

Input for report GA 2024 gender peace and security

Introduction

To inform the Special Rapporteur's Report on Gender, Peace, and Security, which will be presented to the 3rd Committee of the UN General Assembly in October 2024, Caritas organisations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Slovakia, and Ukraine provide two Case Studies and Experiments described in their 2016 action research entitled *Trafficking in Human Beings in Conflict and Post-conflict situations*¹.

The action research stems from a collaborative effort by Caritas members of COATNET (Christian Organisations Against Trafficking Network), established in 2001. COATNET has consistently worked under the umbrella of Caritas Internationalis to denounce human trafficking and actively engage in the defence, rescue, and support of trafficked persons, adopting a comprehensive approach to address various facets of the issue.

Specifically, this submission intends to contribute to the following key questions:

- National action plans on women, peace and security, which include comprehensive measures to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons for all purposes of exploitation;
- Training for relevant personnel to identify, document and denounce situations with risks of trafficking, in particular in refugee camps or IDP sites;
- National procedures for early identification, assistance and referral to protection services for victims or potential victims of trafficking, including gender and child-sensitive measures in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in the context of forced displacement and forced migration;

Therefore, it intends to provide information on the following issues/topics:

- Mandatory training for peacekeeping personnel on trafficking in persons for all purposes of exploitation;
- Design of responses and programmes on prevention, protection and recovery from conflict-related sexual violence, psycho-social and medical support services, which mainstream trafficking in persons, taking into account the impact of policies, projects and programmes on men, women, boys and girls and trying to mitigate the negative consequences thereof.

¹ https://www.contrelatraite.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/anglais_traite_conflits.pdf

Case Studies and Experiments

The action research highlights the multifaceted nature of human trafficking in conflict and post-conflict situations, emphasising the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated international efforts to protect vulnerable people from exploitation.

The idea is to put forward concrete suggestions for actions with a direct effect on people at risk or victims of trafficking in human beings in various countries. Four experiments, each lasting six to eight months, were carried out in Albania, Armenia, Lebanon, and Turkey to anchor thinking about the actions that should be taken in reality. Each experiment was subject to an external evaluation.

Notably, the experiments in Lebanon and Albania are particularly relevant to the Special Rapporteur's Report on Gender, Peace, and Security.

In Lebanon: Train the police force to identify situations of trafficking in human beings concerning refugee women and children

Caritas Lebanon added a module to its training programme on different forms of trafficking, explicitly aimed at the police forces (the internal security and general security forces) on identifying victims among refugees, with a particular focus on women and children.

Since January 2016, this module has been included in training for police officers in the internal security and general security forces (the police responsible for border control and immigration). It will be extended to include judges and staff working for the Ministry of Employment and Ministry of Social Affairs who are in contact with children working on the streets.

Impact on victims

In early 2016, the number of children identified as victims of trafficking in human beings was 17. Although this is still a very low number, it points to a change of perception among police units. Until now, the few victims identified were only domestic workers originating from Asia and Africa and women who were sexually exploited from Eastern Europe or Africa.

In April 2016, a police operation in two well-established brothels in Jounieh (a suburb of Beirut) revealed the presence of at least 75 Syrian women who had been reduced to

a state of sexual slavery. This situation had probably been tolerated by the local authorities and the police² for several years. The arrest of traffickers and the treatment of the people involved in prostitution, who were protected as victims, point to a shift in perceptions. This emerging awareness is partly down to the training provided by various NGOs such as Kafa, Caritas, etc., concerning victims of trafficking in human beings in general and victims among refugees in particular.

The pertinence of the police partnership

Lebanon has a unit in charge of investigations into trafficking in human beings and identifying victims. Apart from this unit, the legislative vagueness in terms of trafficking in human beings and exploitation advocates in favour of training for the various services. Indeed, although Lebanon adopted a law against trafficking in human³ beings in 2011, people involved in prostitution can still face criminal prosecution and be convicted based on a previous law, which is still in effect and prohibits working as a prostitute.

The anti-trafficking law, adopted without a debate so that the country was not classified in tier III⁵⁹ by the US State Department, remains relatively unknown among police officers. Because of the previous legislation, women involved in prostitution are generally viewed as criminals rather than potential victims of trafficking in human beings.

Another peculiarity is the artist's visa, issued by the general security department, which allows foreign women to reside legally for several months to work as artists or prostitutes. These women are not considered sex workers because they are not subject to employment legislation. They must have a sponsor (the Kafala system) authorised to keep their papers. In 2014, 3,400 artists' visas were granted.

For these reasons, purely in terms of sexual exploitation, training for the police services (internal security and general security forces) in detection and identification remains a priority.

The link between identification and protection

As shown by the cases of 75 Syrian women who suffered sexual exploitation, improving the process of identification in Lebanon is central to better treatment for victims of trafficking in human beings. Indeed, once they were identified, the young women concerned were placed in safe houses throughout the country, managed by associations with extensive experience in protecting victims of trafficking.

² The Druze leader Walid Joumblatt accused the police of complicity, which gave rise to an internal enquiry, the results of which were not known at the time of writing.

³ Each year, the US State Department publishes the "Trafficking in Persons Report". Countries classified in tier III are deprived of financial support from the United States.

These facilities quickly adapted to their new audience while strengthening their medical and psychological monitoring teams. According to one of the managers we met, monitoring around 30 victims, they quickly adapted to their new environment. They felt they belonged there, demonstrating the capacity of facilities for working with this audience.

Outside Beirut, protection facilities for children are effectively non-existent. A few places were recently created in safe houses. In practice, this prevents the protection of boys who are exploited in agriculture, the building trade and so on, particularly in the Tripoli and Bekaa regions – where the number of refugees is estimated at over 900,000 people.

National recommendations

- Support access to legal work for refugees to reduce the financial pressure on women and children. Push for the adoption of a civil law defining a legal age for marriage to combat early marriages for exploitation.
- Make legislation on people involved in prostitution consistent, and develop prevention programmes.
- Define a legal status as camp managers for the *chawichs*⁴ to limit abuses to rental prices for tents and organise illegal working, particularly for women and children.
- Develop protection facilities throughout the country for children (boys and girls) who are victims of various forms of exploitation.
- Strengthen the law on the protection of children at risk of exploitation to ensure that they do not automatically return to the care of their parents once placed in situations where they play a role in their exploitation.
- Develop protective accommodation across the country to offer safe areas for different types of individuals (street children, victims of sexual exploitation, etc.).
- Develop training for all professionals who come into contact with children.

Recommendations to UNHCR in Lebanon

- Do not make the renewal of registration with UNHCR dependent on an undertaking that does not work.
- Include the risks of exploitation in the various forms identified by the research, not only violence against women, in the vulnerability criteria that provide access to financial assistance for six months.

⁴ A *Chawich* ("leader") has the responsibility of acting as mediator between refugees, NGOs and UN, to maintain contacts with local Lebanese authorities, monitor and communicate the number of refugees to law enforcement authorities and keep an updated register of those sheltered in the camp.

In Albania: Strengthen the ability to identify victims of trafficking in human beings among refugees and improve their treatment

Context

At the end of March 2016, the border between Greece and Macedonia was closed, along with the borders between Macedonia and Serbia, Serbia and Croatia, etc. In all the Balkan states, the consequence of this series of restrictions was the reappearance of smugglers.

Because of its geographical location, Albania feared a massive arrival of refugees aiming to get to Italy via the Albanian coast. The government's response was mainly focused on security, with a strengthening of border controls on the borders with Greece and Macedonia to limit arrivals and send people quickly back to Greece, with no real assessment of their situation or their vulnerability to trafficking in human beings.

Proposed experiment Caritas

Albania proposed training to improve the identification of people who were at risk or victims of trafficking in human beings. Seven training sessions were organised in the Durrës, Tirane, Lezhe, Shkoder, and Kukes. The training was delivered to 205 people from local institutions, social services, the employment department, judges, head teachers, dispensaries, the local police and the border police. The aims of the training were to:

- build capacity among local authorities for identifying and protecting victims of trafficking in human beings;
- implement local coordination for dealing with victims of trafficking in human beings;
- strengthen partnerships between different organisations and services at the local level;
- improve key actors' understanding of the various forms of exploitation, how people gain a hold over others, and relevant national and international legislation.

The training consisted of theoretical knowledge and presenting practical tools, interview techniques, etc.

Impact on victims

Following the training, seven people were identified, three of whom were victims of sexual exploitation. Two received medium-term treatment (six months). Work with Caritas Lebanon was then instigated to sort out their administrative status and ensure better access to

treatment. Although the impact is limited, this experiment shows the necessity of training professionals to recognise new phenomena with victims who do not speak the language, whose administrative situation is complicated, and so on.

Strengthening partnerships and taking positive steps

To improve the identification process, Caritas Albania has partnered with the border police so that a psychologist supported by interpreters can interview refugees and migrants apprehended by the border guards at the main entry points. Furthermore, the experiment's evaluation showed the necessity of a proactive approach to refugees and migrants moving/transiting to different countries. A multidisciplinary team present at the border is necessary to support border migration police in identifying specific vulnerabilities, such as trafficking.

National recommendations

- Develop similar training for social workers and medical personnel.
- Increase capacity for receiving people who have been victims of trafficking in human beings, both adults and children.
- Make it easier to receive foreign victims from an administrative standpoint and allocate funds to help strengthen teams (cultural mediators, interpreters and psychologists).

Conclusion

This research action underscores the critical need for a coordinated, multifaceted approach to combating human trafficking in conflict and post-conflict situations. By enhancing the capacity of local and international stakeholders, the Caritas organisations aim to provide more effective support to vulnerable populations and contribute to global efforts to ensure gender, peace, and security.

For further details on collaborative efforts and methodologies, refer to the [comprehensive Report by Caritas organisations](#).

Useful information sources:

- <https://www.contrelatraite.org/unhcr#>
- https://www.contrelatraite.org/campagne_exiles
- https://www.contrelatraite.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/anglais_traite_conflits.pdf
- <https://www.contrelatraite.org/recherche-action>