

# CAAHT 2005 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

11 -12 October 2005

Sheraton Hotel, Tirana, Albania

***Session I: Identifying practical programming ideas for prevention and awareness raising***

## **Panel Presentation:**

### **Awareness raising and skills building with Roma girls and women**

#### **Ms. Donika Godaj, Young Women's Christian Association**

The Young Women's Christian Organization of Albania (YWCA of Albania) has been implementing a project called "Educational Seminars Against Trafficking of Romany Women, Girls and Children in the Outskirts of Tirana" for several months, with support from the CAAHT/USAID program. The project is a continuation of our work of the past four years with that community, which is rendered by social marginalization and extreme poverty as a primary source for traffickers, particularly for children.

The project's goal is to raise Romany women, girls and children's awareness of the phenomenon of trafficking. The project aims at informing and sensitizing this community about trafficking in general, by providing basic information about fundamental human rights, women's rights and children's rights, Albanian legislation on anti-trafficking, increasing their self-esteem, presenting the cycle of domestic violence, sensitizing mothers and children about the importance of education, and establishing a group of peer-educators in order to ensure the sustainability of the project. Four suburban areas in the capital city have been selected, which have the biggest concentration of Romany population: *Allias, Yzberisht, Rrapi i Treshit, Lagjia 10* and *Breg-Lumas*

The project has two components: mothers, and children, with whom parallel efforts are being made. Based on their concentration levels, education, living standards and mentality, the women's program was developed with a plain and understandable language, using interactive methods, such as small group discussions, video shows with real stories, discussions based on the cases that women present themselves, etc. Everything was conceived in a way so as to provide the participants with a comfortable setting, for them to speak and learn.

In addition to seminars, mothers are involved in social events, where they get to know each other, and respect and appreciate what they represent. Also, a mini-fair is organized for the women to present their works, in order to increase their self-esteem.

Events with the children include learning courses with children from two to fourteen years old. In those courses they learn the basic elements, colors, numbers, and handicraft. They are also encouraged to speak about their personal problems, and they learn about risks of not living with their parents, child sexual abuse, and failure to go to school. In addition, three fairs are organized with their works.

In order to be effective and respect their psycho-motor and socio-emotional parameters, the children were divided into three groups. The curriculum was developed with great care, using role-playing, story-telling and animated stories about trafficking and school education.

The project is now halfway in its implementation, and the experience so far has shown that:

- Some girls and women go to work abroad on their own free will, incited by their great desire to escape poverty and the situation of their families, without knowing the conditions which wait for them. Children are exploited for forced labor, in some cases with their families' approval, usually upon a promise of an ongoing payment made to their families.
- Romany women and girls have a low level of education: most of them are even illiterate. They come from divorced families. A good part of them have been forced to marry at a very young age, and have 3-4 children with different partners. Their health condition is grave.

In the conditions of lack of information, they fall prey to trafficking through false marriages. The main reasons for this are:

- Extreme poverty;
- parents' conservative mentality;
- lack of adequate income to afford living; and
- continuous discrimination in the education system, by teachers and other Albanian children.

Marriage when still minors and bearing children at a very young age prevents them from completing compulsory education.

It is very important to get their trust, because it is not easy for them to open up to other people. Many Romany women beg together with their children in order to ensure their livelihood. And they do not admit this openly, unless they have established trust in you.

Illustrating materials are a feature of the work with this community, because long talks or lectures are not very effective, due to lack of attention or having to sit still for a long time.

There is a need to extend the program to include other groups from the same areas and other areas, because this category of people still cannot make the distinction between prostitution and trafficking.

By way of conclusion, I can say that the project is really challenging and requires much maturity because of the specifics of this particular community and their great need to be accepted without prejudices.