

The trafficking of Albanian children in Greece

Terre des hommes – January 2003



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Acknowledgments

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Our sincere thanks to Andrea Motta, activist photograph

We would finally offer our special thanks to Mrs. Nathalie HEPPELL, former Canadian police officer whom we have, since the end of 1999, entrusted with conducting a rigorous on-the-spot investigating and whose information and findings permitted us to launch our permanent campaign of seeking out, protecting, repatriating and reinserting Albanian children.

Terre des hommes

Founded in 1960 by Edmond Kaiser Terre des hommes provides assistance to children in distress, and this with no political, racial or religious bias. The Foundation has two vocations: the realisation of concrete projects giving direct assistance to needy children and acting as ambassador by promoting children's rights or denouncing their violation.

Terre des hommes works in over thirty countries, and more than 160 projects of direct assistance are run by the Foundation or its local partners. This means that each beneficiary, whether child, mother, family or community can be given individual attention within the following priorities:

- health care: mother-child health care, medical treatment, nutrition
- social work: prevention, protection, rehabilitation of children in particularly difficult situations (streetchildren, Aids orphans, abandoned, abused or traumatised children, adoption)
- children's rights: legal protection and assistance to minors.

Terre des hommes acts as an ambassador promoting children's rights with the general public and governments alike. In order to reach this aim, the Foundation carries out national and international campaigns denouncing violations of the fundamental rights of children. Furthermore, the Foundation proposes ways of changing public opinion to ensure the respect of the International Convention about children's rights. Indeed, this Convention, although ratified by all nations apart from two, is flouted only too often.

Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Results of Terre des Hommes' activity on the ground	6
1.2	Methods and sources	7
1.3	Problems encountered	7
1.4	Definitions of trafficking	8
2	The extent of the trafficking of Albanian children in Greece	9
2.1	Assertions based on various sources	9
2.2	Trafficking today	10
2.3	The reasons for the recent decrease	11
2.4	Where are the children today?	12
3	Understanding the traffic	15
3.1	Who are these children?	15
3.2	Why are children victims of trafficking?	17
3.3	By whom are the children trafficked?	18
3.4	How are the children trafficked?	20
	3.4.1 From recruitment to the place of exploitation	20
	3.4.2 The ordeals suffered by the children	20
	3.4.3 The various forms of exploitation	22
4	Assistance for child victims of trafficking	25
4.1	Preventive measures in Albania against trafficking in children	25
	4.1.1 National strategy:	25
	4.1.2 The role of public services:	25
	4.1.3 The role of the media:	26
	4.1.4 The role of Albanian civil society and international NGOs	26
4.2	The protection of trafficking victims	26
4.3	Repatriation: deportation and voluntary assisted return	28
	4.3.1 The legal framework	28
	4.3.2 Practices for children under 12	29
	4.3.3 Practices for children over 12: rapid deportation	29
4.4	Reintegration of a child	30
4.5	Co-ordination of the various participants	31
5	Recommendations	33

WARNING

In many countries, whether they were not so long ago shut in by a closed political system hermetically sealed off from outside contact, or whether their borders were always permeable, the circulation of persons and the globalisation of the economy entail large-scale migratory movements in which the traffic in human beings is increasingly appearing as the contemporary form of slavery.

Trafficking in children is just one of the most dramatic symptoms of this in that the collapse of basic public utilities, the rural exodus, the break-up of families and the need to survive make children – so to speak – the cheapest and most docile "raw material" for a multitude of, more or less visible, forms of exploitation, in breach of their most elementary rights to health, education and freedom, according to the criteria defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The prime purpose of this paper is to publicise an investigation and a campaign that *Terre des Hommes* has, since the end of 1999, been conducting in Albania and Greece, two neighbouring European countries, the first having inherited a particularly closed system and the other being a fully-fledged member of the European Union, and thereby to illustrate a phenomenon that is developing generally in Europe.

The intention of *Terre des Hommes* is not on any account to stigmatise these two countries. You will quickly understand on reading this report to what point the problem of the traffic in minors is at the very heart both of the economic, social and legal discussions taking place in our societies, and of the fight to have human rights in general and those of children in particular respected.

Slogans, incomplete snippets of information, rumours and allegations of all sorts apart, we firstly wanted, in a limited area but while taking the necessary time, to compile as documented and rigorous a collection as possible of the facts and testimonies provided by the children themselves, their families, or the authorities, while cross-checking and verifying this information through relevant national or international sources.

Of recent years, numerous studies have been conducted on the traffic in children while as often as not catering to the investigations and activities dealing with the sexual exploitation of children (sexual tourism, prostitution, paedophilia, etc...). We wanted to broaden the study to the countless illegal activities of which children are victims at the hands of traffickers that take advantage of their "relative capacity of discernment, expression and defence" (according to the definition underpinning the Justice of minors): begging, forced labour, commercial adoption, etc.

The results of this investigation served as a starting point for a programme run jointly in the two countries, in close co-operation with the domestic NGOs, both in Albania and in Greece, and involving the various phases of intervention, viz. prevention of child trafficking, seeking out the victims, help with their voluntary repatriation and their reinsertion in Albania according to scrupulously legal and reasonably fast procedures, guaranteeing their security, and psychological preparation, while taking account of the age and maturity of the children concerned.

Through this document, and from the "Albania - Greece", case we want to make our contribution by means of proposals and precise requests on the most important points:

- the seeking out, monitoring and receiving the children;
- the legal status of the children who fall victim to trafficking during their stay in the country of destination;
- the security and protection of the children, including during their stay in an institution;
- the co-ordination and training of the public and private bodies that look to their safekeeping, repatriation and reinsertion, at all stages of the procedure;
- the detection of risk-fraught institutional situations and procedures.

Since the essential of this report concerns Albania and Greece, these requests are addressed in the first place – and insistently – to the governmental authorities, but also to the civilian society, of these two countries. But the broad publicity that we wish to give to this study aims to make the national and international political, economic, trade-union, police and judicial authorities of most European countries that face identical problems aware of what is going on.

Child trafficking is by no means inevitable in Europe any more than elsewhere in the world.

And for several thousands of children in Europe today – sometimes from the age of 4 or 5 – this is really URGENT.

Terre des Hommes Foundation

Peter BREY
General Secretary

Bernard BOËTON
"Rights of the Child" Sector

Introduction

Over the past ten years, thousands of Albanian children from the age of four upwards have been rented out, sold, bought, and transported to Greece. In this European Union country, the children are economically or sexually exploited, under physical and psychological duress, for the profit of a third party, an adult. While the traffic has diminished today, hundreds of children unfortunately remain victims of it.

Until the end of the 1990s, this trafficking of children took place with the indifference of the States concerned. This indifference was explicable in part by the difficulties of the Albanian state, the new nature of the problem and lack of understanding of it, but also by the contempt shown towards children who were believed to come from the Roma community.

For the past two or three years, under pressure from NGOs, the Albanian and Greek States have been mobilised in order to combat this trafficking in children. The measures, implemented in a more favourable economic and social environment, have made it possible to considerably reduce the flow of this traffic in children. However little attention is paid to the task of assisting the children, the victims of the trafficking.

In the context of its mission to directly assist victimised children without paying any regard to political, racial or religious identity, the Terre des Hommes Foundation has participated in the struggle against the trafficking of Albanian children into Greece since 1999. Through its interaction with children, it has gathered precious information on this trafficking.

The objective of this report is to transmit the information gathered, first of all in order to raise awareness of the extent of this trafficking in children during the 1990s and the fact that it is continuing, as well as to testify to the horrible experience these children have undergone. This document describes the assistance put in place, but also and especially the lack of response on the part of states to protect the victims and allow them a better future.

The recommendations for waging a better struggle against the trafficking, communicated at the end of this document, stress the urgency of implementing long-term responses in order to permit these children to remain children.

The recommendations are aimed principally at the Albanian and Greek authorities.

1.1 Results of Terre des Hommes' activity on the ground

From October 1999 to January 2000, Terre des Hommes and the Albanian Foundation NPF "Ndhimë Për Fëmijët" carried out an inquiry into the trafficking of Albanian children in Greece. This inquiry was a response to information provided by the NPF foundation, derived from their activities in favour of vulnerable children in three Albanian cities; Elbasan, Korça and Berat. The temporary or permanent disappearance of children from school programs reinforced the strong presumptions that they were victims of organised trafficking.

This initial research project has been updated regularly. It was followed by three more intense inquiries between May and July 2001, between September and November 2001, and finally between February and May 2002.

From December 2000 onwards, as a result of the conclusions of the first investigation, Terre des Hommes had developed preventive programs against trafficking in schools in the cities of Elbasan and Korça. These prevention programs were subsequently completed with the repatriation of children from Greece to Albania from September 2001 onwards, in collaboration with other organisations. Since April 2002, a street project has been in operation in Thessaloniki with the Greek NGO ARSIS.

This report was elaborated with :

- 4 inquiries since 1999
- a preventive program in South Albania with Ndhimë Për Fëmijët, an Albanian Ngo
- a street project operated in Thessaloniki with the Greek Ngo Arsis
- participation to voluntary return of victims of trafficking
- an intense collaboration between non governmental and various ministries from Greece and Albania.

These programs are carried out in collaboration with the various Albanian ministries concerned: the Ministries of Social Affairs, Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Public Order, who meet in an interministerial group to combat trafficking in children¹, as well as Greek state bodies²; the juvenile public prosecutor, the juvenile department of the Greek police, state bodies responsible for the protection of children, non-governmental organisations operating in Albania (NGOs under the umbrella of BTKF³) and NGOs operating in Greece⁴.

Terre des Hommes is deeply involved in the co-ordination of those working in Albania and in the creation of links between Albania and Greece.

This action carried out by de Terre des Hommes gives it access to several types of sources.

¹ Most notably, Terre des Hommes participated in the interministerial conference "All together in the fight against child trafficking" in Tirana on November 6th, 2001.

² There is no interministerial group dealing with this question in Greece. The group combating human trafficking in Greece, called OKEA, and set up by the Ministry of the Interior, brought together various experts on trafficking and was open to other personalities outside the ministry, such as Daniel Esdras, representative of the OIM en Greece, and M. Lazos, a sociologist from the Panteion University in Athens. However, no representative of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was present in this workgroup.

³ BTKF "së Bashku Kundër Trafikimit të Fëmijëve" (All together in the fight against trafficking).

Composition in alphabetical order: Centre Peace Through Justice, Community Centre of Ballsh, Enfants du Monde Droits de l'Homme (EMDH), International Social Services - Albanian Branch, International Catholic Migration Committee (ICMC), Ndhimë Për Fëmijët, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, Vatra Centre of Vlora.

This organisation "is determined and committed to act according to the principle of the "best interests of the child", in combining efforts and experiences in order to protect Albanian children from trafficking in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and national legislation and mechanisms". An advisory committee is linked to the organisation. The advisory committee facilitates and supports the organisation's actions. It is composed of members of the ministries participating in the interministerial work group dealing with child trafficking, and intergovernmental agencies.

Based on existing programs, concrete collaboration has been established in complementary areas of action (prevention, protection, assisted voluntary return or reintegration). All members of the umbrella organisation work in one of the two geographical axes: towards Italy or Greece.

⁴ There is no umbrella organisation of Greek NGOs involved in the fight against child trafficking.

1.2 Methods and sources

We have operated by bringing together different sources and checking out witness accounts. The latter have been cross-checked with statistical data, observed facts, and other research carried out in other European countries. The different sources used for this report have been gathered during the Terre des Hommes projects on the ground.

We have cross-checked information collected thanks to:

- Witness accounts
- Interviews with trafficker, parents, forces of law and order, government officials in Albania and Greece
- Observation from experience on the ground
- Reading reports and studies on the child trafficking in Europe and Albania's surroundings.

The first source of Terre des Hommes is the collection of witness accounts from children who are victims of trafficking. These witness accounts were collected in the streets of Thessaloniki during the investigations (many accounts were collected in December 1999 with Ndhimë Për Fëmijët, then during street projects from April 2002 onwards) and when the children returned to Albania (maintenance of the children on their return, informal discussions during psychosocial sessions). The children do not speak easily about what they have lived through in Greece. They describe what happened more readily if they are in an environment that inspires confidence. Open interviews are the favoured approach.

The conclusions and observations derived from experience on the ground during preventive and protective programs, programs to assist the children's voluntary return, reintegration and co-ordination programs for various parties are the second "first-hand" source of Terre des Hommes.

Terre des Hommes has also collected facts, observations, and the results of its partners' actions⁵ and other parties involved in the struggle against the trafficking (NGOs, institutional personnel).

In Albania and in Greece, interviews have been conducted with children, parents, intermediaries, recruiters, police officers, juvenile prosecutors, social workers and members of NGOs. We have also interviewed other people with considerable amounts of information about this traffic, such as sociologists and journalists. These various interviews took the form of open questions. They were spread out over the period from December 1999 to May 2002.

Finally, we used various reports on the trafficking of children in Albania and more generally in Europe, produced by the International Migration Office, Save the Children, the UNHCR programme to assist children separated from their families, Save the Children, Human Rights Watch and reports on the situation of children in Greece, especially the reports by Greek Helsinki Monitor⁶.

1.3 Problems encountered

The problems encountered arise from the difficulty of obtaining sources of information, and the incomplete and partial nature of this information once obtained. Trafficking in children is considered a crime in Albania and Greece and it is judged under the criminal law. However, it is particularly difficult to obtain information on these illegal and clandestine activities. In revealing information, each recruiter, trafficker or smuggler is exposed to possible reprisals. The parents, due to complicity, being compromised, or out of fear, are also very reluctant to talk.

Most data collected concerned the most visible form of exploitation resulting from trafficking: begging or work in the streets. Other forms of trafficking less visible exist (sexual exploitation...) but the collecting of data is more difficult.

⁵ Particularly the Albanian NGO Ndhimë Për Fëmijët as well as other member organisations of the Albanian coalition

⁶ See bibliography in Appendix.

As for the children, often traumatised by the experience and fearing reprisals from - or against - their parents, it is difficult to persuade them to talk.

Absence of data for the beginning of the 1990s

Our first quantified sources date from 1997. By that date, the phenomenon had become widespread enough to be a visible social problem in Greece. Social workers had become concerned.

Trafficking for economic exploitation as an essential source.

The only data collected concerned the most visible form of exploitation resulting from trafficking: begging or work in the streets. We have the accounts of child victims of sexual exploitation, but the information we have does not permit us to make an estimate of the extent of the phenomenon.

1.4 Definitions of trafficking

"A trafficked child is a child moved from one place to another, legally or illegally, within his or her country or across borders. And this often takes place without the child's consent. Often, if not always, a third person is involved as an intermediary and the transaction is carried out in an organised fashion. At his or her destination, the child is exploited through work or involved in unlawful or illicit activities, through force or deception. The child may also be sold for adoption. The principal aim of child trafficking is profit. In most cases, child trafficking involves additional criminal activities. Among other things, the reasons for trafficking children involve:

- *Exploitation through work, including slavery and forced labour,*
- *Sexual exploitation, including prostitution and pornography,*
- *Illegal activities, including begging, theft, drug trafficking, etc.,*
- *Commercially motivated adoption schemes,*
- *Traffic in organs.*

The three principal criteria for identifying child trafficking are:

1. *Geographical displacement,
The child's place of residence is moved, within a country or beyond its borders;*
2. *Coercion, including the use of deception, threats or force;*
3. *A profit-making motive for the benefit of a third person¹⁸.*

⁷ This visibility explains, according to many participants encountered, the reaction of the Greek authorities (police, social services). The aim is above all to "clean up the streets" and not to help the child victims of trafficking, as we will see in the section on the struggle against trafficking.

⁸ Definition taken from a prevention and information pack on child trafficking for Albanian teachers, published by Terre des Hommes. It explains in an intentionally educational way the definition of the additional protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime with the aim of preventing, cracking down on and punishing trafficking in human beings, particularly women and children:

Article 3 of the protocol defines human trafficking as: "the recruitment, transfer, harbouring, or lodging of human beings by the threat of force or by force, or other forms of coercion, by kidnapping, fraud, deceit, abuse of authority or of a situation of vulnerability or by the offer or acceptance of payments or advantages to obtain the consent of a person having authority over another, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, as a minimum, exploitation through the prostitution of others, or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or service, slavery or practices equivalent to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs".

The extent of the trafficking of Albanian children in Greece

2.1 Assertions based on various sources

It is impossible for us to report precise statistics due to the illegal nature of the trafficking. For the end of the 1990s, the cross-checking of different sources allow us to give an idea of the scale of the problem and to confirm the following observations:

During the 1990s, thousands of children were working in the streets (begging, selling small items) in all the major cities of Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki, but also Patras, Larissa, Ioannina, Kavala and Heraklion).

- From 1993 to 1999, 300 children a year on average were arrested in Athens for begging.⁹
- In 1999, The Greek NGO Hamogelo¹⁰ collected 294 eyewitness accounts from "street children" during a street project in Thessaloniki.
- From November 1998 to October 2001, 644 children went through the special technical school "Agia Varvara" in the framework of a program for the protection of "street children".¹¹
- In Ioannina, at Easter 1999, during a 6-day inquiry, the NGO CVME counted 60 children begging in the streets.¹²
- According to M. Lazos, sociologist at the University of Panteion and author of a research paper on sexual exploitation in Greece, 1600 minors were sexually exploited in 1997.¹³
- Observations from the December 1999 joint mission of Terre des Hommes and Ndhimë Per Fëmijët estimated at about 1000 the number of street children in major Greek cities.
- The witness accounts collected from Terre des Hommes among child victims of trafficking confirm this order of magnitude.

A majority of children working in the streets in Greece are Albanian.

- According to the statistics of the juvenile branch of the Athens police, of the 300 children on average arrested every year for begging, 90% are Albanian.

⁹ Figures communicated by the Juvenile Department of the Athens police, May 8th, 2002.

¹⁰ Hamogelo means "Smile of the child"

¹¹ Agia Varvara is an institution administered by the "National Organisation of Social Welfare". Agia Varvara was originally a professional training centre. In 1998, it began to take in child victims of trafficking and children separated from their families for other reasons. This program was implemented in the framework of a program to aid street children. This program is the result of interministerial co-operation between the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice "with the aim of eliminating the phenomenon of "street children" begging in the streets, exposed to multiple dangers (physical and moral)". Directorate for Child Protection, Department 1 "explanatory note on the program for the protection of "street children", Athens, October 16th, 2001.

¹² Katerina Kalamboki, "results of the inquiry into street children", CVME (Centre of research and assistance for victims of mistreatment and social exclusion), April 21st, 1999.

¹³ Interview conducted by Terre des Hommes, April 13th, 2002.

- According to the NGO Hamogelo, the 294 children interviewed in the streets of Thessaloniki in 1999 were of Albanian origin.
- According to the statistics of the program "Agia Varvara", 84.3% of the 644 children who passed through the Centre from November 1998 to October 2001 were Albanian.
- In Ioannina, according to the NGO CVME, 90% of the children interviewed were Albanian.

During the 1990s, thousands of children working in the streets were victims of trafficking.

- In 1998, 983 Albanian children were deported by the juvenile police of Thessaloniki at the Albanian border. In 1999 the figure was 385. In 2000, 227. In 2001, 56.¹⁴ Their deportation by the Thessaloniki police confirms that their parents are not present on Greek soil, otherwise the children are sent back to their families by the police.
- From April 1999 to February 2001, the Filoxenia¹⁵ centre of Thessaloniki received 109 children. 37% had their families in Albania. Only 25% had their families in Greece.¹⁶
- The witness accounts gathered by Terre des Hommes among child victims of trafficking confirms the scale of the problem.

2.2 Trafficking today

The phenomenon of trafficking Albanian children to Greece still exists in 2002. Hundreds of children are victims.

- Personnel from the NGO ARSIS and from Terre des Hommes working in the streets in Thessaloniki observe an average of 30 to 40 children working in the street. Between a third and a half are replaced every three months.
- The head of the juvenile department of the Thessaloniki police stated in January 2002 that an average of one or two minors are arrested every day in Northern Greece and pass through his offices.¹⁷
- The witness accounts collected by Terre des Hommes among child victims of trafficking confirm that the traffic is continuing.

The trafficking has been concentrated in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki.

- In Ioannina and in Larissa, there are no longer children working in the streets.
- In Athens, the absence of street work prevents us from having such precise statistics. However, 5 or 6 children are received every week at the Agia Varvara centre, of whom 4 or 5 are Albanian nationals.¹⁸

¹⁴ Statistics communicated by the juvenile department of the Thessaloniki police, May 15th, 2002.

¹⁵ Filoxenia is a reception centre. It is a member of a non-profit association composed of two other institutions [Agios Padeleimon, a reception centre for the protection of disabled people aged over 18, and Papafio, an orphanage], operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the association of parents of handicapped persons. Since 1998, it has been taking in children separated from their families and child victims of trafficking. Filoxenia was originally financed by the Ministries of Macedonia and Thrace, and since 2000, it has been financed by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Funding is renewed every six months.

¹⁶ Information transmitted in June 2001 by Filoxenia to Terre des Hommes.

¹⁷ Interview with the head of the juvenile department of the Thessaloniki police with Terre des Hommes on January 25th, 2002.

¹⁸ Interview by Terre des Hommes with Mrs. Kouri, March 19th, 2002

2.3 The reasons for the recent decrease

Certain trends in Greece explain the decrease in the number of children who fall victim to trafficking:

- A decrease in the profitability of trafficking due to decreased spending by the population informed by the media about the children's lives;
- Greater vigilance (or the end of tolerance) by the Greek police at the borders and the areas where the trafficking takes place;¹⁹
- Regularisation of the Albanian population in Greece.

Certain trends in Albania have reduced the flow:²⁰

- The taboo concerning trafficking has been broken following media publicity and awareness-raising campaigns carried out by NGOs;
- The Albanian State has become aware of the situation and has been combating the trafficking (better border checks, national plan to combat trafficking) following pressure from the European Union and the United States;
- Albanian families have become increasingly aware of the situation following prevention and awareness-raising campaigns in Albania. *"The mother is now aware of the horrible situation of her child in Greece and of the fact that the trafficking is a criminal act punishable under the law";*²¹
- Changes in the behaviour of parents who now prefer to accompany their children. It is a consequence of their knowledge of the profits made by traffickers.

¹⁹ The Greek police have often been denounced by Human Rights Organisations (Helsinki Watch, Greek Helsinki committee...) for their corruption and involvement in the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation:

"Corruption of Greek authorities and police officers is one of the reasons behind the flourishing prostitution industry, including child prostitution, in Greece. In some cases police turn a "blind eye" to the problem, and in the worst instances, police collaborate with the traffickers. Here are a few of the examples of corruption on the part of Greek authorities and police:

- *14 out of 20 police officers at the Menidi police station were found to be involved in forgery, blackmailing and issuing of false certificates for residence permits to foreign women working as prostitutes.*

- *Retired police officers were arrested for money laundering from "white slavery," having transformed a house into an illegal brothel."*

In Greek Helsinki Monitor *"parallel report on Greece's compliance with the UN convention on the Rights of the child"*, August 2001, p57. at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/reports/GHM-Reports-Greece.html>

The presence of several types of human trafficking at once can lead us to deduce, if not involvement, then considerable tolerance on the part of the Greek police, until the problem became widespread enough to affect society as a whole at the end of the 1990s.

²⁰ To illustrate the reduction of this traffic in Albania, we will cite the estimation given by Robert Stratoberdha, director of Ndhimë Per Fëmijët: out of a class of 25 children (a special class for children who had not been attending school), in April-May 1999, 7 or more children left for Greece. In 2002, 2 or 3 children at most had been in Greece.

²¹ Interview by Terre des Hommes by Robert Stratoberdha, director of Ndhimë Per Fëmijët, February 11th, 2002. At the same time, he added: *"our task of prevention is now more difficult because the family hides the fact that the child has gone. They say the children are in Tirana. Previously, mothers openly admitted that they had sent their children to work in Greece"*.

2.4 Where are the children today?

Where are the children today who were trafficked during the 1990s to large Greek cities? There is little information available on this subject. No child has been reported missing in Albania due to the distrust of the Albanian State on the part of the population afflicted by this traffic, the people's lack of awareness of their rights, and also the involvement of parents in the trafficking.

Where are the children today who were trafficked during the 1990's to large Greek cities? There is little information available on this subject but directions to follow in research request in depth analysis.

To provide directions to follow in research, we proceed by cross-checking information.

- **In Greece.** Among the Albanian children who worked in the streets during the 1990s, some had families who had immigrated illegally to Greece. The integration of the family allowed the child to stop working.

- **On return to Albania.** Ndhimë Për Fëmijët, the principal NGO assisting Albanian children and operating in the areas most affected by trafficking (Korça, Elbasan, Berat and Tirana) has not seen children returning in large numbers. However, they note that they do not intervene in the rural areas where many of the children may come from.

Mario was kidnapped in Tirana when he was 9. He became a «robot» in Athens, forced to beg and commit small robberies 14 hours a day. Police members arrested him 3 times and sent him in a social institution, where he's been taken twice by his bosses. The third time, no one came to take him. Mario decided to stay. He is now 14 and doesn't want to go back to Albania anymore, afraid to come across his boss. He has regular contact with his mother over the phone

- **In orphanages in Greece.** According to the Child Protection Department, only 14 child victims of trafficking have been received by State orphanages. We observe however that according to an internal notice of the Child Protection Department, 45 children have been placed in child villages.²² The same Department refused us permission to visit these orphanages.²³ In orphanages run jointly by the State and the Church, an investigation by the Ecumenical Service for Refugees is under way concerning the number of Albanian children and their past. One of the major's difficulty is the assimilation of these children registered under false Greek sounding name (as "advised" by their bosses) in the institutions. Additional information is expected before the end of the year. In Italy, 9000 Albanian children have been placed in orphanages.²⁴

- **In the prostitution milieu in Greece.** According to M. Lazos, there are 20,000 prostitutes, of whom 10% are minors. It appears that out of these minors 75% are Albanian. Some information collected confirms the passage, from the age of 12, to sexual exploitation of girls originally trafficked for economic exploitation.

- **Prostitution traffic in third countries.** In Belgium, an agent of the Red Cross reception centre observed: *"In September 2000, there was a sudden increase in the number of well-dressed young Albanian boys aged 13-14 in Belgium. We can no doubt presume that these boys were sexually exploited"*²⁵ The information gathered confirms the movement of Albanian children to other European countries (Belgium, Italy...) from the port of Patras.

Naim, 14 years old, says, he «lost control» of how many times he went begging in Greece since he was 6. Today, his former bosses are his role model. They encourage him to cross the border with two kilos of marijuana.

²² Directorate for Child Protection, Department 1: "explanatory note on the program for the protection of "street children", Athens, October 16th, 2001.

²³ In a fax from the Department of Child Protection to Terre des Hommes, November 30th, 2001.

²⁴ Source: UNICEF. Interview between UNICEF Albania and Terre des Hommes, May 17th, 2002.

²⁵ IOM, "trafficking in unaccompanied minors for sexual exploitation in the European Union", IOM, Brussels, May 2001, p. 35.

- **Integration into criminal networks in Greece or in third countries.** The child grows up in these networks until he himself becomes a "little boss" of children or is used in other illegal networks.

- **Death:**

- by murder. In Italy, the Ministry of the Interior reported 168 murders of foreign prostitutes in 2000, of whom the majority were Albanian. Witness accounts collected confirm this possibility in Greece.
- by accident. At crossroads, children have been accidentally injured or killed while working.²⁶

²⁶ Lezim stayed in hospital in Greece for a year, after an accident while working at a crossroads. His "employer" had abandoned him. According to an interview conducted by Terre des Hommes in August 2001.

Understanding the traffic

3.1 Who are these children?

Three social criteria concerning the families²⁷

- a. Extreme poverty (most of the beneficiaries of the programs adapted for child trafficking live on an average of 0.40 Euro per day and per person),
- b. Illiteracy (the educational level of the parents is very low and their awareness of the issue is almost zero),
- c. The family unit has broken up (a large proportion of the families affected by child trafficking have gone through divorces, remarriages, mothers alone without support, etc.).



Korça, Albania, October 2001.

Claudia, 10 years old, is eating with her family in her wood and cardboard house. She came back from Greece after being arrested by the police. Her boss used force her to work 14 hours per day.

A geographical criterion: the suburbs of the major cities of Albania

The origin of children caught up in trafficking generally corresponds to the geographical proximity of the destination country.

In Greece, children approached in the street come from the cities of Tirana, Elbasan, Pogradec and Korça. These cities are a geographical axis near the Greek border. Children may also be moved indirectly through Macedonia (FYROM): from the centre of the country towards the south-east.

Another geographical axis of trafficking in Albanian children to other countries departs from Tirana towards the cities of Durrës, Fier, Berat and Vlora. Vlora is the main port for the clandestine passage of Albanians towards Italy.

We have also discovered rarer cases that do not correspond to this geographical pattern (for example from Berat towards Thessaloniki). This is linked to the mobility of recruiters or their origin. If a recruiter comes from Berat, he will give "work" to the children of families he knows well, sending them to the destination of his network.

In the two principal axes, Tirana is an important place of recruitment. In ten years, the population of the capital has increased threefold, principally through rural exodus from the North of the country. The northern suburbs of the city are overpopulated.²⁸

²⁷ The profile of child trafficking victims is close to that of families where children are forced to work. See the brief evaluation by the ILO-IPEC, "working street children in Tirana, Shkodra and Vlora", March 2002.

²⁸ This state of affairs implies exploitation and trafficking on a national level of children originating from isolated towns and villages who are taken to Tirana and Durrës, the two largest cities in the country and very close to one another.

The urban peripheral areas are the poorest. Not only do they have a concentration of disadvantaged urban dwellers, but also many families who have recently moved from villages. This is the reason why NGO interventions in Albania are concentrated almost exclusively in urban peripheral areas. Given the high concentration of families potentially at risk, recruiters are particularly active in these suburbs.

To a lesser extent, the recruitment takes place in villages. Many cases have been detected by NGOs or uncovered by the Albanian press.

No ethnic criteria

There are really no ethnic criteria for recruiting children.

Until 2000, child victims of trafficking in Greece came from a mixture of all backgrounds ("white"²⁹ children, Romas or "Egyptians"³⁰).

In 2002, according to the comparative experiences of the various partners active in Albania in prevention or the reintegration of trafficked children, 95% of the families affected by trafficking in children belong to the "Egyptian" community.

The Egyptian community is the most vulnerable population group in Albania and combines all the risk criteria for child trafficking. Poor and without education, the "Egyptians" live in the peripheral areas of the major cities.



Thessaloniki, September 2001. Maria, 10 years old, from Korça, is selling flowers until very late at night, to her boss's profit.

²⁹Expression used in Albania to describe the population which is neither Roma nor Egyptian.

³⁰ "Jevgjit are variously described as a people descended from Coptic migrants who came to Albania from Egypt in the fourth century; as disguised Turks; or as assimilated, "non-nomadic" Roma.

The Jevgjit/Roma line, regardless of the ethnic origins of either group, displays all the tensions typically arising between assimilated and non-assimilated minorities; although both are rejected by mainstream society, the two groups spend much energy cultivating "the narcissism of the small difference" (Freud). Ultimately, both Jevgjit and Roma live beyond the colour line in Albania and are regarded as similar by the majority. According to the Albanian sociologist Kimet Fetahu, "Roma and Jevgjit are very marginalised. They do the most unskilled and dirty manual labour." European Romas Rights Centre, "No record of the case. Romas in Albania", Country reports n°5, July 1997, page 10. http://www.errc.org/rr_nr3_2000

3.2 Why are children victims of trafficking?

Child trafficking follows a logic of market economics with its supply, demand, profits and constraints.

Supply

The collapse of the communist regime in Albania has led to the destruction of community life, family structure and social norms. The majority of trafficking victims come from families in difficulty who face unemployment, poverty and often high birth rates.

Criminal organisations also emerge from the ruins of the country's collapse. The all-powerful State has given way to lawlessness and extreme poverty. Albanian children become a cheap commodity for an activity which brings immediate gains and carries no risks.

Child trafficking follows a logic of market economics with its supply, demand, profits and constraints. The common border between an European Union Country in full economic growth and one of the poorest countries in South eastern Europe provides a mechanism in the system of supply and demand, favouring the flow of migration

The fall of the totalitarian regime also implies the very violent shock of opening up to the outside world. Trafficking of children between Greece and Albania is part of a vast migratory current. Emigration is a very wide-reaching social phenomenon. All Albanian families have at least one member abroad or preparing to move abroad.

Demand

The common border between a European Union country in full economic growth and one of the poorest countries in South-eastern Europe provides a mechanism in the system of supply and demand, favouring the flow of migration.

A recent Greek economic study³¹ has shown the major role of Albanian labour in the Greek economic growth of the last ten years (between 0.5 and 1 million workers of Albanian origin compared to a working population of 4.5 million). However the regular sectors are not the only areas where demand is strong and migration favoured:

- begging: the traditional and religious structure of Greek culture encourages, through perversion of the charitable act of almsgiving, the exploitation of children for begging. The multiplication of young beggars has reinforced this market. Other illegal activities have developed: washing car windows, the sale of religious greetings cards, flowers and handkerchiefs...;
- sexual exploitation: while the phenomenon of prostitution is especially taboo in Greek society, demand is nonetheless at a similar level to other European Union countries;
- adoption: national and international adoption demands, quite rightly limited by strict regulation, find a certain satisfaction in this neighbouring country where regulations can easily be side-stepped by clandestine activities.

Since we succeeded in gathering very little information on the traffic of organs, we have decided not to include this area in the discussion of demand.

Demand exists in other illegal sectors, but they concern the problem of child trafficking only indirectly (drugs, burglaries, etc.).

A child earns a minimum of 30-50 euros per day. When a boss «owns» several children, profits are considerable.

Profit

"Starting up" in child trafficking requires almost no initial investment. However profit is quick and substantial. In fact, a child earns a minimum of 30-50 euros per day.³² Children give all their earnings to their employers. A small percentage is sent back to their families in Albania, but very irregularly. When a boss "owns" several children, profits are considerable.

³¹ Interview with Mr. Petros Linardos-Pulmond, economist at the Greek Labour and Trade Union Syndicate, by the television documentary European Forum, Channel Arte, February 2002.

³² In May 2002, a social worker working in the streets of Thessaloniki informed us about a young boy involved in trafficking. "He is 13 years old. He is seriously handicapped in both arms. Thanks to this handicap, he can make 200 euros in a week-end".

Trends in trafficking in reaction to constraints of the "market"

While this "market" responds to the rule of supply and demand, it also obeys the constraints which condition it. The large number of children begging or washing car windows at crossroads has given rise to a social problem. Greek society has attempted to respond to it by:

- a) repression through raids, then systematic deportation by the police;
- b) media denunciation to inform public opinion;
- c) reinforced border controls;
- d) regularisation of clandestine immigrants of Albanian origin.

The forms of trafficking have had to evolve in response to these constraints. Child beggars therefore become minor street peddlers or disappear into other, less visible, networks or "markets".

3.3 By whom are the children trafficked?

What type of structure is hidden behind this traffic? Is it organised, structured, hierarchical? Or does it consist of criminals independent from one another and "owners" of a small number of children?

Despite the clandestine nature of the trafficking and of the **criminal** organisations, we have been able to assemble some information on the existence and functioning of these networks from interviews.³³ This information cannot, of course, be exhaustive due to the flexibility of these transnational networks.

«The human beings trafficking organisation are adaptable, specialised and flexible»

IOM report «trafficking in unaccompanied minors for sexual exploitation in the European Union», p.49

Some children are the "property" of a small trafficker, the "owner" of 2 to a maximum of 10 children and involved only in this type of trafficking. This trafficker has himself bought or rented the children from their parents in Albania before taking them to Greece to work for him. This trafficker, a recruiter and smuggler at the same time, is often a neighbour or even a distant relative.

Other children are part of much larger, well-organised networks.³⁴ The chain of trafficking thus involves a division of tasks

«I am notable to work because I have never worked in my whole life. I have experience in this business (children trafficking). In Greece, the only way for an idler like me to survive, is to make children work, either mine or others. I made children beg in Thessaloniki and in Athens. I always choose children from families I know well..»

interview of an Albanian children trafficker with a Terre des hommes member in August 2001.

and roles: the recruiter of children (often someone close to the family), the smuggler of children at the border with other illegals, the distributor in Greece³⁵, the different buyers present in Greece. Children pass through "several pairs of hands" before arriving in Greece. Once in Greece, the children can be sold several times to different "employers".³⁶

³³ This question however has often unsettled our interviewees who answer with blanks or with answers to other questions.

³⁴ A Greek journalist confirmed to us his interview with a local "Mafioso" in an Albanian city, involved in various types of trafficking, particularly drugs, boasting in 1998 that he "owned" more than 200 children and made a lot of money with this traffic.

³⁵ According to our information, there exists a "sorting and distribution centre" for the children newly arrived in Greece. This was confirmed to us in Florina by three independent sources. It is supposed to be located in the suburbs of Thessaloniki.

³⁶ M. Lazos estimates that 30% of the Albanian children are resold before their arrival in Athens. Interview conducted by Terre des Hommes, April 13th, 2002.



Athens, September 2001. Discussion between a barman and Stella. The badly dressed children have given way to other children who are well dressed and sell small items on café-terraces.

These Mafia-like organisations carry out several types of trafficking, including drug trafficking and prostitution... Children are moved from one "market" to another, according to the commercial interest of the trafficker.

These organisations are nevertheless not pyramidal, but as summarised by the OIM in its report on the traffic of unaccompanied minors who are victims of sexual exploitation in Italy, "*they are adaptable, they are specialised and they are flexible*".³⁷

The ability of these networks to adapt is very visible in Greece. The "traffic light children"³⁸ suddenly disappeared from Greek crossroads and streets when the police began to conduct large numbers of arrests from 1998 onwards.³⁹ These badly dressed children, intended to induce pity in the Greek population, have given way to other children who are well-dressed and sell small items on café terraces.

Since 1999, the functioning of these criminal organisations seems to have evolved. The number of children in the streets has diminished. The traffic is no longer as profitable or as widespread. The major Albanian Mafia organisations have perhaps abandoned this "market" to concentrate on more lucrative markets such as prostitution or drugs to increase their area of influence. "*It seems that the Albanian networks have increased their illegal activities to become one of the main protagonists in the lucrative business of trafficking in human beings*".⁴⁰ This hypothesis has been confirmed by several people interviewed in Greece.

³⁷ IOM, "*trafficking in unaccompanied minors for sexual exploitation in the European Union*", op.cit, p.49.

³⁸ This name was given by the Greek press to children begging at traffic lights in large Greek cities during the 1990s. Most of these children were child trafficking victims.

³⁹ In Thessaloniki, the number of deportations of Albanian minors at the border increased from 213 in 1997 to 983 in 1998.

⁴⁰ In IOM "*Trafficking of unaccompanied minors for sexual exploitation in the European Union*", op.cit., p143

3.4 How are the children trafficked?

3.4.1 From recruitment to the place of exploitation

Recruitment

In the majority of cases, the parents are approached by someone close to the family who will convince them to let them take their child to go and "get money in Greece". As previously seen, this relative may act alone or as a member of a group. The parents let their child leave for reasons of poverty (see 3.1 - profile of families) and often out of ignorance. Some of them may be involved in the trafficking.

Clandestine Immigration routes

"We went to Greece on foot. Four days' walk. We injured ourselves when we tried to escape from the police who were pursuing us. We had a lot of "scares" during this journey to the Greek border, because it was very dangerous". Mirela⁴¹, 15 years old, describing her first journey to Greece when she was 4 years old.⁴²

Several routes are taken to get from Albania to Greece. They are the same as the routes taken by illegal Albanian immigrants travelling to Greece. We have witness accounts on mountain routes taken near the border at Kapshtice (near Korça). These routes, known by everyone, are taken in all seasons. In winter the crossing is even more arduous since the cold is added to the length and difficulty of the journey.

"But I went by car too ..." Astrit, aged 15. Today, the journey by car is more common. The circuit leads to Skopje, with the particular purpose of obtaining false papers for the traffickers. Several cars are taken to the Greek-Macedonian border. The crossing of the border takes two hours on foot. Another car is waiting on the Greek side to take the clandestine immigrants as far as Florina before their dispersion throughout the country. Children also take this route. This route has the reputation of being safer, hence its higher cost.

We do not have information on the route taken by children coming from Fier (on the West Albanian coast). We can only assume that they take the same routes as the clandestine Albanians over the mountains near Gjirokastra (South-East of Albania).

Child victims of Greek forces of law and order violence during the journey

As Mirela stated in the previous witness report, the children confirm the danger of the route, due especially to the violence of Greek forces of law and order charged with controlling the borders. They frequently let their dogs loose to arrest clandestine immigrants. The dogs do not distinguish children from adults.

Since 2000, we have no longer collected witness accounts of violence on the part of Greek forces of law and order against children.

3.4.2 The ordeals suffered by the children

Every child has his or her own experience to relate about this trafficking situation. However, in order to extract a maximum profit from their "product", the traffickers use similar methods to ensure the children remain dependent.

Force: physical and psychological violence is used to compromise the dignity and the physical and psychological independence of the victims. This dependence can be such that the children can be in a state of semi-slavery. Force is used to discourage any form of rebellion (running away, co-operation with representatives of the State) and to punish the child who has not earned the required daily amount.

"The bosses mistreated us when we played and didn't want to work.." Astrit⁴³

⁴¹ For the children's safety, all the first names mentioned have been changed.

⁴² Video report from Terre des Hommes.

⁴³ Video report from Terre des Hommes

"Many children described to us the ill-treatment suffered, such as cigarette burns on the body, blows, verbal abuse or the obligation to swallow a solution of shampoo to make them ill or being made to sleep outside..."⁴⁴

Fear: fear is often linked to possible violence against the family members of the victims, still in Albania. A social worker working in the street noted that *"the children were more afraid of certain individuals. They were afraid of what they could do to their families"*.

The children are also terrified of the consequences of their attitude in the street. They are constantly watched by their "employers"⁴⁵ or by a "supervisor", often an adolescent a few years older than the child. They watch to make sure that the child works, does not play and does not talk... They also supply the child with products to sell and regularly collect the money earned by the child.

«Many children described us the mistreatment they underwent such as cigarette burning on their bodies, slaps, insults, or the obligation to swallow shampoo to look sick, to sleep outside...»

Nathalie Heppell, 1st inquiry report Tdh, 1999

Brainwashing: The children are victims of brainwashing when they arrive in Greece. *"They have new, Greek-sounding names. They must say that they are accompanied by their parents or by members of their families in Greece and that they have been there for several years."*⁴⁶ The boss explains to the children that they must help their families and that their mothers are waiting for the money earned by their work in Greece. The children feel guilty if they do not earn enough money, Mirela explained to us: *"In fact, it was right to beat the children. Imagine that now my mother thinks I'm working, while I'm talking to you. My mother would not be happy"*.⁴⁷ From the child's point of view, no one in Greece wants him or her to help the family. They are told certain stories to frighten them. *"The police will beat you and send you back to Albania. The social worker wants to sell your organs..."*. As a result, the children do not wish to speak and lie for their own protection as taught by their "employers".⁴⁸ Their environment is built on lies. This method of brainwashing seems to have been used consistently since 1999, a time when the trafficking became more difficult to organise.

All this is exacerbated by the difficult conditions under which the children arrive in Greece: in most cases, they do not speak Greek well, they feel alone, away from their families. *"We are happy to see you because we have a lot of nostalgia"*⁴⁹ said Alketa

to an Albanian social worker in Thessaloniki. They are unaware of this completely different environment from their usual environment in Albania. Paradoxically, the only person they can believe is the trafficker who protects them (against other traffickers or against their deportation to Albania...) and helps their families by regularly sending money to Albania, or at least so the children believe.



Tirana, October 001. A woman forcing a young girl to take a brush in order to wash car windows. The little girl doesn't want. She's crying.

⁴⁴ Nathalie Heppell, internal Terre des Hommes report, February 2000.

⁴⁵ In Thessaloniki, these "employers" are easily identifiable in Aristotelou Square.

⁴⁶ Interview by Terre des Hommes with a social worker from the NGO Hamogelo.

⁴⁷ Interview by Terre des Hommes with Mirela (name changed), aged 13, from Elbasan. This interview was recorded in Thessaloniki on December 19th, 1999.

⁴⁸ All the participants, police officers, prosecutors and social workers note that the children give false, Greek-sounding names.

⁴⁹ Interview by Terre des Hommes in Thessaloniki, December 1999.

We must also mention the children who come to Greece voluntarily. When we ask Astrit if he was forced to leave, he answered: "No, I wanted to leave..."

In a context of misery, emigration is regarded as a means of survival. In Albania, emigration is a common recourse and socially accepted. The child, through a spirit of adventure, a desire to help his or her family, or for pleasure, may thus voluntarily choose emigration and working in Greek streets, which means exploitation through work. This decision also results from the vision of a future which will leave no other choices. This choice can be made by older children who have already been to Greece several times and have smoother relations with their employers, based on their common interests.

Nevertheless, these children continue to be used as instruments for the profit of a third party who takes advantage of their credulity and the fact that the child is not aware of other ways of life. They live out the model experienced from an early age.

Naim, aged 14 and a former child "robot"⁵⁰ is influenced by his former employers. Today, they encourage him to cross the border with two kilos of marijuana. He will be their smuggler, their "beast of burden", or without knowing it, their "red herring".⁵¹

3.4.3 The various forms of exploitation

The degree of vulnerability of a child caught up in trafficking should be seen in relation to the multiplicity of the forms of exploitation to which he is exposed. These forms of exploitation are closely linked.⁵²

The aim of the trafficker is solely to "make money". A child may sell flowers during the day and be sexually exploited during the night. The forms of exploitation suffered by the child will change according to the "employer's" opportunities (his knowledge of the market) but also the age and sex of the child. In particular, a girl from the age of twelve onwards has a very high possibility of being sexually exploited after an initial experience of economic exploitation from the age of 4 to 6.

The forms of exploitation suffered by the child will change according to the employer's opportunities (his knowledge of the market) but also the age and sex of the child. In particular, a girl from the age of twelve onwards has a very high possibility of being sexually exploited after an initial experience of economic exploitation from the age of 4 to 6.

Economic exploitation

This form of exploitation is the most visible and the most common in Greece. Mrs. Lytina, Head of the Department of the Sub-Directorate for the Protection of Minors, admits that this form of exploitation is the only one known by her service.⁵³

Until 2000, their main activity was begging. The technique for making money is summed up by Mirela: "during the winter we had to wear light clothes to provoke pity among the Greeks and encourage them to give money."

From 2000, the trend moved towards the sale of small items (handkerchiefs, icons, telephone cards...) and flowers. They are now "more presentable", well-dressed and no longer aim to inspire pity like before.

What has not changed is the exploitation of the children who often work more than 12 hours a day, constantly walking through the town, and subject to ill-treatment inflicted by their employers.

We have collected the witness accounts of girls exploited for economic reasons, then sexually exploited from the age of 12-13.

⁵⁰ "Robot" is the word used by children to refer to themselves when they are caught up in trafficking.

⁵¹ A "beast of burden" smuggles drugs, a child "red herring" is used as bait for the police (the child will carry 0.5kg of cocaine while the smuggler will transport 5kg).

⁵² See the point on the organisation of the networks.

⁵³ Interview of Mme Lytina with Terre des Hommes, May 8th, 2002.



This young girl keeps the money she earned in her hand. She can't go back to her house until she's earned the appointed amount by her boss. She's been repatriated in her family in January 2002 thanks to a reintegration program implemented by Ndhimë për fëmijët and Terre des hommes in Albania.

Sexual Exploitation

The information transmitted by Mr. Lazos, sociologist at Panteion University in Athens⁵⁴, as a result of his research, give us information on the existence of the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation in Greece.

In 1997, 1600 minors were sexually exploited in Greece. Out of the minors aged 15 to 18, 90% were female. This number includes 400 children sexually exploited in the "paedophile market" in Greece. 75% were Albanian. 60% were male. The "paedophile market" sells children who look like children. The age limit is approximately 12 to 14.⁵⁵

En 2002, he estimated (he has concluded his research) that out of 200 children exploited in the "paedophile market", 75% were Albanian.

Albanian children "come mainly from the villages of central Albania and Tirana. A certain number also come from the North of Tirana. Over the last four years, it has become rare to see a child from Southern Albania become a victim of prostitution."⁵⁶

Involvement in legal activities

We have no concrete facts. Mrs. Lytina notes that "no child involved in drug trafficking has been arrested".⁵⁷

However, well-informed sources state that trafficked children are involved in illegal activities such as organised theft and drug trafficking. In the former case, the children are allegedly used as "scouts" to penetrate the buildings targeted for burglary and then open the doors to accomplices. In the second case, the children are used as drug couriers.⁵⁸ The Albanian Mafia is involved in heroin trafficking in particular. This involvement has apparently decreased with the reduction in the trafficking of Albanian children over the last few years.

Alketa, 12 years old, is forced to beg and sexually exploited in Thessaloniki. She has been expelled by the Greek police. She stayed 23 days in Albania in a social and scholar reintegration program. Under the trafficker pressure (which exploits her mother too), she went back to Greece. A Ngo from Thessaloniki found her back few days later. Her colour hair has changed. She disappeared 3 months but reappeared in Elbasan, her native town. The Albanian anti-trafficking police alarms Terre des hommes. Her security is now ensured. She is following up everyday.

⁵⁴ Interview by Terre des Hommes with M. Lazos, April 13th, 2002.

⁵⁵ But a child of 13 who looks older will be exploited in the "adult market". And a child of 14 who looks younger will be exploited in the paedophile market.

⁵⁶ E-mail exchange between M. Lazos and Terre des Hommes, April 21st, 2002.

⁵⁷ Interview by Terre des Hommes with Mrs. Lytina, Minister of the Interior, May 8th, 2002.

⁵⁸ See note 51.

This information ties in with the following which reinforces our strong assumptions concerning the involvement of trafficked children in illegal activities:

- juvenile prisons in Greece have a very large population of Albanian origin;⁵⁹
- these juveniles often started to work very young.⁶⁰

Finally, this information can be cross-checked with that gathered by the OIM in Italy, which writes: "*Albanian children seem to be employed chiefly as smugglers for large quantities of drugs*".⁶¹ In the same report, it is noted that: "*the involvement of minors in illegal activities for commercial purposes is a complex question which has not yet been studied or analysed*". The same observation may be made for Greece.

Trafficking in organs

We have gathered information from various sources on this traffic. However, we do not judge it sufficient to confirm the existence of organ trafficking between Albania and Greece.

⁵⁹ Greek Helsinki Monitor, "parallel report on Greece's compliance with the UN convention on the Rights of the Child", August 2001, page 54:

- "At the Volos detention centre for the period 1998-2000, out of 149 minors detained, 35 were Greek and the remaining 114 were foreign, mostly Albanian.

- At the Avlona detention centre, out of 294 juvenile detainees, 89 were Greek and 205 were foreign (76% of whom were Albanian)" (translation by Terre des Hommes).

⁶⁰ In Greece Helsinki monitor, op.cit. p56. "According to another study carried out by the Ministry of Justice, 156 minors were living in institutions, 26% of whom had begun to work regularly from at between 5 and 10 years of age and 39% had started between 12 and 14. Approximately 27% of these minors were illiterate."

⁶¹ Travelling to Italy, a speedboat can transport for example twenty clandestine immigrants, ten minors and two tonnes of hashish, according to an eyewitness report obtained in April 2002 from a person who had recently taken clandestine passage to Italy.

Assistance for child victims of trafficking

4.1 Preventive measures in Albania against trafficking in children

After years of inaction, in 2001 the Albanian government became involved in the struggle against trafficking in human beings. Improvements are noticeable, even if an evaluation of the actions taken according to a national strategy has still to be carried out.

4.1.1 National strategy:

Following decree N°77 of the Albanian Prime Minister, dated June 15th, 2001, an interministerial group drew up a national plan to combat trafficking in human beings. This group includes representatives of the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Labour and Social Affairs, Culture, Youth and Sport, Education and Science, as well as national intelligence services.⁶²

After years of inaction, in 2001, the Albanian government became involved in the struggle against trafficking in human beings. Improvements are noticeable.

The mission of the strategy is *"to establish guidelines to prevent and stop trafficking in human beings, to protect and aid the victims of trafficking and assist their reintegration into society"*.

The plan of action mentions the organisation of *"television documentaries on trafficking in human beings from the point of view of preventing trafficking and the situation of the victim"* (for June 2002). It also envisages *"the establishment of a special police unit for prevention and the pursuit of traffickers under the supervision of regional police chiefs"* (realised since September 2001). It also includes the *"development of economic programs for the prevention of domestic violence and its economic and social consequences for women and children"* (for June 2004).

For a budget of around 15 million US dollars, the Albanian government has pledged to cover 40% of the costs. The other sponsors will cover the remaining 60%.⁶³

4.1.2 The role of public services:

Ministry of the Interior: the creation of a special police unit represents 43% of the total budget of the national action plan. Colonel Avni Jasharllari, head of the anti-trafficking unit declared⁶⁴: *"Since 2000, we have been developing courses of action against the trafficking of human beings in general, including child trafficking. We have opened 12 regional offices throughout Albania. For example, in Korça, a specialist in child trafficking and a specialist in prostitution are at work. (...) In January 2001, the Albanian penal code changed and adopted a specific law on child trafficking. We have arrested 11 people and 3 organisations of traffickers specialised in prostitution in Italy. We need co-operation, not only concerning human trafficking, but also in the struggle against organised crime in general"*.

Social Services: the role of the social services in terms of prevention is not clearly defined in the national strategy. All efforts are concentrated on the reintegration of victims.

Education: The Albanian authorities recognise as a weak point *"lack of awareness of the risks of trafficking in educational curricula"*. For September 2002, the Minister of Education and Science made a commitment to prepare educational material for children and young people on *"the danger of trafficking and the promotion of intolerance towards violence against women and children"*, including training programs for teachers, etc.

⁶² International organisations, NGOs and specialists in the struggle against trafficking in human beings were also invited to draw up this strategy, for example the OSCE, the European Union Mission in Albania, the ICITAP Mission and American specialists, in assistance to the various levels of the Ministry of the Interior, Mission Interforce, the UNHCR, the IOM, the ICMC, "Save the Children", "Terre des Hommes", "Vatra e Gruas Vlonjate", etc.

⁶³ According to the national strategy for combating child trafficking.

⁶⁴ During an official meeting held at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs with Greek representatives of the justice system and police from Thessaloniki, May 16th, 2002.

4.1.3 The role of the media:

The mass media have an important role to play in informing the public and the prevention of child trafficking. On the basis of an inquiry, over the past year 40 articles relevant to this question have been published in the main daily and weekly Albanian newspapers. The quality of the articles has improved, and the journalists now have a clearer approach to the subject (checking out information, several sources, etc.).

However, public opinion still has a bad image of the nature of the phenomenon. Trafficking in children is equated with prostitution, trafficking in organs and more rarely the sale of children in other countries. The mass media may have contributed to this incomplete understanding of the problem and this deformed vision. Since the end of 2001, the daily newspapers have widened their approach to the phenomenon, giving social and economic explanations for the sending abroad of children who are exploited for illegal activities (such as begging, etc.).

"How I got involved in baby trafficking »
 Article from Gazeta Shqiptare the 27.10.02 taking
 the testimony of a woman from Pogradec.



4.1.4 The role of Albanian civil society and international NGOs

Out of the 750 non-profit organisations registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs, only ten are active in this area of intervention.⁶⁵ A small number of organisations are experienced and active in the struggle against child trafficking.

The head of the department co-ordinating the NGOs and the Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs stated: *"The government has taken important steps in co-operating with NGOs working against child trafficking, in the areas of prevention, reintegration of the victims and repatriation. For a year, we have been working with NGOs to construct an active network called BKTF (Basku Kunder Trafikimit Të Fëmijëve – All together against child trafficking). We organised the first interministerial conference in November 2001 with the Ministries of Social Affairs, the Interior and NGOs. We are improving our knowledge and our geographical coverage for prevention and reintegration."*

Since October 2000, Terre des hommes has implemented prevention program in the Centre and the South of Albania to guard against the risks of exile in making children aware of the problem. With the support of school and parents, a system for registering and detecting children at risk has been put in place, as well as a system of intervention to help "high-risk" children.

4.2 The protection of trafficking victims

The hell experienced by the child in Greece and the environment of fear in which he or she lives, is reinforced by the absence of help given to the children. The Greek State denies their victim status. On the contrary, it considers them guilty of illegal entry into the country and arrests them. Social aid, social work programs in the street and reception centres are almost non-existent or unsuitable.

⁶⁵ Interview by Terre des Hommes with the head of department of the NGO coalition at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, May 10th, 2002.

The Greek State denies the victim status of trafficked child. On the contrary, it considers them guilty of illegal entry into the country and arrests them. Social aid, social work program in the streets and reception centres are almost non-existent or unsuitable.

Victims guilty of entering and staying in Greece illegally⁶⁶

In the trafficking situation, the only contacts the child has with Greek institutions are police officers. The latter arrest them for begging or not having a licence to sell their products. There are no social workers operating in the street, apart from a few rare initiatives which are remarkable, but unfortunately one-off operations.

Let us cite in particular the Filoxenia organisation, an organisation subsidised by the State which carried out work in the streets of Thessaloniki from 1999 to 2001. 560 children had been approached, of which 90% were Albanian. This action has been taken up again at an intensive pace by Terre des Hommes and ARSIS since April 2002. Finally, the NGO Hamogelo conducted its first street project in 1999 in the streets of Thessaloniki.⁶⁷ Since the month of April 2002, this NGO has restarted its work in the streets of Athens with financing from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

All these organisations have in common the tactic of taking on Albanian speakers for street projects to make contact with the children possible.⁶⁸

The children, once arrested by the police or detected by a social service, are not considered by Greek legislation as victims of trafficking, but as illegal immigrants. The response to their status is therefore imprisonment pending deportation to their country of origin. For children aged under 12, specific protection measures are taken by the juvenile prosecutor. The child is placed in a reception centre for the period necessary to locate his or her family.

The disappearance of children in reception centres

Once they have been removed from the trafficking situation through arrest by the police, or more exceptionally by social workers, children under 12 are placed by the juvenile prosecutor in social service centres. Children aged over 12 remain in detention. They await their deportation to their countries of origin at a deportation centre.

In Athens' reception centre, Agia Varvara, 487 children out of 644 who have been received from November 1998 to October 2001 have disappeared (75%).

To our knowledge, only two centres exist. One of them, the specialised school Agia Varvara⁶⁹, is in Athens. The other, the Filoxenia centre⁷⁰ is in Thessaloniki. The juvenile prosecutor places children in these centres when they are arrested by the police.

These two reception centres have only been used for children involved in trafficking since the end of 1998. No structure existed previously to receive these children, while the traffic had already reached a considerable level (see part 1).

- At Agia Varvara, from November 1998 to October 2001, 487 children out of 644 who had been received there (75%) disappeared.⁷¹
- At Filoxenia, from April 1998 to February 1999, 23 children disappeared out of 109 who had been received there (21%).⁷²

⁶⁶ This point was included thanks to a study of Greek legislation concerning child trafficking victims, carried out by Greek Helsinki Monitor in collaboration with Terre des Hommes.

⁶⁷ This was stopped brutally when a social worker from Hamogelo received a death threat from a trafficker.

⁶⁸ The first objective of this street work, common to both Greek and Albanian personnel, is the protection of the child (services offered in Greece). The second objective is voluntary assisted return of the child to his or her environment of origin (see following point).

⁶⁹ This virtual absence of involvement of Greek NGOs in assisting these children can be partly explained by their dependence on external funds. However, the Greek state has only been financing Hamogelo since April 2002 to carry out a street project in Athens. The financing available from the European Union is intended for research and seminar projects. There is an absence of funds for direct aid to victims. We concur with Helsinki Rights Watch, who note: "this sense of priority sends a signal to member states that victim protection is not one". in HRW op.cit. p16.

⁷⁰ See note 10

⁷¹ See note 13

⁷² Directorate for Child Protection. Department 1 "explanatory note on the program for the protection of "street children", Athens, October 16th, 2001. This communication gives the following facts: 644 children were taken in by this centre. 543 were Albanian, 45 Greek, 40 Iraqi. 487 escaped, 90 were recovered by their parents, 45 were transferred to orphanages and 22 were found by the police.

⁷³ Information transmitted in June 2001 by Filoxenia to Terre des Hommes

The traffickers come to look for their "protégés" at the centre. To do this, they present false documents or pay staff working at the centre⁷³. Children also run away. This running away can be explained by the pressure these children live under and the "brainwashing" they have undergone.

The smaller percentage of children disappearing at Filoxenia is linked to better adaptation of the centre to child victims of trafficking (Albanian-speaking personnel, secure centre).⁷⁴

Prison for children aged over 12

Juvenile prosecutors are faced with a critical shortage of reception centres for children aged over 12. Result: minors remain in deplorable conditions in deportation centres before they are taken to the border by bus for deportation (see following point).

Children remain for several days, waiting for the bus to fill up to drive them to the border, in rooms which are too small, dirty and unsanitary.⁷⁵

Indisputably, measures have already been taken since 1999. But they remain insufficient and dependent on the goodwill and understanding of those responsible as well as on funding. Today however, the Department of Child Protection does not consider the problem to be important.⁷⁶ The Filoxenia centre, which could serve as a model to be emulated on a European level, is at risk of closing its doors to child victims of trafficking, leaving them with no other alternative than detention, as before 1999.

Indisputably, measures have already been taken since 1999. But they remain insufficient and dependent on the goodwill and understanding of those Greek responsible as well as on public funding.

4.3 Repatriation: deportation and voluntary assisted return

4.3.1 The legal framework

The Albanian Minister of the Interior and the Minister of the Interior in Greece have signed a readmission agreement for the return of Albanian residents staying in Greece illegally.

As seen previously, child victims of trafficking are simply arrested as illegal immigrants in Greece. This readmission agreement is therefore the legal basis to which the Greek justice system and police refer in returning the child to Albania. However, this readmission agreement makes no reference to children, much less to child victims of trafficking. *"For the readmission agreements, returning a person means not examining his or her personal situation, nor the situation of the country of origin where he or she is supposed to return. "He is an offender and must be sent back home" (...). The readmission agreement constitutes a serious violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child".*⁷⁷

In addition to this first problem, there is the problem of the legal guardianship of the child in Greece. Legally, the guardian is the juvenile prosecutor. However, the latter deals with too many cases to be able to decide alone what is in the best interests of the child.

⁷³ From a reliable source, we know that the traffickers have paid up to 500 euros to recover their "property".

⁷⁴ Unfortunately, in a European context the high disappearance rate from Agia Varvara is the norm. Filoxenia appears to be a model case. For example, in Denmark the average percentage who disappear is 50%. UNHCR newsletter: Separated Children in Europe Program, August-September 2001, page 3. Each newsletter gives the same kind of data for every European country.

⁷⁵ According to the witness reports of several children corroborated by external visitors in the middle of 2002. Nevertheless, conditions have improved. Let us remember the accounts of children collected in 1999. To the question: "Do you have problems with the police in Greece?" Shpetimi answered: "Yes, one day, while we were begging, two policemen in civilian clothes came up to us. They grabbed my hand, but I escaped and they followed me. When a driver opened the door, a big dog chased me. They caught me and started to beat me. Afterwards, they sent me to prison into a room called "the urine room". Other people beat me." Video interview by Terre des Hommes. The children had nicknamed their detention area "air and urine room".

⁷⁶ Interview by Terre des Hommes with Mme Kouri, Director of the Department of Child Protection, March 20th, 2002.

⁷⁷ Legal Clinic for Minors, (Albanian NGO) "Legal Basis for the Repatriation of Trafficking Children", contribution to the Albanian interministerial conference on the struggle against trafficking, Tirana, November 6th, 2001.

4.3.2 Practices for children under 12

In Athens: a long administrative procedure or rapid deportation

Since 1999, deportations of these children at the Albanian border by the police have become rarer⁷⁸. Attempts are being made to follow other practices involving the minor's prosecutor from Athens, the minor's department, the Social Welfare Ministry, the Albanian embassy in Greece and International Social Service⁷⁹. However these have brought few results. Out of 44 cases followed by the International Social Service (ISS) since the opening of the "Agia Varvara" program, only two family reunions have been successfully arranged.⁸⁰ The time lapse between the placement of the child and return to the family was 21 months in the second case. These results and this slowness⁸¹ can be essentially explained by inadequate co-ordination between the different services involved.

In Thessaloniki: good practices followed

At the instigation of the juvenile prosecutor in Thessaloniki, Filoxenia, the NGO ARSIS and the group of NGOs working together in Albania, good practices are followed to repatriate children arrested by the police or found by a social worker. Since July 2001, 12 children have been assisted in their return to their original environment.

These encouraging results are above all the fruit of the involvement of certain individuals and organisations. They can also be explained by other reasons:

- Protection of the child at Filoxenia. The percentage of children who disappear is smaller than in most such centres in Europe, due to the fact that the centre is secure.
- The staff are from the same place of origin as the children, making it possible to gain the child's confidence and to obtain reliable information on the child's experiences and family.
- Establishment in high-risk areas and good knowledge of families at risk on the part of the Albanian group of organisations. This allows a rapid search in Albania.
- Co-ordination between the juvenile prosecutor in Thessaloniki, the Albanian Ministry of Public Order and the Greek and Albanian social organisations involved (Albanian coalition of organisations, Filoxenia, Arsis).
- Procedures are accepted by all participants, allowing efficiency and speed.
- Personal commitment of the juvenile prosecutor in Thessaloniki.

It is indisputable that measures have already been taken, but they remain dependent on the goodwill and understanding of individuals responsible for their administration.

4.3.3 Practices for children over 12: rapid deportation

In Athens or Thessaloniki, the same experience awaits the child over the age of 12: deportation at the border. Once arrested by the police, the minor is detained at the Deportation Department of the Greek police pending his or her deportation. The date of deportation depends on when the bus can be filled. The bus drops the children off at the border, where, when they are being trafficked, the trafficker waits for them to quickly take them back to their "place of exploitation".

⁷⁸ The most recent case dates from the end of May 2002: a 9-year-old girl was deported at the border by the juvenile department of the Thessaloniki police and was logically to be handed over to the authorities at the Albanian border. Having arrived earlier than planned with the police bus, this child finally crossed the Greek/Albanian border without any checks on either side. She was "caught" in extremis by the Terre des Hommes team, accompanied by her mother. An official statement could then be co-signed by the Albanian commander of the border post, the child's mother and a representative of Terre des Hommes.

⁷⁹ At Agia Varvara, if the child's family does not come to take the child back, the juvenile prosecutor places the child in a reception centre of a social welfare organisation while waiting to locate the child's family. To do this, the National Welfare Organisation forwards the information received to the International Social Service (ISS). This organisation, through its international network, searches for the family. Once the family is found, the ISS forwards the results of the social inquiry concerning the family to the National Welfare Organisation, which in turn sends it to the juvenile prosecutor.

⁸⁰ Fax from ISS Greece to Terre des Hommes dated 15.10.2001. The second case was concluded in March 2002. Out of the 44 cases, 18 "escaped" from the orphanages and 14 are in the process of repatriation. In 4 cases, negative recommendations have been given regarding the return of the child to his or her family, given the situation of the latter. 2 children have been deported by the police.

⁸¹ Let us note that the slowness of the process of returning the child makes his or her family, academic and social reintegration all the more difficult.

There is no reception centre in Greece for children aged over 12. Finding a child's family means prolonging the duration of his or her imprisonment.

According to the observations of experienced individuals dealing with the reintegration of children who have been victims of trafficking, all the conditions of return strongly determine the elements of reintegration.

4.4 Reintegration of a child

In Albania, the main response given by the national action plan is the opening of specialised structures for the reintegration of women and children. Public services usually adopt an approach of "institutionalisation" for child victims of trafficking.

The situation of public institutions and services is fragile. According to the director of the Projects Department of the social services:⁸² *"We must understand that the economic situation in Albania is bad. Reintegration programs are weak in Albania and the period of transition is long. We need only look at divorce cases and illegitimate births! We estimate that there are 5000 unaccompanied Albanian minors abroad and 8000 girls prostituted abroad. We do not have enough structures to reintegrate them. Our structures are poor and need assistance (...) The Italian government gives us concrete assistance (for reintegration centres), but we also need co-operation for social work structures, financial and logistical assistance and help with training".*



Young boy back to school in Albania. He was a trafficking victim in Greece, forced to sell items 13 hours per day. He is now following a reintegration program implemented by Ndhimë për Fëmijët

Open services, adoptive families and specialised programs are often considered as intervention areas by national and international NGOs. With the support of the international community, some NGOs, such as Ndhimë Per Fëmijët, have developed activities for social and academic reintegration. These "intervention models" are being taken into consideration more and more by the ministries concerned (social affairs and education).

⁸² Interview by Terre des Hommes, May 16th, 2002.

4.5 Co-ordination of the various participants

The struggle against child trafficking involves a large number of state services (the Ministries of Social Welfare, the Interior, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Education) and non-governmental participants. For voluntary assisted repatriation alone, eight to ten participants are involved. It is therefore essential to ensure good co-ordination to allow the sharing out of the roles and jurisdictions⁸³ of each party.

After years of administrative disorganisation and absence of political interest in the question of trafficking human beings, the Albanian State has made considerable advances since 2001. A system of co-ordination between ministries has been put in place⁸⁴. It maintains close links of co-operation with the NGO BTKF (së Bashku Kundër Trafikimit të Fëmijëve - All Together Against Trafficking)⁸⁵.

The result of this co-ordination between different participants has been the drawing up of a national strategy and the first public interministerial conference on the question of child trafficking⁸⁶. An evaluation of the results of this strategy has now been carried out to judge the concrete progress made following the promises and good intentions. The interministerial committee must also make proposals to neighbouring states, the host countries of child trafficking victims, concerning ways of accommodating and voluntarily repatriating the children. It must be the instigator of co-operation with the Greek authorities. Until now, isolated contacts have been made by the Greek authorities with Albanian diplomatic representatives in Greece. But no significant response has been received from these representatives.⁸⁷

The Greek authorities began to take the problem of trafficking into consideration in 2001⁸⁸. New laws against sexual exploitation should be passed by the summer of 2002. However, there is no interministerial co-ordination on this matter. The various services involved are isolated. Co-operation between state services and NGOs is also very slight.

This absence of co-ordination between Greek participants and between Albania and Greece causes unnecessary obstacles and can be solved by dialogue between the various services and a common strategy.

BTKF " së Bashku Kundër Trafikimit të Fëmijëve " (All together in the fight against trafficking).

Composition in alphabetical order: Centre Peace Through Justice, Community Centre of Ballsh, Enfants du Monde Droits de l'Homme (EMDH), International Social Services - Albanian Branch, International Catholic Migration Committee (ICMC), Ndhimë Për Fëmijët, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, Vatra Centre of Vlora.

This organisation "is determined and committed to act according to the principle of the "best interests of the child", in combining efforts and experiences in order to protect Albanian children from trafficking in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and national legislation and mechanisms". An advisory committee is linked to the organisation. The advisory committee facilitates and supports the organisation's actions. It is composed of members of the ministries participating in the interministerial work group dealing with child trafficking, and intergovernmental agencies.

Based on existing programs, concrete collaboration has been established in complementary areas of action (prevention, protection, assisted voluntary return or reintegration). All members of the umbrella organisation work in one of the two geographical axes: towards Italy or Greece.

⁸³ As well as the standards used for detection, registration, repatriation and reintegration of the children.

⁸⁴ According to decree No.77, dated June 15th, 2001, of the Albanian Prime Minister. This group includes representatives of the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Labour and Social Affairs, Culture, Youth and Sport, Education and Science, and national intelligence services.

⁸⁵ Another coalition was created on July 23rd, 2001. It is called KKT, "Koalicioni Kundër Trafikut të Qenieve Njerëzore" (Coalition Against the Trafficking of Human Beings). It is composed of seven national organisations: Albanian Centre for Human Rights, Albanian Youth Council – YCA, Children's Human Rights Centre of Albania – CRCA, Albanian Family Planning Association- FPA, Independent Forum of Albanian Women, Media Institute, Useful to Albanian Women.

Its mission is "co-ordination and co-operation in actions and activities against trafficking in human beings, especially of women and children". At the time this report was prepared, no information had been collected on the activities of this coalition.

⁸⁶ Interministerial Conference "All together in the fight against child trafficking", Tirana, November 6th, 2001.

⁸⁷ Except in the setting up of the Agia Varvara program (see previous point). However the Albanian consulate in Athens considered satisfactory the deportation of the child to Albania, with no conditions of protection thought necessary.

⁸⁸ Interview by Terre des Hommes with a representative of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 2002.

Conclusion

Hundreds of Albanian children every year experience a living hell in Greece, the tourist paradise of Europe. They are victims of trafficking to be exploited in various ways – economic, sexual, for illegal activities and so forth. Police measures to deal with "thousands of children of light", children who begged at Greek crossroads during the 1990s, made this traffic less visible. But the traffic continues. It has adapted to these new "market" constraints by becoming less visible but is still just as dangerous for the children.

Whereas in Albania and Greece, efforts were made at the end of the '90s to reduce this "child trafficking", there still remains much to be done both in the struggle against the impunity of the traffickers and in helping the child victims of trafficking themselves. Measures must be implemented to seek out children being trafficked, particularly by social workers operating at street level. Transit and reception centres must be developed in Athens and Thessalonica on the lines of the Filoxenia Centre in Thessalonica. With the help of the judiciary powers, the police and the social authorities of the two countries, these centres must prepare the child's return placing its interest above all else. Repatriations must be conducted in a socially and psychologically safe, legal, fast and consistent manner in order to avoid their slipping back, while considering the child, according to its age and maturity, an active participant in its own future. The mere return of the children to the border of the neighbouring country, without any preparation of the child and without any prospect of reinsertion, is a guarantee that the child will slip back.

Finally, it must be pointed out – and regretted – that the attention of the authorities, the media and public opinion is excessively centred on the problems caused by the children, and very little on the solutions to be implemented in Albania. Yet the traffic responds to a logic of supply and demand. Reducing the supply by firstly reducing the poverty of the *Jevgjit* families and community, is the most efficient means of durably reducing the traffic in Albanian children to Greece or other European countries, especially Italy. We can already now start combining the long-term measures with shorter-term activities for preventing trafficking aimed more specifically at the children and families at risk in Albania and the reintegration of the victims of trafficking into the domestic, social and educational environment of their places of origin.

The only way to cope with this transnational problem is to approach it in a co-ordinated and networked manner (to counterbalance the networked methods of the traffickers); only this will lead to conclusive and effective results. The Albanian and Greek authorities must meet around a table and together seek appropriate solutions. These must be based on the various initiatives implemented in Albania and Greece that have proved that child trafficking is by no means a foregone conclusion. It is in the common interest of the authorities of both countries to protect the children from traffickers but the true political will is still lacking. The situation of the children is, however, alarming and help is urgently needed.

Placing child trafficking at the top of the political agenda is urgent for Albania and Greece and also for the rest of Europe.

It serves no purpose to want to postpone the problem. In a few years, the countries of the former Eastern Bloc will join the countries of the European Union. It is thus necessary to anticipate the phenomenon, otherwise it will assume excessive proportions, encouraging an approach aimed strictly at the security aspect to the detriment of the elementary rights to which the children are entitled.

In general, while the Western countries managed, several decades ago, through public aid or the NGOs, to apply the best of their expertise concerning health and nutrition, they must now do the same with respect to the legislation and worthy procedures for receiving, heeding, repatriating and reinserting victims of child traffickers, for their turning to crime should be considered with the same gravity and urgency as is applied in combating economic criminality or terrorism.

Recommendations

To the Albanian government

- Have an independent evaluation done of the results of the national plan of action to combat trafficking in children.

Prevention of trafficking

- Ensure better border controls for unaccompanied minors leaving or returning to Albania.
- Develop better control mechanisms between maternity services, public records offices and state and private institutions who receive children abandoned at birth.
- Pursue the study and statistical treatment of the phenomenon of child trafficking in order to improve knowledge of the subject and find appropriate responses in the struggle against trafficking.

The protection of child trafficking victims

- Amend existing legislation with appropriate provisions for the protection of the victims.

Voluntary return of child trafficking victims

- Initiate negotiations with the Greek State to draw up a protocol for the repatriation of unaccompanied children. This protocol must not be a protocol of readmission but of voluntary assisted return. It must allow good co-ordination between the various services involved in Albania and Greece. These procedures can take the example of the recommendations formulated by the European assistance program for children separated from their families, positive experiments already in operation between Albania and Greece (social investigation involving the child and the family, protection of the child during the inquiry, assisted voluntary return to his or her family...). The aim is to ensure the child's safety and allow his or her social reintegration.
- Advise Albanian diplomatic representations in Greece of clear procedures for their co-operation with the Greek authorities in the struggle against child trafficking.

Social reintegration of child victims of trafficking

- Develop "alternative intervention models" for the protection of the child (such as open services, foster families...) outside the centres which are now being used. These services will allow child victims of trafficking to return to Albania under favourable conditions if in the judgement of the social services a return to their families is not possible.
- Strengthen the National Adoption Committee.
- Set up specific procedures for the academic reintegration of children who have abandoned school and are at great risk of being caught up in trafficking.

Co-ordination of the various participants

- Initiate better co-ordination with the Greek State in the struggle against child trafficking.
- Officially recognise the NGOs who are working against child trafficking (for better protection of the personnel and greater security for their activities) according to the criteria defined by the interministerial group.

Training

- Improve the training of social service personnel and define a clear social policy on children and families affected by child trafficking (including mechanisms for detecting missing children or who are at risk of disappearing).

To the Greek government

Legislation

- Follow the March 2002 recommendations of Human Rights Watch on legislation to combat trafficking in children. We particularly stress:
 - In the new law to combat all forms of trafficking in human beings, the criminalisation of all forms of human trafficking, not only trafficking for sexual exploitation.
 - The creation of special provisions concerning trafficking in children in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially as regards the child's consent. As children do not have the same capacity to judge, the notion of coercion must not necessarily be proven in order to identify an action as trafficking.
 - The protection of child trafficking victims who have agreed to participate by giving evidence at a trial.
 - Set up a mechanism to confiscate the assets of individuals accused of trafficking, using them as a support fund for the victims of trafficking.

Prevention of trafficking

- Ensure better border controls for unaccompanied minors leaving or entering Greece.
- Develop the awareness of the public opinion in order to improve their understanding of the begging children and those working in the street realities.

Protection of child trafficking victims

- End the imprisonment of minors for begging or illegal immigration. End their deportation at the border without any assistance. The children arrested by the police must be placed in a suitable establishment giving them access to medical and psychosocial assistance.
- Improve the detection of children where they are being trafficked and working in the streets, in collaboration with local Non-Governmental Organisations. Involve the social services in this work. Strengthen the listening skills of trafficking victims.
- In co-operation with local Non-Governmental Organisations, provide transit centres appropriate for trafficking victims, guaranteeing counselling, training, psychosocial support and safety. The Thessaloniki centre must be reinforced, and one created in Athens. Transit centres for unaccompanied minors over 12 must be created. New centres can take an example from the Filoxenia experience as well as the NGO Child Focus in Belgium.

Assisted voluntary return of child trafficking victims

- Follow voluntary return procedures assisted by good co-ordination with the various services involved in Greece and Albania. The aim of the State is the prompt reunification of the child with his or her family in the best interests of the child, or an adequate response adapted to the child's wishes in order to permit his or her social reintegration. With this aim, the State must permit the tracing of the family, an inquiry into the circumstances in which the child was trafficked to determine where to place the child according to his or her best interests (in the family or elsewhere). Once it has been decided where to place the child, the Greek State must ensure the return of the child in humane conditions and in safety. These voluntary assisted return procedures must follow the example of recommendations formulated by the European program for children separated from their families, and the positive experiments already in operation between Albania and Greece (Thessaloniki).
- Hold an official inquiry into the disappearance of street children in Greek cities into Greek orphanages. Establish a link between these rescued children and their families according to the wishes of the children.

Co-ordination of the participants

- Establish a committee allowing the co-ordination of the various ministries involved (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and open this committee to co-operation with the Albanian authorities and the parties of Greek civil society who are involved. This initiative could consist of widening the current group under the Ministry of Public Order.
- Officially recognise the NGOs combating child trafficking (for better protection of NGOs and greater security for their activities) according to the criteria defined between the ministries concerned and the NGOs and Governmental organisations active in the struggle against the trafficking of children.

Training

- Train border police and city police in the detection of children who are being trafficked.
- Train social service personnel in social work with child victims of trafficking.

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STOP CHILD TRAFFICKING

This project of struggle against children trafficking between Albania and Greece, implemented by the Foundation Terre des hommes, has received the Human Rights award of the French Republic 2002.