation of the child by the social workers looking after them to “Die Drehscheibe”, so that the case can be continued to be observed from Vienna (cf. UN.GIFT 2008: www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/humantrafficking/ebook.pdf).

For many ones affected by child trafficking, the perspectives for the future offered are inappropriate, as mostly only humanitarian residence permits can be organized, for which there is no legal claim, however, making them unsure, or the children get, as it often happens, quickly repatriated into their country of origin. As many children had a real wish to migrate before their exploitation, they reject this “voluntary” repatriation. “Die Drehscheibe” places the children in professional crisis centers in their home country, but they are subsequently often sent home. This bears the danger that they again become victims of child trafficking (cf. ECPAT et al. 2008: www.ecpat.at/fileadmin/download/BS-ECPAT_Austria_Fact_Sheet_DE_FINAL.pdf).

According to UNICEF, someone who is subject of child trafficking and identified as such outside the country of origin has the right to return to the home country (cf. UNICEF et al. 2003: www.unicef.de/download.php?f=content_media/presse/.../Richtlinien.pdf). If this is not seen as an optimal solution in the long run, two more options are possible: local integration into the country of residence of the child or settlement in and integration into a third country (cf. UNICEF 2006: www.unicef.org/ceecis/0610-Unicef_Victims_Guidelines_en.pdf).

If these options are applied, however, the protection of the fundamental human rights of the affected children has to be considered, and standards for dealing with victims of child trafficking should be applied (cf. Sölkner, Uhl 2007: 85f).

Best Interests Determination

In order to make a decision about the stay of the child, a “Best Interest Determination” should be made in any case of child trafficking (cf. UNICEF 2006: www.unicef.org/ceecis/0610-Unicef_Victims_Guidelines_en.pdf). The Best Interests Determination describes the decision-making process with and for the child. The special situation of the child has to be assessed in the individual case, so that a lasting and appropriate solution for the child can be found (cf. UNICEF 2006: www.unicef.org/ceecis/0610-Unicef_Victims_Guidelines_en.pdf).

This clarification of the child’s well-being in the individual case, according to the UNHCR guidelines, can often not be done in Austria, due to the lack of capacities (cf. ECPAT et al. 2008: www.ecpat.at/fileadmin/download/BS-ECPAT_Austria_Fact_Sheet_DE_FINAL.pdf).

Risk Assessment

Ahead of any repatriation, a risk assessment should be made estimating all the risks which could endanger the child. The entire life reality of the trafficked child should be examined for possible security risks, and the life situation of the affected child should be considered in the following issues:

- Stigmatization by the social environment, the family and the authorities,
- Danger of persecution by the home country,
- Appropriate medical care, and

- Possible blackmailing of the victim or the victim's family by the criminal organization of the child traffickers.

A risk assessment done fairly includes the child. Measures for protection and help must have started ahead of the risk assessment, and the child should have the necessary information for the return (cf. Sölkner, Uhl 2007: 86).

Return into the country of origin – repatriation

Children identified outside their home country as victims of child trafficking have the fundamental right to return to their home country. Should there be reason to believe, however, that the child or his or her family could be endangered upon the child's return, a repatriation should not be considered, and another solution found.

According to UNICEF guidelines for the protection of the rights of victims of child trade (2003: www.unicef.de/download/php?f=content_media/presse/.../Richtlinien.pdf), a guardian or social worker should be assigned to every victim of child trafficking, accompanying him or her on its return and handing him or her over there to the custody of the interior ministry of the International Organization for Migration.

Binding obligations are requested from the countries to ensure that the child is received in the home country by an assigned person of the social authority responsible, and/or the person.

The interior ministry or other relevant authorities are urged to make arrangements to ensure an appropriate repatriation of the child (cf. UNICEF et al. 2003: www.unicef.de/download/php?f=content_media/presse/.../Richtlinien.pdf).

Repatriation into the home country of the concerned children is often seen as an appropriate reaction of the country. In countries cooperating with "Die Drehscheibe", this also gets done by this institution. Although many children want to return home, other factors have to be considered before (cf. Sölkner, Uhl 2007: 77).

The option of repatriation should only be preferred over the integration into the country of origin if it is considered to be a safe, manageable and sustainable solution. Some subjects to child trafficking are endangered in their home country to become again a victim of child trafficking, or to be stigmatized by society. Thus, any case needs appropriate support so that the child does not immediately come into an environment again in which it became a victim of child trafficking before.

Berker (2003: 25) describes repatriation as a possible risk for the child to become again a victim of child trafficking. This is especially the case if the home country lacks the institutions to care for the child appropriately. Thus, repatriation is only an option if accompanied well and if the authorities in the home country can ensure a reintegration of the child. Repatriation should be considered case-by-case individually, and there should also be the possibility for the subjects of child trafficking to stay in the country of residence for at least some time.

Pollmann (cf. 2003: 69) considers the inconsiderate repatriation to Romania as a new danger for the affected children. Moreover, because of the lack of criminal prosecution, the criminal act of the child traffickers gets attenuated, and becomes a rather harmless offense. Pollmann cites in his article staff of youth institutions in Hamburg which have looked at the situation in Romania themselves and came to the following conclusion: "Repatriating them makes little sense, as they will return" (orig. "Abschiebungen dorthin haben wenig Sinn, die kommen wieder zurück"; Pollmann 2003: 70).

Structures have improved, however, since 2004: 48 "emergency-centers" and eight "traffic-centers" were established in Romania (cf. Ceipek 2009:7). The Vienna City Administration offered training in "crisis work" for social workers from the country of origin together with a two-way-invitation. This means that seminars in the country of origin are offered by Austrian social workers on the one hand, and that there is an invitation to directly participate in the "Die Drehscheibe" in Vienna. This takes place every week. As a follow-up, support is offered through a fax and chat function, which, however, is limited in use due to language barriers (cf. Ceipek 2009: 4).

Procedure in Austria

On a federal level, there is neither a structured procedure for repatriations of those affected by child trafficking, or international cooperation measures. The institution “Drehscheibe” of MAG11, however, realizes since 2004 repatriations into individual countries, mostly to Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia (cf. ECPAT et al. 2008:

www.ecpat.at/fileadmin/download/Schattenbericht_zum_OPSC-Deutsch-Final.pdf).

There is a cooperation between the Vienna City Administration (crisis center “Drehscheibe” of MAG 11) and many authorities of the children’s countries of origin. The existing contacts are mostly due to the personal effort of the head pedagogue of the institution “Drehscheibe”, Mr. Ceipek of MAG11. Crisis centers were established in Romania in cooperation with the Vienna City Administration. These take up repatriated children and care for them (vcf. ECPAT et al. 2008: www.ecpat.at/fileadmin/download/Schattenbericht_zum_OPSC-Deutsch-Final.pdf). The costs for repatriation are taken over by the Vienna City Administration (cf. Ceipek 2009: 7).

Repatriations into countries which do not have a direct cooperation with the institution “Drehscheibe” are mostly made by the Internal Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM gets contacted if necessary by “Drehscheibe” or NGOs and informed about the victim to make subsequently a voluntary repatriation.

The principle of participation is insufficiently implemented in Austria, instead decision about a repatriation into the country of origin is made in Vienna by “Drehscheibe” alone (cf. ECPAT et al. 2008: www.ecpat.at/fileadmin/download/Schattenbericht_zum_OPSC-Deutsch-Final.pdf).

Requirements from the social workers

“Drehscheibe” of MAG11 is the only institution in Vienna caring for those affected by child trafficking. As of now, company and care are almost exclusively taken over by social pedagogues. There is need for action by the professional group of social workers to involve themselves more intensively into the work of those affected by child trafficking in Vienna. In order to comply to the international suggestions and guidelines concerning how to deal with those affected by child trafficking, additional professional and financial resources will have to be used.

Strategies and methods of social work in the area of child trafficking

In the care for the victims of child trafficking in Austria, mostly **individual case help** gets applied (cf. Ceipek 2009: 3). The help relationship between the under-age child and the social pedagogue or social worker is a significant mark of individual case help (cf. Galuske 2002: 76). “Only an intact relationship enables the social worker to be accepted by the client as a trustworthy conversational partner, and the client therefore to willing to accept the help of the social worker” (orig. “Nur eine intakte Beziehung ermöglicht, dass der Klient den Sozialarbeiter als vertrauensvollen Gesprächspartner akzeptiert und damit auch die Hilfe des Sozialarbeiters anzunehmen bereit ist”; Galuske 2002: 76).

For the care for traumatized victims of child trafficking, a strengthened cooperation between the caring social pedagogues, workers and psychiatry would be something worth wishing, so that the children are put into a position to cope with the traumatic experiences within the framework of a therapy.

For the purpose of implementing the suggested guidelines for care, an application of **international social work** is asked for. The cooperation between countries of origin and destination should continue to get strengthened in order to prevent child trafficking or to make repatriations in the best interest of the children.

For preventive work in Romania as country of origin, the application of **community work** has to be thought about. This highly needed educational work of often affected groups of the population could be realized within that framework. Especially categorically community work aimed at certain structurally disadvantaged groups of the population is a good advice.

Ethnically disadvantaged groups of the population, like the Romani, are subjected additionally to several risk factors which put them in a situation to be subjected to exploitation, could support by community work and profit from it. Romani are often affected by manifold problems. Room to develop every-day life as well as life in general, thus improving the general life situation, is a clear goal of this community work (cf. Noack 1999: 11). Categorical community work could therefore support the Romani in their difficult situation, show them options for improvement or elaborate these together with them. An important function of community work is social participation. Possibilities to participate should be created for the individual person to improve the overall situation of this group of the population, also with respect to the personal situation. By the support of the community work, people should be led to support each other.

Street work seems to be an appropriate possibility with regards to making first contact with endangered under-age persons in the country of origin. Gref (1995: 13) describes street work as a strategy of youth work and social work where establishing contact happens in terms of visit work. This means that the social worker goes to places which correspond to the immediate living environment of the under-age persons. Informal meeting points of endangered under-age persons should be visited so that their interests can be approached there, or educational work in the area of child trafficking can be delivered. Another strategy of social work recommendable to be realized in the country of origin and destination alike is **empowerment**.

Conclusion

Romani girls from Romania are especially endangered to come into a situation where they are exploited because they are affected by several factors which are in favor of becoming a victim of child trafficking. Besides their membership to an ethnical minority and the female gender, they are often hit by poverty, insufficient education or lack of information and/or education about the risks of child trafficking and missing birth registration. In special cases, they do not even grow up by their parents and are thus in a situation where they can especially easily become prey of child traffickers.

In order to sustainably improve the situation of the Romani in Romania and the children not running risk any longer to become victims of child trafficking, it is necessary to fight unemployment. By a regular income, poverty decreases and therefore the factor especially favoring and exploiting situation could be reduced. The fundamental condition of a chance for work is education. Possibilities should be created to decrease the high drop-out rates of Romani children and to guarantee school education for all. Additionally, measures for social integration should be made. The multilayered and comprehensive problem situation of the Romani population is unlikely to be solved in the next years, a longer time span, ranging over generations, has to be planned with. It will be quite possible, however, to improve the situation of the Romani in the near future through various projects, especially focusing on the long-term decrease of poverty and thus the root of human trafficking.

These projects should by all means originate and be performed in cooperation with the Romani population. Great expectations are made with respect to the Romani decade, and there remains the hope that changes for the better for the Roma will follow.

There is only one institution in Austria for those affected by child trafficking which is managed by MAG11 and located in Vienna. Repatriations of affected children to Romania are made by this institution (“Drehscheibe”).

The implementation of internationally recommended guidelines for dealing with those affected by child trafficking should continue to get improved, so that the children can be supported better in the repatriation and reintegration into their home country. The decision about repatriation to Romania is solely made by the caring institution “Drehscheibe”.

Romani children coming from Romania are always repatriated from Austria, as some criteria for a decision regarding the repatriation are fulfilled beforehand (e.g. the fact that this is an

EU country, or that Romania insists on repatriation of trafficked children to care for them) and an additional individual case decision is not seen as mandatory for the repatriating authority. Although many non-governmental organizations which are active in the area of child trafficking see general guidelines and rules ahead of the decision about repatriation as very important, neither a child welfare examination or risk analysis according to UNHCR-guidelines is done for Romani children. Although the process of repatriation from Vienna gets done quick and without problems, some difficulties are being reported with respect to the cooperation with the Romanian authorities. The situation of repatriated children gets supervised from Vienna for only six months, afterwards it is assumed that the Romanian youth welfare authority sufficiently “cares” for the child and the family until it is adult. One of the many problem situations of Romani in Romania describes the topic of wide-spread discrimination, which also comes from the side of the authorities. The question arises how this situation of constant monitoring and control by the youth welfare authority is experienced by the Romani, and if there is not a new danger of discrimination. It is questionable whether Romani children traumatized by their exploitation are being well cared for and supported in their country of origin.

The situation of repatriated Romani children is not under long-term observation from Vienna; therefore it was unfortunately not possible with the frame of this work to answer the question whether repatriation represents the best and/or sustainable solution for the children. In order to do this, investigations would have to be made on-site, and contact established with the families. Additionally, it is doubted after working on this theme whether this question can be answered in general. It is much more relevant that every individual case of child trafficking gets viewed and assessed individually. Only by long-term observation and company the question can be answered whether repatriation is the best and above all sustainable solution of this special case.

With regard to the context of social work, it has to be said that relationship work is of great importance in terms of the care for victims of child trafficking, which thus continues to make individual case help seem optimal. Moreover, the cooperation and networking with various institutions is decisive for the success of optimal care and acting or finding of solutions in the best interest of the child. In terms of international social work, this should be initiated increasingly with international non-governmental organizations active in the area of child trafficking, and especially with organizations and authorities in the countries of origin of the children. In the area of prevention, group work and community work, respectively, should stand in the foreground. Disadvantaged groups of the population which are affected by some factors favoring the risk to end up in a situation where they are exploited could be supported by social work. Empowerment should play a role here, and the method street work should be applied.

In conclusion, it can be said that many changes in dealing with victims of child trafficking have taken place in Vienna, but more improvements are desirable. Aside from significant methodical preconditions for social work, there are also important guidelines and measures for dealing with those affected by child trafficking – so far, however, their necessary implementation is lacking. Social work can moreover deliver an important contribution with regard to the prevention of child trafficking in the country of origin.

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