

Trafficking in Persons in South East Europe and its Human Security Implications

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Trafficking in persons can be depicted as the modern day slavery against which legal, social and economic measures are taken. In order to combat this scourge, countries, international and non-governmental organizations should closely co-operate on every level, focusing on prevention, victim assistance-protection and law enforcement aspects. A multi disciplinary and integrated approach is recommendable with the involvement of State agencies and the civil society.

In the last couple of decades, the international community has experienced rapid globalization accompanied by the economic liberalization and a remarkable progress of information technology. At the same time, this process has significantly deepened interdependence of the world, having brought substantial benefits to certain social layers on one hand, widening the gap between the rich and the poor both nationally and internationally on the other.

Organized crime plays a key role in facilitating human trafficking as a growing industry. Yet the expansion of human trafficking is propped up by underlying economic, social and political disparities in many developing countries. Poverty, unemployment, lack of education, lack of work skills, limited opportunities of access to the labor market, political oppression and civil strife are among the factors that disenfranchise people, making them defenseless preys to organized crime groups. Everyone does not have the same possibilities to achieve their dreams of a better life. We live in an unequal world where people's yearnings to improve their lot in life can be easily exploited.

Trafficking in persons violates basic human rights of victims and encompasses transnational criminal dealings. Its victims are often vulnerable women and children, misled about what will await them when they reach their destination. Trafficking means coercion and

abduction as well as fraudulent promises for seemingly attractive jobs and a better life. The transaction does not end at the point of destination, as traffickers may continue to profit through sexual exploitation of their victims, forced labor and other forms of slavery. Therefore a humane approach is needed. There is also an obligation to prevent, investigate and punish violations and to provide the victims with adequate remedies.

The primary concern is to combat the exploitation of human beings under forced labor or slavery like conditions. However, individual endeavors of the protagonists in this field are not sufficient to wipe out this phenomenon from our lives so long as the root causes persist. One had better speak of diminishing the impact or controlling damages of this evil. In sum, human trafficking can be best evaluated by bearing in mind all the relevant push and pull factors. The promotion of regular migration and regulated influx of legally admitted labor may contribute to reducing trafficking.

Security policies should take into consideration both the safeguarding of national borders and the protection of the individuals. Human security should be an integral part of governmental security policies.

The following steps could be instrumental in furthering counter-trafficking: establishing a common data and referral system at regional and international level, strengthening the technical capacity in particular through training, developing awareness raising activities and taking preventive and repressive measures as law enforcement priorities.

Turkey's ongoing economic transformation and European vocation make her a favorite destination luring people from adjacent areas in search of a more suitable environment.

Trafficking in human beings is considered as one of the prominent types of organized crime. Current rather restrictive migration policies are one of several factors contributing to the rise in human trafficking. Measures taken against terrorism bring ever tighter controls. Connections between organized crime and terrorist organizations appear as a source of major concern.

It is estimated that 700.000 women, children and men are bought and sold across international borders each year and exploited for sex or forced labor. The world-wide number of trafficking victims each year is believed to reach 3.000.000 when victims of internal trafficking are included.

The 2005 ILO report on forced labour states: “Human trafficking is so common now that it is the third most profitable criminal activity in the world after drugs and arms trafficking. Globally, forced labor – including sexual exploitation – generates 31 billion USD, half of it in the industrialized world, a tenth in transition countries.” This quote is self-explanatory to demonstrate how seriously the question should be tackled.

International agreements and multilateral arrangements within the UN system, OSCE and Council of Europe provide useful tools for bolstering solidarity in anti-trafficking. Nevertheless, adhesion to such instruments is far from being a panacea in itself.

The situation in Turkey

Situated at the intersection of continents, Turkey has been displaying an active approach in the struggle against trafficking in human beings. In this sense, Turkey performs a security producer function.

Areas of instability close to Europe are mostly situated in Turkey’s neighborhood. Turkey’s cooperation is therefore essential for the stability of the South East and wider Europe though benefits may not be perceived immediately.

Turkey is a destination country in trafficking of essentially women. Two out of four main routes into Europe are in Turkey’s vicinity: The Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. Others are the North African and Central and Eastern European routes.

Trafficked human beings are most commonly employed in unregulated therefore unprotected domestic work such as childcare or taking care of

the old, etc. According to ILO research as many as 20 % of irregular migrants in the CIS are at some stage exposed to some form of physical constraint.

Fight against human trafficking comprises a wide range of strategies:

First of all, it is necessary to strengthen measures to alleviate the circumstances that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Lack of appropriate rights for returned trafficked persons and adequate financial resources in the countries of origin increase the risk for re-trafficking and re-victimization. Prevention of trafficking should devote a serious effort to organized crime side of the problem in origin, transit and destination countries. Combating human trafficking should rely on close co-operation between origin, transit and destination countries. Turkey stands ready to share the responsibility of addressing this issue, but should not be seen as a border guard or an outpost for “Fortress Europe”.

As a token of Turkey’s commitment to the struggle against human trafficking, a far-reaching project has lately been launched to step up measures and assist victims.

The principal components of the project are:

- Operation of a tip-off helpline “157”,
- Opening of more shelters for victims across Turkey (İstanbul, Ankara, Antalya, Trabzon, Van, Adana/Mersin),
- A public awareness-shaping information campaign (TV spots, billboards at airports etc.),
- Passport inserts for foreign visitors,
- Intensive training for officials,
- Improvement of the national referral scheme with the establishment of a network of NGOs dealing with the issue.

Within the framework of this project, the helpline became operational as of May 23rd, 2005. Since this date, 269 trafficking-related calls and 163 rescue requests have been received. Through helpline calls, almost 30 victims of trafficking have already been rescued.

This project is coordinated by the Government of Turkey and implemented by IOM, Ankara Mission. The spot film designed for victims and promoting “157” helpline has started to be aired on Turkish nation-wide channels and on other TV channels in Moldova and Ukraine.

More than 500.000 passport leaflets have been printed and handed over at İstanbul and Antalya airports by staff members of the Police Department for Aliens which is responsible for passport control and immigration.

Finally, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice and Gendarmerie, IOM will organize a set of training programmes for law enforcement officials and officers.

In line with her multilateral and bilateral commitments, Turkey has implemented new policy measures on migration and in particular for the repression of human smuggling and trafficking. The new Turkish Penal Code prescribes heavy penalties for these two offences. Besides, the Citizenship Law and Law on Work Permits were amended to deter attempts for irregular migration and labour-related exploitation including its sexual form. Furthermore, Turkey has been pursuing a pro-active policy, strengthened by bilateral cooperation agreements. Such Agreements are concluded with Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Since we are convinced that NGOs play a major role in counter-trafficking efforts, we are working on setting up a network of NGOs in this domain.

NGOs also play an important role in managing the shelters for the victims of trafficking. In this regard, Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF) and Foundation for Women’s Solidarity (FWS) deserve special thanks for their efforts in managing shelters with their limited resources. Furthermore, HRDF organizes training programmes for law enforcement agencies in Turkey.

Another important aspect in the fight against human trafficking is not to lose from sight the genuine requirements of NGOs which are actively serving on the ground. There is a need to devote funding to various projects to implement in the real surrounding; therefore, we should step up our efforts to help NGOs, in particular financially.

Trafficking is considered not only as matter of concern at humanitarian level but also as a security issue by Turkish authorities. It is perceived as a field that links the concept of public security to that of individual human beings. Therefore connecting security concerns with freedoms and rights and bringing in a human rights-oriented approach is essential. For example, extendable residence permits for up to six months are issued for victims in order to enable them to stay in Turkey for treatment and rehabilitation. Furthermore, free medical care, accommodation and psychiatric counseling are also provided. Victims can also apply for working permits.

From this perspective, Turkey would become a leading country in her region. Yet a strong correlation remains between trafficking and insufficiency of economic opportunities, social desperation and urge for a better life in source countries. Diminishing the impact and limiting the high damage caused by trafficking may be partial remedies but beyond these there do not seem to be so many effective alternatives though one should not refrain from looking for creative policy options.

Recent statistics reveal that an annual average of 250 victims of trafficking have been identified in Turkey, a significant number of which returned voluntarily to their countries, some obtained temporary residence permits while some other victims were accommodated. Of course, with the “157” helpline running quite smoothly the number of identified victims is likely to increase in a foreseeable future. Available figures point to that tendency.

Under the guidance of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a national Task Force on combating trafficking was initiated to convene since 2002 and a National Action Plan was drawn up to develop further policy and enforcement measures.

Turkey is used in general as a transit territory for irregular migration with the likelihood of becoming a destination country while it is already a destination country for victims of trafficking. In addition to counter-measures taken to curb both irregular migration and trafficking in and through Turkey, a positive change of mindset has emerged and public awareness raising activities have been intensified.

Turkey believes in the need for developing better information systems along with data and information exchange on irregular migration and trafficking. Cooperation between international organizations such as IOM and BSEC promises a lot in capacity building in the wider South Eastern European region. In view of the organized crime dimension of trafficking, comprehensive and compatible systems for the collection, processing and distribution of information among origin, transit and destination countries would let us efficiently tackle with this scourge. Once again, it is noteworthy to recall that human trafficking now ranks as the third largest source of money for organized crime after trafficking of arms and drugs according to the United Nations.

Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) is composed of main origin, transit and destination countries for human trafficking. Therefore, Turkey contemplates calling on the BSEC countries to consolidate their accomplishments in combating human trafficking through solid arrangements within BSEC. That may be carried out either by an experts group or by introducing the trafficking issue on the agenda of the already existing organized crime scheme.

Taking into account the transnational character of trafficking, there is a pressing need for sustainable regional and multilateral preventive actions and networks addressing the international dimension of this crime.

Our joint drive should be further enhanced not only by better equipping ourselves in terms of infrastructure and control instruments but also by acting more efficiently in preventing, detecting and prosecuting the human trafficking related crimes as well as protecting and assisting victims. But without overlooking the root causes. The struggle against human trafficking is a long-term one. A staunch dedication is necessary.

The situation in Moldova

Moldova has been a country of origin in human trafficking for years. In 2004, 62 victims out of 239 victims identified in Turkey were Moldovan.

Based on the interviews with those who were apprehended in Turkey, the main pull factor for Moldavian irregular migrants appears to be mostly economic in nature as Turkey's GDP per capita (3000 USD) is five times higher than the Moldavian GDP (600 USD). Besides, a rather liberal and neighbour-friendly visa regime applied by Turkey as well as easy transportation from South East Europe to Turkey is secondary pull factors.