

Human Trafficking and Turkey

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Turkey has been facing a very important and devastating international problem, human trafficking, in the recent years. The recent political turmoil and clashes occurring in neighboring areas have pushed people into the country with the hope of a better life, security and protection from persecution. Turkey becomes a destination country for persons trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and labor. Most victims come from countries of the former Soviet Union, including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Although the trafficked victims in government statistics still show low numbers, HRDF believes that this might be the tip of an iceberg.

Turkey's response to this problem has been quite effective since 2002. Turkey has been placed among Tier 3 countries in US TIP Report in 2000 and 2001. Ratifying most of the international agreements, first enacting a specific local law on combating human trafficking and then enacting of new Penal Code by June 2005, training of police officers and judiciary staff (judges and prosecutors) and involvement of HRDF as an NGO in combating efforts have moved Turkey from Tier 3 countries to Tier 2 countries with the declaration of the President of USA in September 2003.

Combating human trafficking cannot be considered as a program that can be executed or implemented by one sector. It is a program that involves various sectors and agencies from the public, NGO and private sector at the national level. Furthermore, it should include regional and transnational collaborations and cooperation including various sectors.

The Human Resource Development Foundation⁶⁵ has been involved in combating human trafficking activities since 2003 and has developed its

⁶⁵ Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF) is a leading non-profit, non-governmental and autonomous organization based in Istanbul working on population and development fields with an emphasis in reproductive health as well as the

programme. The overall objective of the program is to contribute to international efforts and to enhance the national capacity of Turkey to prevent trafficking in women as well as to increase awareness of Turkish population on trafficking in women.

The initial activities were directed towards the capacity building of HRDF on combating human trafficking. HRDF professionals have participated at:

- International meetings (i.e. OSCE-Uzbekistan; KEPAD-Greece);
- Trainings (i.e. ICMPD Police-NGO training, Combating Human Trafficking Training by British Council-United Kingdom);
- Study tour (Moldova, Ukraine, Austria, Netherlands).

HRDF has signed two protocols with the government to collaborate in combating human trafficking and one protocol with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality for the funding of a flat for the shelter for victims:

- The protocol between the Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Security and HRDF, signed in September 4, 2003;
- The protocol between the General Commandership of Gendarme and HRDF, signed in June 14, 2004;

empowerment of the human resource. Since its establishment in 1988 by 40 founding members, HRDF has developed, executed, implemented, and also participated in, a number of projects and activities at national and international levels on wide and versatile range of issues such as STIs & HIV/AIDS training and Information, Education and Communication (IEC), community development, community-based health services, development of technical training materials for service providers, promoting children's rights and improving the socio-economic status of women, providing social support for refugees and victims of human trafficking. Through these projects and activities, HRDF has accumulated a remarkable experience and know-how in project development, implementation and assessment, and also partnership and coordination skills with various international organizations and has served 400,000 women, 30,000 health service providers, 8,000 immigrants and refugees. Since 1997, HRDF is one of the internationally accredited executing agencies of UNFPA. HRDF has a special consultative NGO status with UN Economic and Social Council.

- The protocol between the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and HRDF, signed in June 29, 2004 (extended for another year in June, 2005).

Provision of assistance is an essential component of the programme. Victims of trafficking need help and support in areas like shelter, medical and legal counseling, translation, adaptation to a new environment, organization for their voluntary and safe returns.

Shelter

The flat for the shelter was rented in July 2004 with the funding provided by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. A protocol has been signed between the Municipality and HRDF during the NATO Summit in Istanbul; a ceremony was held with the presence of Mr. Colin L. Powell, US Secretary of State USA and Mr. Abdullah Gül, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Most of the refurbishment and related repairs have been finalized by the end of October, 2004 and the shelter is operational since November, 2004. The running costs (other than the rent) of the shelter is covered by both Philip Morris/Turkey and Philip Morris/International; the administrative costs are covered by HRDF. Beyoğlu District Municipality supports the shelter by providing dried food items.

Running the Shelter

The shelter is a support center for victims of trafficking where their voluntary participation is essential. All administrative and paperwork are conducted at the Headquarters of HRDF, by the Programme Coordinator.

Currently, there are three housing counselors, who speak Turkish and Russian, working at the shelter. Main responsibilities of the housing counselors are:

- Transfer of victims from Istanbul Foreigners Department to the shelter;
- Transfer of victims from the shelter to the airport and accompanying them to the airplane for departure;
- Accompanying and assisting the victims to health services;
- Daily management of shelter, including shopping and assisting the victims in daily activities;
- Translation for interviews during psychological and legal counseling;
- Assisting IOM staff for the issues related with the safe return of the victim (during IOM screening, consulate visits, etc)

The shelter referral system for victims is as follows: Police and/or Gendarme forces identify the victims among others that have been caught during the raids or through phone calls. IOM expert makes screening to identify the victim status of these women using standard tools to provide their voluntary return. HRDF's case manager takes the responsibility of the victim from the police and transfers her to the shelter. The victim stays at the shelter until her safe return is arranged in collaboration with IOM.

The victims of trafficking spend their *reflection period* at the shelter. This quietly spent period helps the victims of trafficking to regain their self-confidence and also trust to other people. Occasionally, the victims at the shelter are called back to the police station if there is new evidence for that particular file. Also, the victims who have refused to witness or testify initially, sometimes change their minds during the reflection period and decide to share the information they got.

More than 100 victims have stayed at the shelter since the opening. 38% of the victims come from Ukraine, 28.5% from Moldova, 8.5% from Russia, and the rest are from other countries in the region.

Psychological and Health Support

Psychological and medical support for victims of trafficking are carried out under international patient rights protocols as well as ethical rules of medicine and with the consent of the individual victim of trafficking.

Taking into consideration the heavy trauma that the victims of trafficking have been through, HRDF's psychologist conducts an initial interview and a counseling session with each victim after her arrival to the shelter to determine her psychological needs and provide counseling on how to cope with what she has lived. The psychologist conducts extra sessions if the victim of trafficking needs continuous psychological support. Moreover if there is a need, she refers the victims to a psychiatrist. She also conducts group sessions in addition to above-mentioned individual interviews.

The Ministry of Health has announced a circular to all state hospitals on providing free medical care for victims of human trafficking. HRDF staff takes the victims to hospital whenever is needed.

Safe Returns

Voluntary and safe returns of the victims of trafficking are provided in collaboration with IOM. After all the paperwork is completed by IOM, Ministry of Interior informs HRDF about the schedule of the flight and HRDF's housing counselors accompany the victim(s) of trafficking to the airplane.

Training of Law Enforcement Officers, Judges and Prosecutors

Training of police officers and judiciary staff is crucial to raise awareness within these groups in order for the efficient implementation of legal regulations against human trafficking. HRDF has successfully implemented a training program in 2004 with the funds received from the European Union and British Council.

A total of 151 law enforcement officers have participated at the three-day trainings organized by HRDF in 6 different provinces. A total of 63 prosecutors and judges have participated at 3 two-day trainings organized by HRDF in 2 different provinces.

These trainings are expected to provide knowledge and skills to the judiciary and law enforcement staff on issues like the basic concepts of human trafficking; its motives, consequences and mechanisms; international protocols; national laws and regulations; basic rules of working with victims; cooperation and collaboration of all relevant parties in combating human trafficking; case studies; victim assistance programmes; the role of NGOs' in combating human trafficking, etc.

International Collaboration in Combating Human Trafficking

Catholic Relief Services/Bulgaria and the HRDF have organized an international meeting on “*Cooperation Between NGOs and Law Enforcement Agencies Across Countries in Combating Human Trafficking*” held in Istanbul between the dates 16-17 September 2004. The main purpose of the meeting was to explore and identify opportunities for cross-border cooperation of police, authorities and NGOs in Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania and Moldova. Participants invited from four countries represented the government sector, and mainly the security forces as well as NGOs working in the area of combating human trafficking either to prevent trafficking in human beings or to assist the victims. A total of 54 participants from these countries have participated at the conference.

A project on “*Cross Border Cooperation for Efficient Victim Assistance*” with the partnership of CRS/ Bulgaria, CRS/ Serbia; Caritas/ Bulgaria, Astra/Serbia and HRDF is launched by the beginning of 2005. HRDF has organized a workshop in May in Istanbul to exchange experiences with the participation of representatives of Foreigners Departments of Security Directorates of 10 provinces in Turkey. A regional forum with the participation of relevant organizations, i.e. Gos and NGOs from these 4 countries will be organized in September in Sofia to further discuss the regional activities and possible collaborations.

Human Trafficking in Bulgaria

A survey has been conducted in August 2004 in two Bulgarian towns at the Turkish-Bulgarian border. HRDF has provided consultancy including preparation of the questionnaire and survey design and data analysis for this survey. The main objective of the survey was to obtain information to clarify trafficking of women or children from Bulgaria. The starting point of this was the local rumors in Bulgarian border towns, about Turkey's being a transit country for trafficking from Bulgaria. So the survey was designed both to inquire these rumors and also to collect information on the general characteristics of the population under risk in these two towns. The field study was conducted by CRS/ Bulgaria and a local Bulgarian NGO. The data has been processed by HRDF. The rumors regarding the intense mobility from Bulgaria to Turkey as a transit country has not been supported by the data obtained in this survey.

Networking

HRDF has started its networking activities in 2003. Currently a database of NGOs has been established. HRDF communicates and does information sharing with the NGOs on this database.

HRDF has participated at many international meetings as well as national meetings to present its anti trafficking activities and to discuss durable solutions to the ongoing problems in this area. These activities have led to the recognition of HRDF in this area. As a consequence of this recognition, HRDF has been receiving denunciations from the NGOs in source countries on missing women who can be potential victims of human trafficking. These kinds of information have been forwarded to the General Directorate of Security and HRDF makes the follow up of them to provide feedback.

Partners and Collaborators

HRDF collaborates with a number of institutions and organizations while working on various components of its combating human

trafficking programme, bearing in mind that the collaboration of the agencies is a critical factor:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- Ministry of Interior,
- Ministry of Health,
- General Directorate of Security,
- General Commandership of Gendarmerie,
- Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality,
- IOM.

HRDF collaborates with EU, British Council and Catholic Relief Services in other projects to combat human trafficking and also exchanges information with UNHCR and ICMC.

The collaboration of HRDF with Ministry of Interior and General Commandership of Gendarmerie is mentioned in a book written by Kemal Derviş, Daniel Gros, Michael Emerson and Sinan Ülgen.

Awareness Raising through the Media

HRDF maintains relationship with the media to increase the awareness of the society on human trafficking issues and the situation in Turkey through interviews with the major media organizations.

Current Situation

Turkey has been placed among Tier 3 countries in US TIP Report in 2000 and 2001. Following Turkey's response to human trafficking problem, Turkey was moved from Tier 3 countries to Tier 2- watch list countries with the declaration of the President of USA in September 2003.

The interim report of US State Department in January 2005 has mentioned about HRDF's shelter and the collaboration of HRDF with the Government. Lastly, the 2005 TIP Report has placed Turkey in Tier 2 countries.