

*The sexual exploitation of boys from Eastern Europe*

WEBINAR SUMMARY

29 Mar 2016

**I. Presenters:**

**Michelle Asbill** is a doctoral student currently spending her academic year (2015-2016) in Bulgaria as a recipient of a fellowship to conduct research related to her dissertation. It is on the topic of Bulgarian human traffickers and the incentives to engage in human trafficking.

**Viktoría Sebhelyi** is currently finishing a PhD dissertation in Sociology of Education at the University of Pécs. The dissertation examines the links between socialization and sexual exploitation in human trafficking. Ms. Sebhelyi conducted nearly 20 human trafficking researches in recent years and has published several articles on sexual exploitation and child protection.

**II. Content:**

Ms. Asbill started by explaining that the goal would not be to present the general statistics on sexual exploitation of boys from Eastern Europe, but rather provide an overview and implications for research of the current limited knowledge base. She mentioned three studies from 2014 and 2015, published by [ECPAT](#), [UNOCD](#) and [Center for the Study of Democracy](#). They all emphasized the expanding trend of boys' sexual exploitation, but had trouble providing clear numbers for this increase.

The researcher emphasized that while data is certainly helpful, it should be interpreted with care, since quantitative research is conducted in different ways by different researchers and with dissimilar methodologies ranging from country to country.

Unclear statistical data create a problem regarding how far reaching the problem of boys' sexual exploitation is and leads to four key challenges for researchers:

1. Significant lack of research: even in terms of key questions, such as who is the target population of sexual, which has practical implications of preventing service provision for their boys to improve.
2. Stigma and social taboo for paying for same-sex sexual favors, which takes the exploitation of boys underground, making them even more vulnerable and marginalized and preventing law enforcement, child protection and social workers from reaching them.
3. Smaller likelihood of children and teenagers of identifying themselves as victims and reporting their abuse, while law enforcement is not trained to recognize these issues.
4. Due to female victims of trafficking getting more attention, male victims are often overlooked.

Mrs. Sebhelyi continued with the case study of Hungary, based on a transnational research that she was part of in 2009, called [CONFRONT](#) (Countering New Forms of Roma Children Trafficking: Participatory



Approach), where both sending and receiving countries were involved. While acknowledging that trafficking is not an ethnic, but a poverty-related issue, the study exclusively focused on Roma girls and boys, striving to determine the key victims, trafficking factors and explore how vulnerable children are protected. The researchers interviewed individuals from local level institutions, dealing with the victims, such as the police and foster homes, as well as community members, including informants.

Mrs. Sebhelyi explained that, in terms of the legal framework, Hungary's 2013 Criminal Code does not fully transpose Directive 2011/36/EU, which lists punishable acts of trafficking and constitutes a basis for their research. Hungary's legislation still defines trafficking as selling and buying of people and doesn't emphasize exploitation, even though the Directive puts direct emphasis on this reality. While the Directive stresses that a child is a victim of the crime of trafficking, even if she/he has agreed to be part of the exploitation or not, Hungary's new legislation stresses that children can be both victims and perpetrators and are punishable through fines and imprisonment. In 2014, 272 children were fined for prostitution and 53 were imprisoned. In 2015, 10% of cases of children under 18 were imprisoned.

In terms of profiling, the research determined that trafficked children are usually poor children, those coming from families or neighborhoods with high rates of criminal activities, from dysfunctional families, living in foster care or runaway.

One of the key findings of the research was that, in Hungary, there is a deficiency of the referral and assistance system, as professionals are often left to determine victims by themselves, given that there is no protocol for victim identification. Many of the interviewed professionals confessed that they look for physical and emotional suffering, even though for a key to survival in abuses is hiding suffering, especially for children. Some experts even said that child prostitution is voluntary, not a question of abuse, as it part of the Roma culture. At the moment, Hungary lacks special assistance for victims of trafficking, especially children, with all cases being now processed by the Victims' Assistance Service.

Even in the rare instance, when children are identified as victims of human trafficking, there is no governmental assistance, as there are only a few places in shelters offered to adult victims or children who become adults while with their parents in foster care. The system would require the children to simply go back to foster care institutions, which often lead to their re-victimization, as they lack trained staff and protocols on how to assist child-victims. Police often exploit rather than help. They often treat the victim as a criminal and only start an investigation, if the victim reports the abuse, which goes against the EU Directive. The limited definition of trafficking, as selling and buying people for money and the general belief that some of the children as much perpetrators as victims leads to few cases going to court and the child protection referral system being used.

At the end of the presentation, Ms. Asbill encouraged participants to read reports from Western Europe to find out about the implications and results in countries, where the demand for trafficked boys comes from, recommending the ECPAT country reports on Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Norway.

