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CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE’S RESPONSE TO TRAFFICKING*

Introduction: The text characterizes the phenomenon of human trafficking in three countries: Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland. It was decided to describe ways to combat this phenomenon using the example of Poland.

Research Aim: The goal of study was to submit a short report on the general situation in the field of human trafficking in selected countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Evidence-based Facts: Central and Eastern Europe is the origin, transfer, and destination for victims of human trafficking. While in Bulgaria or Romania sexual exploitation is predominant among the victims identified, forced labour is predominant in Poland.

Summary: Help for victims of human trafficking is largely based on the activities of non-governmental organizations, and the state is left only to prosecute this crime. Poland considered this outsourcing of assistance to victims more effective than building a public assistance system.

Keywords: human trafficking, non-governmental organizations, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Evidence of the insufficient recognition of the problems of human trafficking is the fact that “the global number of victims of various forms of servitude is as high as 40 million whereas the number of identified victims does not exceed 100,000” (Laso-cik, 2021, p. 274). New forms of slavery and human trafficking are linked to political decisions, war, military interventions, migration of thousands of people who escapes poverty, violence, climate change and unemployment. Migrants are totally at the mercy of strangers or, worse still, at the mercy of criminals who exploit their powerlessness (Rembierz, 2021, pp. 335–343). Bulgaria, Romania, countries from

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the former Soviet Union, and partly Poland are known as the main countries of origin for victims of trafficking and labor exploitation in Europe (Hoff, 2019, p. 18).

Bulgaria is mainly seen as a country of origin for victims, who are trafficked abroad mainly to other EU countries. In 2017, 505 people were identified and registered as trafficked, including 442 females and 63 males. 323 people were trafficked for sexual exploitation and 67 for labor exploitation (Hoff, 2019, p. 78). We can observe a very similar situation in Romania. This country is one of the main countries of origin for victims of human trafficking in Europe and figures of domestic (trafficking for) labour exploitation cases are low. 662 cases are registered there as victims of human trafficking, including 506 women and 156 men. 454 were trafficked for sexual exploitation and only 79 were victims of forced labor (Hoff, 2019, p. 114).

Such a low level of registration of crimes primarily related to the exploitation of people during their professional work in Bulgaria and Romania results from the fact that many victims, for various reasons (fear, language barriers, lack of faith in the effectiveness of the law), do not report to law enforcement authorities about a crime committed by their employer.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The problem of human trafficking is a global issue. This text was created for a specific purpose. My aim was to submit a short report on the general situation in the field of human trafficking in selected countries of Central and Eastern Europe at the Human Trafficking Conference organized in 2022 by the University of North Carolina in Pembroke, USA. Before arriving at a research stay at the above-mentioned University, the author of the article was asked by Prof. Judi Paparozzi, organizer of many conferences on this topic, to prepare this report. The text therefore asks about the situation of human trafficking in this part of the world and how to help people affected by this problem.

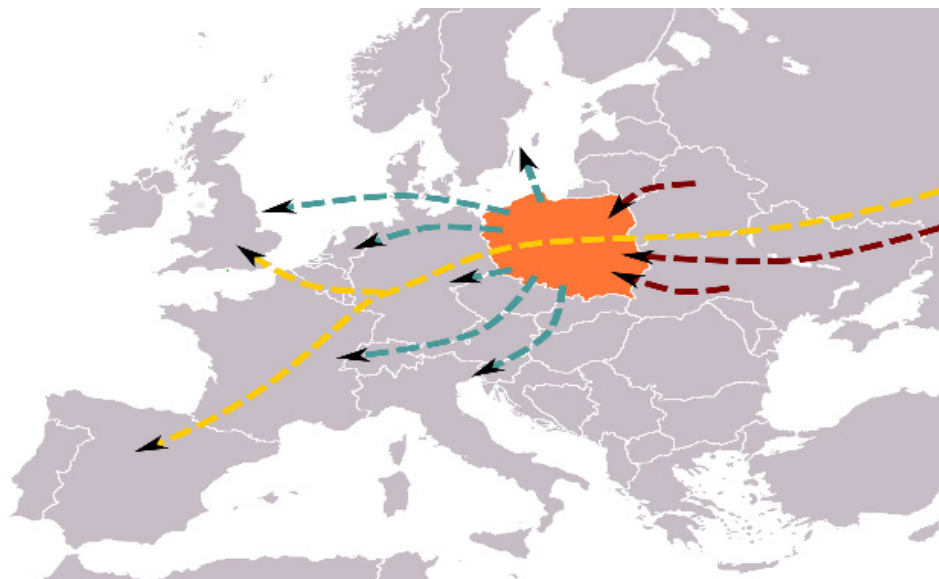
EVIDENCE-BASED REVIEW

Human trafficking is criminalised in Poland. Article 189a of Poland's penal code prescribes punishments of 3 to 15 years' imprisonment (Ustawa z dnia 6 czerwca 1997 r. – Kodeks Karny). In 2019, Polish Police registered 31 crimes that have been "cleared" or solved by arrest and 98 victims. The vast majority of the victims were foreigners, 82 people in comparison to 16 Polish citizens. It should be noted that among the victims, the majority are men (66 people), the number of which is more than twice as high as aggrieved women (32 people). In 2019, the vast majority of the victims were people exploited in work or forced services (87 people).

At the same time, significantly fewer cases concerned exploitation for prostitution or pornography (8 people) and other forms of exploitation (3 people). The Border Guard, as the next law enforcement authority, identified 98 potential victims of trafficking in human beings in 2019 in Poland. 80 people were coerced into forced labor (45 citizens of Ukraine, 18 citizens of Poland, 9 citizens of Uganda, 3 citizens of Belarus, 2 citizens of the Philippines, and 1 citizen of Vietnam, India, and Nepal) and 8 women were forced into prostitution (5 Sierra Leoneans, 3 Guinean citizens) (*Handel ludźmi...*, 2019).

Poland is a country of origin (the green line, Figure 1), transfer (yellow line) and destination for victims of human trafficking for victims from beyond the eastern border, especially Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Belarus.

Figure 1.
Poland on the human trafficking map



Source: (*Handel ludźmi...*, 2019).

The Polish labor market is an attractive destination for economic migration. The nations that particularly like the country on the Vistula River include citizens of Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and migrants from Asia (especially from India). Over one million non-natives currently work in Poland. 73% of them come from Ukraine (Woźniak, 2023). Non-official estimates about the number of migrants residing in the country fall somewhere between 3 and 4 million people. Undocumented migrants and other groups with limited access to employment in general are more likely to be vulnerable to exploitation (Hoff, 2019, pp. 18–28).

Migrants who work illegally are exposed to the additional consequences of accidents at work. In May 2020, a high-profile court trial ended in Poland regarding the death of a 36-year-old Ukrainian who fainted at work. According to the prosecutor's office, the boss of a Ukrainian worker forbade to call for help due to illegal and informal employment. As a result of this omission, the employee has died and the boss took the man's body to the forest. The employer was sentenced to almost two years in prison (TVN24, 2022).

Recently, employment rules have changed for the better. Citizens of Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine can work legally on the basis of the employer's declaration of entrusting work to a foreigner without the need to obtain a permit. The rest of the visitors from other countries can work in Poland if the entrepreneur who wants to employ them obtains a work permit for them or if they have a uniform permit for temporary residence and work (Woźniak, 2023).

Children – victims of human trafficking – are a separate issue. Children are used in Poland for begging (especially Roma children) and are recruited for sex exploitation (prostitution, pornography, and child trafficking). Perpetrators use tourist facilities and services – hotels, restaurants, resorts, airlines, taxis, travel agents, etc. They can establish contacts with children in a variety of circumstances, such as on the Internet, on the streets, on the beach, in five-star hotels or cheap accommodations, clubs, bars, restaurants, train stations, nearby their school (Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, 2022). In Poland in 2011–2012, the police registered over 5,000 children – victims of sexual abuse and from several dozen to several hundred minors exploited in prostitution. However, there are no available data that would define the scale of sex tourism (*Przeciwdziałanie wykorzystywaniu...*, 2014).

Many institutions deal with the problem of trafficking in human beings in Poland. The most important are the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, the Police (Unit to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings), the Border Guard, the National Labour Inspectorate, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, etc. (*Handel ludźmi...*, 2015). However, the most important role in the fight against human trafficking in Poland is played by the National Consulting and Intervention Center for the Victims of Trafficking (KCIK, 2022). The center is financed by competition by the Minister of the Interior and Administration. KCIK offers a round-the-clock helpline, basic provision – food, clothes, shoes, sanitary products, accommodation in a safe place, psychological support, legal assistance, the assistance of an interpreter, medical assistance. After identifying the victim, KCIK employees have the opportunity to isolate her or his from the perpetrators in the shelter and provide them with comprehensive support.

At the request of the ministry, the KCIK program has been implemented in recent years by two non-governmental organizations. The choice of these NGOs is not accidental, as they are visible in Polish media and have been dealing with the issue of trafficking in human beings for many years. It is about the Foundation

Against Trafficking in Human Beings and Slavery La Strada (2022) and the Catholic support organization PoMOC (2022). La Strada together with PoMOC runs KCIK, which is actually financed by the Ministry of the Interior through a tender process that the government launches annually. La Strada Poland runs a shelter in Warsaw and PoMOC has a shelter in Katowice.

The following classes are conducted for women living in the shelters:

- therapeutic and rehabilitation (community work, occupational therapy, art therapy, working on the mother-child relationship, management lessons),
- preparing for independent coping in society, as well as for difficult life situations.

Residents can also obtain:

- psychological help (individual therapy),
- legal counseling,
- career counseling,
- spiritual help.

Additionally, it is possible to participate in various training, workshops, therapeutic, rehabilitation, and recreational trips. The female residents are also motivated to continue – previously interrupted – education and obtain a job or education. Staying in the shelter helps to regain mental and spiritual balance as well as self-esteem and agency (PoMOC, 2022).

NGO PoMOC is run by nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, which aims, among other things, to care for poor women and to prevent prostitution. Twenty years ago, the Congregation delegated two sisters to work with prostitutes, who today, together with the staff of lay therapists, run a center for women who want to leave the profession. The nuns also acquired qualifications to conduct therapy, e.g. addiction treatment. The shelter accepts women (some with children) who may stay in the center for a period not longer than 9 months. Sometimes this period is extended. As they say in the book they recently published, “for someone who really wants to, nine months is really enough. Our experience shows that when you stay here for a long time, people simply do not feel good. Grievances, convenience, claims are triggered” (Jakimowicz, 2021, p. 53).

In the book they published, the sisters share their experiences, but most of all, they give voice to the women they helped. Below is a case study (narrative of one of the women), in which one can also find a description of the sisters’ work with victims of human trafficking:

When I was six, my father hanged himself above the stove. My mother and I found him after we got home. It was my sixth birthday. My mother was an alcoholic. [...] When I was seventeen, I was a quiet and peaceful person. Around me, I saw beautiful friends to whom everyone paid attention. They had everything – I wanted so too. I started taking drugs to get someone to notice me. [...] When I lost everything, a certain boy appeared. He was a bouncer at a disco. I liked it very much and started dating him.

After some time, he said that he had an offer for me to go to Germany, to a brothel. I agreed because I knew that I would earn a lot and eventually become as beautiful as my friends – I would be able to dress and make up fashionably.

After two weeks of this wonderful job, my boss came and took my phone. He said I was working for him from now on, he was taking my money and forbid thinking about running away. But I had all. The most expensive perfume, clothes. It was only after a few months that I concluded that I wanted to go home. Unfortunately, my boss refused. I tried to run away with the client, but when I left the agency, my boss was just there. He pulled me out of the car by the hair, tearing it out, and when I fell, he kicked me in the stomach and knocked out a couple of teeth. [...] The next morning he ordered to take me to the border. [...] This is how I got to my mother, who took me in and made a prosthesis. After a few weeks, I went out to see my friend, and the doing drugs started again, the wrong friends showed up, and the old scenario was repeated. There was again someone I believed when he promised to look after me. It was enough that he hugged me a lot and said things that I needed to hear at that time. It was perfect. For this he was a gangster. I thought at the time that such a man would protect me because everyone was afraid of him.

Soon he announced that we would set up a brothel, in a rented apartment. He introduced me as his woman. It impressed me. Once upon a time, we were drinking alcohol with his friends when he suddenly attacked me and beat me up. He said it was because I screamed. And then he added that now I have to pay a fine of PLN 10,000. And I have a week for that. [...]

I went to a client I had visited before and whom I knew was a policeman. He once told me he would help me if I wanted to. [...] I already never returned there [to the brothel where she was kept under duress – M.B.]. This policemen took me to my mother and told me not to go out. After a few hours, a policewoman came who listened to the whole story and called the right place. When she hung up, she told me to pack. An hour later I was on my way to a crisis intervention center in another city.

It was hard to leave everything behind. Everything, that is, drugs, fun, alcohol, expensive cosmetics, fashionable clothes. After a few days at the crisis intervention center, I found out that there was a place for me in a sheltered center run by nuns.

Well, I wasn't pleased. In a place like this, I thought, one had to pray a lot, and there was no question of any drugs. I thought: I will go and then I will run away.

The police drove me to the shelter. Upon my arrival, I spoke to the sisters about the rules of the house. Of course, they invited those willing to pray. Then I thought that I had better go if they were to persecute me afterward for not going to pray. They also presented their entire-assistance offer, and I only asked how much it would cost. When they said nothing at all, I started asking where the catch was. It seemed to me that nothing was for free in life.

I talked a lot with my sisters about my life, about my desires. I took part in various activities. Surprisingly, I didn't run away, although at first, it was only because I was scared. Earlier escapes always ended very badly.

The initial two years in the center were difficult for me. I was afraid of every sound, light, fast movement. I was constantly awake. I was nervous that my previous torturers would find me. However, the sisters and staff were patient. They helped me find a

psychiatrist who supported me. Meanwhile, Sister Anna gained my trust. She talked to me a lot. She was so human. I had the impression that she was not rejecting anyone and accepting people as they are. It gave me more warmth than I have experienced in my whole life. We had a weekly ritual every week – we went on trips to IKEA. We always walked around the store, we talked [...]. In the end, we were buying ice cream. I loved our trips. Once Sister Anna took me to her lecture. She was talking about girls working on the street. She did it with such kindness! She did not judge. And I cried as a baby. I felt that someone understood me. Kasia, who worked in the center as a case manager and therapist, also had a big influence on my shift. She helped me cope with my miscarriage, which I had a few years ago. It was a subject that I could not come to terms with. Kasia took me for walks with her dog, then we talked a lot. She once persuaded me to write a letter. I included everything in it – my drugs, my miscarriage. Kasia went with me to the park and supported me while I was smoking this letter. It was an important moment for me.

I don't know how it happened, but after seventeen years of drug use, I stopped. After many years, I went to confession. I felt free and happy. I also attended an addiction consultation. There they stated that I did not need any other support for now. I started to pray, to get to know life sober. It was beautiful! I started to feel joy and it turned out that I was surrounded by only good people. (Jakimowicz, 2021, pp. 20–25)

The above fragment shows the typical fate of victims of sexual violence. We also see that breaking up with the past means hiding from torturers and starting a long recovery process. Being a victim of sexual abuse is often associated with addiction and mental disorders. People who have time to build a bond of friendship and trust with the victim of violence must participate in the recovery process. Their professional therapeutic education, but above all their readiness to accompany the victim in everyday life activities (shopping, walks, talks), builds the right space to start a new life by a victim of sexual violence.

SUMMARY

Central and Eastern Europe is the origin, transfer, and destination for victims of human trafficking from Asian and former Soviet countries. It is also region with labor shortages. Therefore, Central and Eastern European countries are becoming an attractive target for workers from third-world countries.

Two described in the article organizations, La Strada and PoMOC, have shelters for typical victims of trafficking in human beings where they can provide their clients with round-the-clock support. Nevertheless, there are also other NGOs in Poland worth mentioning. For example, Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje [Nobody's Children Foundation] supports children and their families by helping in abusive situations (Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, 2022), and Itaka Foundation, which searches for missing people and supports their families (Itaka, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Each country of Central and Eastern Europe has its own specificity. While in Bulgaria or Romania sexual exploitation is predominant among the victims identified, forced labour is predominant in Poland. Central and Eastern European countries have legal and institutional measures to combat trafficking in human beings like proper law and enforcement. However, NGOs play a special role in the system of counteracting the negative phenomena of forced labour and sexual exploitation. The state is pursuing the perpetrators, but the victims are usually assisted by NGOs. Comprehensive help for victims of human trafficking is entrusted to them and governments often are financing their activities.

Unfortunately, the US Department of State in the 2019 Report dropped Poland from the list of countries that effectively eliminate human trafficking to one of the countries that are deficient or negligent in this matter. The causes were, , that law enforcement lacked the expertise to identify forced labour victims and child victims and because there was no clear definition of what constitutes forced labour in the Polish criminal code. In addition, prosecutors and judges often lacked expertise in labour trafficking cases (Lasocik, 2021). We can only hope that more and more non-governmental organizations such as those described in the text will be created in the future and that the awareness of the problem of trafficking among law enforcement services will be improved.

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ODPOWIEDŹ EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ NA HANDEL LUDŹMI

Wprowadzenie: W tekście dokonano charakterystyki zjawiska handlu ludźmi w trzech krajach: Bułgarii, Rumunii i Polsce. Postanowiono także opisać sposoby walki z tym zjawiskiem na przykładzie Polski.

Cel badań: Celem badań było przedstawienie krótkiego raportu na temat ogólnej sytuacji w zakresie handlu ludźmi w wybranych krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

Stan wiedzy: Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia jest miejscem pochodzenia, transferu oraz miejscem docelowym dla ofiar handlu ludźmi. Podczas gdy w Bułgarii i Rumunii wśród zidentyfikowanych ofiar dominuje wykorzystywanie seksualne, w Polsce dominuje praca przymusowa.

Podsumowanie: Pomoc ofiarom handlu ludźmi w dużej mierze opiera się na działalności organizacji pozarządowych, a państwu pozostaje jedynie ściganie tego przestępstwa. Polska uznaje ten outsourcing pomocy ofiarom za skuteczniejszy niż budowanie systemu pomocy publicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: handel ludźmi, organizacje pozarządowe, Polska, Bułgaria, Rumunia