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Session II: Identifying practical programming ideas for assistance and reintegration

Panel Presentation:

Assistance and reintegration work with women and girls from minority communities

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Vatra has worked in the area of human trafficking for seven years. Currently it is carrying out activities in the area of prevention and reintegration of victims of trafficking. Ongoing research and analysis on the phenomenon that Vatra has carried out has identified the fact that about 50.2% of victims of trafficking come from the Egyptian and Romany minority communities. Based on this shocking fact, Vatra has undertaken projects aiming at sensitizing not only those communities about the threats the phenomenon poses but also government institutions, so that the latter can take concrete action, which would involve social and economic treatment of families, with the goal of preventing the trafficking of children, women and girls from those communities.

Given that the impact of efforts with those communities is tangible when parallel work is done — both prevention and reintegration — we have aimed at adapting or combining our projects, working along both lines of action simultaneously. This is what distinguishes Vatra from the rest of the organizations working in this area.

The awareness-raising work that Vatra staff does through training on human trafficking has now moved to neighborhoods and families, which has enabled the identification of Egyptian and Romany families that have been affected by the phenomenon and identification of women and girls who have fallen prey to trafficking.

We have now extended our work to Fire, under the CAAHT-funded project, where we cover areas with a considerable concentration of those communities: Vlora, Novosele, Levan, Patos, and Roskovec. This has enabled us to identify the factor leading to the increase in the number of children, women and girls who are affected by trafficking.

In addition to the economic factors, what is particular to both minorities includes:

- the mentality related to prostitution;
- traditions such as marriages at very young ages, illegal marriages, marriages within the clan, etc.;
- low educational levels or high illiteracy, which have been rampant among the youth of both communities recently; and
- the failure to register their children, particularly those of the Romany community, which makes it difficult to know the accurate number of trafficked women, girls and children.

Those factors have led to:

- the sale of children, women and girls by their own family members;
- recycling of victims of trafficking (who whenever are deported by various EU member state police authorities, are recycled into trafficking again);
- their becoming accustomed to the phenomenon; and
- families' indifference to trafficked children, women and girls.

Taking into account those elements, Vatra provides the target-groups with more specific and special training, by working directly with the victims' families.

During this year, 40 affected families have been identified:

- Novosele 10 families
- Roskovec 20 families
- Levan 10 families

Through direct work with the families the Vatra staff has managed to select 10 victims of trafficking, who had been returned by EC member state police and who now live with their families.

Vatra aims at providing trafficked women and girls and those at risk a chance to be involved in social reintegration programs, through social services provided at the shelter or elsewhere. Based on their educational and cultural level, Vatra-provided assistance consists of the services benefiting the victims. For example, training through the vocational courses, in cooperation with state institutions such as vocational education schools, aims at:

- preparing them, in groups with a wide inclusion of various communities, as a first step towards integration in a normal setting;
- preparing them with a complete curriculum;
- providing them with a state diploma; and
- giving them a faster employment opportunity, by the institution that trains them.

Also, Vatra considers the preparation for reintegration in combination with providing them with personal working tools, relevant to their professional profile, so that victims of trafficking can have more chances of self-employment.

Starting a small household micro-business by victims of trafficking is the finalization of their reintegration into normality. While our efforts with victims from the Egyptian community have yielded very good results — with regard to both their vocational training and their employment — we have come across difficulties with the Romany community:

- low educational level;
- lack of willingness to complete the course;
- frequent drop-outs from jobs; and
- selling of the personal tools.

Currently, Vatra has vocationally trained and employed 28 girls and women, 18 of whom belong to the Egyptian community and four who belong to the Romany community.

Cooperation with various organizations that work in the area of prevention or with social service centers in various districts has already been achieved by Vatra, which seeks to provide victims with the possibility of choosing alternative support. Also, organizations that work in the area of prevention can help their target groups. This cooperation, which Vatra

does through RILAT Network (established by Vatra in cooperation with the International Anti-Trafficking Center), has yielded very good results in the past two years, including:

- inclusion of victims that live outside the areas covered by Vatra;
- referring victims, by centers that provide only limited services to centers that can meet victims' needs; and
- performance of follow-up for victims after the process of reintegration is over.

While our cooperation with NGOs and other centers has been good on the two first items, we have run across difficulties with regard to the follow-up; this takes time and money to be done, and it is difficult for NGOs and centers to monitor it. This is a problem that should be discussed and addressed in the future.

Another very important line of action for Vatra's work includes group meetings and seminars at commune level, which aim at gathering the local government and community representatives, talking to local authorities openly about their concerns. This had a positive impact in the Commune of Novosele, where the local authorities decided to register the Romany children that had not been registered there. They also decided to enroll illiterate Romany children in schools.

The reintegration process is difficult, and it takes time and good will not only of service providers but also beneficiaries. This process becomes even more difficult when it focuses on victims from minority communities, and the reasons for this were mentioned above.

By way of thanking the conference organizers for the comprehensive agenda, we would like to wish you a successful work in these two days, and further successful efforts in combating human trafficking.