

Risks and Realities: Romani Experiences of Human Trafficking in Romania

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the  
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Nancy Christine Pellegrino

Graduate Program in Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies

The Ohio State University

2023

Thesis Committee

Dr. Jennifer Suchland, Advisor

Dr. Angela Brintlinger, Committee Member

Copyrighted by  
Nancy Christine Pellegrino  
2023

## Abstract

The Romani people are arguably the most ostracized group in Europe. This thesis examines how their minority status intersects with the vulnerability factors for human trafficking. Romania serves as the location of my research as it is not only a dominant sending country of trafficking victims, but it also has the largest Roma population in Europe. My research provides an overview of trafficking in Romani communities and the responses of the Romanian government, non-government organizations (NGOs), and anti-trafficking groups in Romania. I analyze data on the Roma community's access to state services, Roma socioeconomic status, Roma migration patterns, and anti-Roma sentiment among civil society and state actors in order to explain why the Roma are at higher risk of being trafficked. I employ a labor market and human rights approach to anti-trafficking in order to 1) formulate more appropriate responses to anti-trafficking efforts and Roma inclusion initiatives and 2) challenge the notion that human trafficking in Romani communities is inherently a *Roma*, or ethnocultural, problem.

## Dedication

Dedicated to my Grandfather, Phillip F. Pellegrino. It is my greatest hope to always make you proud.

## Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Jennifer Suchland, for inspiring me through her own work in anti-trafficking and for guiding me throughout this writing process. I would also like to express my appreciation for both Dr. Angela Brintlinger, my committee member and the Director of the Center for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (CSEEEES), and Dr. Adela Lechintan-Siefer, my Romanian professor. Special thanks to Emma Pratt, Assistant Director of CSEEEES, for always being a quick email or text message away when I needed advice. I could not have undertaken this project without the unwavering support and encouragement of my friends, family, and cohort members. I am also thankful for my cat, Zuko, for always staying up late with me while I write. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the United States' Department of Education for sponsoring my academic interest in Romania through the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship.

## Vita

2021..... B.A. Diplomacy and Global Politics, Miami University

2021..... B.A. Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies, Miami University

2022..... Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship, the Ohio State University

2023..... Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship, the Ohio State University

2023..... Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program, Romanian-U.S. Fulbright

Commission

## Fields of Study

Major Field: Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Vita.....	v
List of Tables .....	viii
Chapter 1. Introduction .....	1
Intersectional Approach.....	3
Chapter 2. Who Are the Romani People?.....	6
Historical Background .....	6
Contemporary Status.....	9
Crime.....	10
Poverty .....	11
Migration.....	13
State Policy and Institutions.....	15
Public Perception .....	16
Chapter 3. Overview of Trafficking in Human Beings in Romania .....	19
Overview of THB in Romania.....	19
The Trafficking in Human Beings of Roma People .....	23
Chapter 4. <i>Pro</i> -Roma and <i>Anti</i> -Trafficking Measures in Romania .....	32
The EU Response: Funds, Frameworks, and the Decade of Roma Inclusion .....	32
Romania's Response: Neglect, Corruption, and Discrimination .....	35
National Strategies and State Agencies: Roma Inclusion.....	36
National Strategies and State Agencies: Anti-Trafficking.....	38
Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking and Access to State Care .....	40
Carceral Protectionism and THB of Roma .....	41

Institutional Discrimination and Bias .....	42
NGOs: Roma Rights Groups and Romanian Anti-Trafficking Organizations .....	44
Chapter 5. Assessment and Recommendations .....	50
State Actors .....	51
Non-Governmental Organizations .....	58
Researchers .....	60
Conclusion .....	62
Bibliography .....	65



## List of Tables

Table 1: Romanian Trafficking Legislation.....	20
Table 2: Snapshot of Documented Instances of Romanian Roma Trafficking .....	26
Table 3: Recommendations for State Actors, NGOs, and Researchers .....	51

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Trafficking in human beings (THB) is considered one of the most egregious violations of human rights in modern times. The most recent spike in this phenomenon coincided with the opening of Eastern Europe's geographic and financial borders to the rest of the world in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Since then, human trafficking has become a buzzword in the media, academia, and politics. This interest has primarily produced coverage on human trafficking in regard to organized crime and sex trafficking. As a result, most of the anti-trafficking policy, advocacy work, and research is focused on the gendered dimensions of trafficking and on punishment— rather than on prevention of trafficking of all persons or of specific populations who are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

Due to this prioritization, research and policy tend to overlook the intersection between human trafficking and other vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities like the Roma people in Romania. This thesis attempts to offer an intersectional approach to the issue of human trafficking in Romania by examining the ways state and non-state actors recognize and attempt to mitigate ethnic discrimination toward the Romani community in the context of anti-trafficking legislation and advocacy work. Ultimately, I argue that anti-trafficking programs are not designed with the Roma people in mind.

---

<sup>1</sup> Victoria Vall, "Assessing the Impact of the Post-Communist Transition and EU Integration on Anti-Human Trafficking Work in Romania," in *Global Crisis, Local Voices*, eds. Gabriele Piazza, Megan Jessie Asplin and Kajsa Hallberg (London, United Kingdom: IJOPEC, 2019), 127.

The four following questions guide the bulk of my research and writing: 1) Is the Romanian Roma population disproportionately affected by, or vulnerable to, human trafficking? 2) How does their status as an ethnic minority impact both their vulnerability to trafficking and the protection Roma victims receive through anti-trafficking measures? 3) What effect does public perception, institutional bias, and discrimination have on anti-trafficking initiatives and access to victim services? 4) What, if any, protective and preventive policies does Romania have in place to address this issue?

To best answer these questions, I structure my paper in the following way: In the latter half of Chapter 1, I introduce the lens with which I examine the issue of anti-trafficking more broadly. Chapter 2 familiarizes the reader with the Romani people's historic and contemporary experience in Romania. Chapter 3 then turns to the issue of human trafficking itself. I intentionally introduce human trafficking later in the paper to allow the reader to make connections between Romani livelihood and human trafficking; in other words, to show that in a globalized world, human trafficking is often the natural progression for groups who are underserved and marginalized by society. This structure also reflects the struggles I encountered in my own research process; Roma-specific research was often segregated from anti-trafficking literature. My decision to demarcate the content of Chapters 2 and 3 is intended to comment on the separation, or absence, of Roma poverty from anti-trafficking discourse, while making it abundantly obvious through my writing that they are, in fact, intertwined.

Chapter 4 examines the framework and efficacy of both anti-trafficking campaigns and social inclusion programs on the European and Romanian state level.

Chapter 4 stresses that poverty reduction and social inclusion efforts *are* anti-trafficking initiatives. Therefore, an assessment of Roma-targeted anti-trafficking policy would not be complete without an evaluation of programs such as the European Union's Decade of Inclusion and Romania's National Strategy for Roma Integration. These campaigns are not explicitly labelled as "anti-trafficking" policy, but their goals align with mitigating vulnerability factors of human trafficking. This perspective also calls into question the effectiveness of, and offers an alternative to, the awareness campaigns that currently make up the bulk of anti-trafficking efforts in Romania.

In Chapter 5, I conclude by offering recommendations to state actors, NGOs, and researchers that include, but are not limited to, investments in Roma-targeted programs, anti-corruption legislation, an increase in access to existing state and NGO care, poverty reduction and prevention campaigns, and participatory research. My sources include academic publications, state memos on Roma integration and anti-discrimination policy, socioeconomic statistical data, case studies of Roma trafficking, media sources, and Romanian anti-trafficking NGOs. I attempt to create a comprehensive analysis of human trafficking among the Romanian Roma and of the anti-trafficking responses that pertain to them, in particular.

### Intersectional Approach

As previously mentioned, anti-trafficking literature and state policy are saturated with discussions of sex trafficking and its gendered dimensions. The primary interest in human trafficking discourse revolves around sensationalized stories of deceived

underage, white, and typically Eastern European girls—the “perfect victims”.<sup>2</sup> These women have become the face of fourth wave of human trafficking, which coincided with dismantling of communist regimes throughout Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This fourth wave is perhaps more commonly known by its epithet, the “Natasha trade”. Consequently, ethnic minorities, migrant workers, members of the LGBTQ community, victims of labor exploitation, or more simply, those who do not fit into this “perfect victim” mold, are not only left out of the anti-trafficking discussion, but they are also not considered when anti-trafficking policies and programs are drafted. The focal point of the anti-trafficking framework becomes punishing the sex industry and looking for criminals who abuse young girls—rather than scrutinizing structural and societal deficiencies that give rise to human trafficking.

This focus on punishment and sex trafficking has become an observable pattern in anti-trafficking discourse. Antonela Arhin has used these reoccurring themes to identify eight approaches to anti-trafficking. For example, she categorizes the emphasis on punishment under the *criminal justice approach*, while she places the focus on sex trafficking, which typically entails debates on the legality and morality of sex work, under the *feminist approach*.<sup>3</sup> Regarding my general outlook on anti-trafficking, I apply the human rights, labor market, and victim-participatory approaches to my research. The *human rights approach* is characterized by prioritizing the role of socioeconomic factors

---

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Suchland, “Trafficking as Aberration: The Making of Globalization’s Victims,” In *Economies of Violence: Transnational Feminism, Postsocialism, and the Politics of Sex Trafficking* (Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Antonela Arhin, “A Diaspora Approach to Understanding Human Trafficking for Labor Exploitation,” *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2016.1136538>.

in human trafficking and by advocating work for legal rights, such as those inscribed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as a form of prevention. The *labor market approach* typically entails a critique of capitalism, globalization, and social and economic marginalization, which tend to facilitate and incentivize labor exploitation and migration. Finally, the *victim-participatory approach* emphasizes the need to give trafficking survivors both agency over their stories and a fundamental role in developing the research and policies that will affect them.

These approaches are particularly salient to researching the Romani community in Romania. Socioeconomic factors influence a Romanian Roma citizen's decision to migrate abroad. Through this migration process, the citizen is likely to end up in precarious working conditions, not only because of deceit or coercion, but also because the global economy has created a need for cheap migrant labor in areas such as agriculture. This need is then accompanied by a lack of commitment to upholding both migrant and labor rights. Additionally, in the case of the Roma, bias and distrust have negatively impacted both the media coverage of human trafficking involving people of Roma descent and the reception of anti-trafficking initiatives among the Roma community. The success of anti-trafficking, therefore, relies heavily on the collaboration between the Roma population and the state, anti-trafficking groups, and researchers in order to overcome structural and societal prejudices. Using these approaches, I would like to reframe how anti-trafficking, especially toward minority groups like the Romanian Roma, is conceptualized.

## Chapter 2. Who Are the Romani People?

### Historical Background

The Romani people, colloquially known as the Roma, were historically an Indo-Aryan ethnic, nomadic group. They predominantly settled throughout Central and Eastern Europe after a mass exodus from Northern India approximately a thousand years ago. Dating back to the 1400s, the Roma people have had a long history in Romania. For over 400 years, the Romanians enslaved and exploited the Roma until their emancipation in 1865. Emancipation ushered in their ‘freedom’ via mass deportations and the creation of segregated rural settlements.<sup>4</sup> Within these communities, the Roma identity, as well as Roma livelihood, was tied to artisanal crafts, such as brick-making, basket-weaving, tin- and copper-smithing, horse-trading, bear-taming and so on.<sup>5</sup> During the 20th century, much of this knowledge slowly faded as Romanian society forced the Roma population to assimilate into the ranks of industrial and agricultural workers.

Under Romanian communist rule, which spanned from 1947 to 1989, Romani communities benefited socially and economically from policies that deprioritized ethnic distinctions and mobilized the impoverished and largely unemployed Roma population to

---

<sup>4</sup> Will Guy, “Why Roma Migrate,” openDemocracy, June 30, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/why-roma-migrate/>.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Horgen Friberg, “Poverty, Networks, Resistance: The Economic Sociology of Roma Migration for Begging,” *Migration Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mny038>.

work on farms and in heavy industry.<sup>6</sup> However, unlike other minority groups, such as Ukrainians and Hungarians, the Romanian Roma never obtained “coinhabiting nationality” status. This status would have officially recognized the Roma as an ethnic minority and granted them representation in politics and subsidies for cultural institutions and activities.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the Roma remained socially isolated in “poor-quality” housing and worked low-wage jobs.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Romani community were historically victims of racism, negative public perception, poor living conditions, and discriminatory state policy, their plight has been further exacerbated by Romania’s political transition and integration into the global economy in the twenty-first century. For example, the post-communist Romanian government dismantled social protection programs that provided Roma with housing.<sup>9</sup> The rise of private housing markets and the subsequent reduction of government investment in public housing, where the majority of urban Roma communities tend to reside, has led to deteriorating living conditions for the Romani people.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the abandonment of the communist project marked a return to fervent nationalism among the Romanian government and public. Romanian nationalist began to blame the Roma for

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Viorel Achim, “The Communist Authorities’ Refusal to Recognize the Roma as a National Minority. A moment in the History of the Roma in Romania, 1948-1949,” *Baltic Worlds* XI, no. 2-3 (2018): 51-52. <https://balticworlds.com/the-communist-authorities-refusal-to-recognize-the-roma-as-a-national-minority/>.

<sup>8</sup> Michele Lancione, “The politics of embodied urban precarity: Roma People and the fight for housing in Bucharest, Romania,” *Geoforum* 101, (2019): 185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geogorum.2018.09.008>.

<sup>9</sup> Collin Williams, “8 Facts About Poverty Among the Roma Population in Romania,” The Borgen Project, September 5, 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-poverty-among-the-roma-population-in-romania/>.

<sup>10</sup> Lancione, “The politics of embodied urban precarity,” 186.



the economic hardships induced by the political transition.<sup>11</sup> In the 1990s, a surge in ethnic violence toward the Roma people ensued. Many buildings that housed Roma were demolished as a result of hate crimes and forced evictions.<sup>12</sup> At the turn of the twenty-first century—it became evident that the state no longer had an interest in protecting Roma livelihood, or their employment status, for that matter.

Between the fall of the communist regime and the rise in mechanized agriculture and the service industry, the Roma people have lost many of the low-skilled manual labor jobs that they were initially forced into years ago. During the transition to capitalism, employers fired Roma citizens at disproportionate rates due to claims, oftentimes exaggerated and racially motivated, of their “lack of qualification” and “poor educational training”.<sup>13</sup> As a result of these job losses and heightened social marginalization, many Roma families remained unemployed and needed welfare benefits to survive. Roma citizens were unaware, or uninformed, of state-sponsored professional integration programs, and therefore, did not seek them out. Rather than direct the Roma to these services, the government dismantled a post-socialist aid law that provided funding for several welfare programs after officials complained that these programs were primarily serving the Roma community.<sup>14</sup> As a result of these complications of the early political

---

<sup>11</sup> Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Roma in Romania*, Refworld, 2004. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38cf17.html#:~:text=May%2014%2C%201990&text=Cloarba%20also%20claims%20hundreds%20of,is%20the%20worst%20in%20Europe>.

<sup>12</sup> Cladiu Coman and Cătălin Andronechescu, “Discrimination of Roma Population in Romania,” *Revista Universitara de Sociologie* 2020, no.2 (2020): 82. <http://www.sociologiecariova.ro/revista/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/00.FULL-VERSION-2.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Ingrid Nicolau, “Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice 9, no.2 (2017): 224. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/950fa6088ff65e8eb59634cce4761fba/1.pdf?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=136105>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

and economic transition, the current Romani socio-economic situation in Romania ranges from largely unimproved to further deteriorated.

### Contemporary Status

The mistreatment of the Roma people is not exclusive to Romania as they are widely considered the most marginalized group in Europe.<sup>15</sup> However, Romania is home to the largest Romani diaspora population in Europe, with approximately 9% of the population being ethnically Roma.<sup>16</sup> This number is likely higher in reality, as some Roma choose to not disclose their ethnicity due to discriminatory practices of state institutions and the racial prejudices rampant in society.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Romania is a primary sending country for human trafficking. These two factors make Romania an apt candidate for studying the correlation between human trafficking and ethnic minorities.

In Romania, common issues for the Roma include de facto housing segregation, low education levels, insufficient access to healthcare, and general discrimination. Experts cite these same issues as indicators of vulnerability to human trafficking. Vulnerability to human trafficking has been categorized into the four following “main pillars” by Tomsa et. al: Crime, Vulnerability, which is defined by housing insecurity, poverty, age and gender, and a lack of access to health care and education, Migration, and

---

<sup>15</sup> Friberg, “Poverty, Networks, Resistance,” 228.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Romania’s President Basescu fined for Roma comments,” *BBC News*. February 10, 2014.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26125135>; Agnes Csontá and Adrian Marin, *Discrimination of Roma Communities: Romania National Report* (Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, 2013).

[https://www.gitanos.org/upload/44/68/Discrimination\\_of\\_Roma\\_National\\_Report\\_ROMANIA\\_Net\\_Kard.pdf](https://www.gitanos.org/upload/44/68/Discrimination_of_Roma_National_Report_ROMANIA_Net_Kard.pdf).

State Policy.<sup>18</sup> Examining these areas not only reveals the experiences of ethnic minorities in Romania, but it also illustrates how interconnected minority status is with vulnerability to human trafficking.

### *Crime*

Tomsa discusses crime as a factor in human trafficking in terms to developed organized crime. In fact, reports frequently refer to ethnic and familial ties as the backbone of organized trafficking operations.<sup>19</sup> While it may be true that some individuals of Roma descent engage in trafficking, an analysis of organized crime largely falls under a criminal justice approach to human trafficking, and is, therefore, peripheral to the goals of this paper.<sup>20</sup> More generally, however, Romania was ranked as the 61<sup>st</sup> most corrupt country in the world, and 4<sup>th</sup> in the EU in 2018.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that the deficiency of state institutions responsible for policing and prosecuting organized crime and human trafficking are of greater importance than the ethnicity of the perpetrators.

It should also be noted that Roma people are highly overrepresented in the prison system in Europe, specifically in Spain and Romania. They often receive longer prison sentences for the same crimes when compared to other non-Roma prisoners.<sup>22</sup> Ethnic

---

<sup>18</sup> Raluca Tomsa, Alexandra Hosszu, and Gelu Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania: 497 Registered Victims and 130 Convicted Traffickers?* (Agentia Impreuna, 2019): 9-11. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336847955\\_Trafficking\\_of\\_human\\_beings\\_in\\_Romania\\_497\\_registered\\_victims\\_and\\_130\\_convicted\\_traffickers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336847955_Trafficking_of_human_beings_in_Romania_497_registered_victims_and_130_convicted_traffickers).

<sup>19</sup> Sasha Poucki and Nicole Bryan, "Vulnerability to Human Trafficking among the Roma Population in Serbia: The Role of Social Exclusion and Marginalization," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 2 (March 4, 2014): 156, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.885417>; U.S. Embassy in Romania, 2022 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2022. <https://ro.usembassy.gov/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 4's discussion of organized crime in the context of societal marginalization.

<sup>21</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Lorena Molnar, "The Imperative Need for Criminological Research on the European Roma: A Narrative Review," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, October 8, 2021, 10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211048448>.

profiling, police misconduct, and routine policing of Romani communities have been a major source of distrust toward law enforcement among the Roma people.<sup>23</sup>

### *Poverty*

Unemployment and poverty rates are substantially higher among Romanian Roma communities when compared to the non-Roma population.<sup>24</sup> As of 2015, it is estimated that around 90% of the Roma population in Romania live in poverty and that 40% of Roma children experience malnutrition or hunger.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, 44% of Romanian Roma adults are unemployed, and about 60% of Roma people live in segregated communities with a lack of access to proper housing, running water, electricity and adequate resources for waste disposal.<sup>26</sup> Roma citizens that *are* employed typically work in low-wage, manual labor jobs. Jon Horgen Friberg's article on poverty networks, highlights the correlations between being Roma, low employment, minimal education, and a lack of basic resources, the example given here being running water in the home.<sup>27</sup>

Only about 5% of Romanian Roma complete high school, and Romani children are highly overrepresented in state care institutions or places under the care of social workers.<sup>28</sup> Roma children are frequently segregated in school and rarely receive quality

---

<sup>23</sup> GRETA, *Evaluation Report Romania: Third Evaluation Round. Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings* (Council of Europe, 2021), 46. <https://rm.coe.int/evaluation-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-council-of-europe-conve/1680a2b0f8>.

<sup>24</sup> GRETA, *Evaluation Report Romania*, 45-46.

<sup>25</sup> Will Guy, "Why Roma Migrate."

<sup>26</sup> Robert Kushen, Lori Mann, Ostalinda Maya Ovalle, European Roma Rights Centre, and People in Need, *Breaking the Silence: Trafficking in Romani Communities: March 2011: A Report by the European Roma Rights Centre and People in Need* (Budapest: ERRRC, 2011), 45-46.

<sup>27</sup> Friberg, "Poverty, Networks, Resistance," 238.

<sup>28</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 46, 50-51.

education.<sup>29</sup> The life expectancy of Roma people is lower than the non-Roma population by 6 years, and 77% of Roma people in Romania cannot afford proper medication for their ailments, suggesting inequalities in medical care and living conditions.<sup>30</sup> Although Roma citizens with health insurance have access to free medical services, it is estimated that half of the Roma do not have such required health insurance, compared to 97% of all Romanian citizens who do have insurance.<sup>31</sup> Reasons for this can include discrimination by public healthcare workers and a lack of knowledge or resources that would facilitate obtaining health insurance. Furthermore, although Romanian *students* between the ages of 18 and 26 are eligible for free medical services.<sup>32</sup> The barriers to secondary education for the Roma effectively bar them from partaking in this program. For the Roma people, Romania's independence did not improve their health and poverty progress, as many received better medical treatment under communism due to ethnic discrimination policies and heavy investments in social welfare programs under that regime.<sup>33</sup>

This lack of proper medical care can be seen in the example of the Oltenian Roma, a community in which the mortality rates are quite high, in addition to there being high rates of both birth and infant mortality. All of this is due to insufficient healthcare in

---

<sup>29</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 10; Csontá and Marin, *Discrimination of Roma Communities*.

<sup>30</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 45; "Romania's National Roma Integration Strategy: 2012-2020," (European Commission, 2012), 13. [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu-country/romania\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu-country/romania_en)

<sup>31</sup> Csontá and Marin, *Discrimination of Roma Communities*.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Powell Doherty, A. Telionis, Daniel Müller-Demary, Alexandra Hosszu, Ana Duminica, Andrea Bertke, Bryan Lewis, and Stephen Eubank, "A Survey of Quality of Life Indicators in the Romanian Roma Population Following the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion,'" *National Library of Medicine* 6 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.12688/fl000research.12546.3>.

the rural region, which is experienced (in varying degrees) by both Roma and non-Roma people alike. When asked, many Oltenian Roma women will say that they consider the insufficient healthcare to be a main migration push factor, indicating that local authorities might be able to start stemming migration rates by improving healthcare services in the area, and in rural Romania, in general.<sup>34</sup>

### *Migration*

Romania ranks fifth on the list of countries with the largest emigrant populations.<sup>35</sup> Romanian Roma people, like all Romanians, have EU citizenship and can migrate freely. Despite sensationalized depictions of human trafficking, such as the movie *Taken* [Pierre Morel, 2008] most instances of human trafficking begin with an individual's intentional decision to migrate. So, why do the Roma people choose to migrate? According to Costea, migration is an indicator of social and economic instability *and* human trafficking.<sup>36</sup> This instability summarizes several reasons why people choose to migrate, often called push and pull factors. The main push factors can be found in the other “pillars” of this section, such as poverty in the Romanian countryside, the lack of quality healthcare, the amount of organized crime in the country, and discrimination faced when looking for work. Pull factors for Romanian Roma

---

<sup>34</sup> Juan Gamella, Leonardo Piasere, Yaron Matras and Livia Otal, *Roma Women in Migration: Perceptions, Participation and Emerging Opportunities*, Plenary Discussion (University of Manchester: MigRom, September 2016): 9. <http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Roma-women-in-migration.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Corina Costea, “The Evolution of Romanian Law and Mechanism in the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Being. A Focus on the Situation of Women,” *Deportate Esuli Profughe* 45, (2021): 85. [https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n45/07\\_Costea.pdf](https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n45/07_Costea.pdf)

migration have to do with perceived opportunities for work in other EU countries, which often results in high-risk situations of migration. Globalization fuels this migration cycle through its creation of the “constant demand for cheap manual workers” in Western countries.<sup>37</sup>

Ethnic violence and discrimination have also led to many Roma leaving Romania after the transition. In a handful of cases, ethnic violence and harassment, particularly at the hand of law enforcement, have been cited as the impetus for Roma migration.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, data from a 2001 survey conducted in all Romanian villages shows that migration was more frequent in communities with a high proportion of ethnic or religious minorities.<sup>39</sup> If traffickers intentionally seek out victims “from regions with large-scale emigration flows”<sup>40</sup>, and Roma communities are more likely to fall into that category, then the Roma are more at risk of being trafficked.

Combined with a lack of language proficiency, education, and resources in the new country, poverty migration causes especially rural Roma to be highly vulnerable to exploitation when they reach their destination. When Roma with the aforementioned profile migrate from Romania to other EU countries, many of them, unable to get traditional work, make their living instead from “informal street work,” which may

---

<sup>37</sup> Toman Omar Mahmoud and Christoph Trebesch. “The economics of human trafficking and labour migration: Micro-evidence from Eastern Europe.” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 38, no.2 (June 2010): 175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2010.02.001>.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolau, “Rights of Roma in Romania,” 225.

<sup>39</sup> Tim Elrick and Oana Ciobanu, Migration Networks and Policy Impacts: Insights from Romanian-Spanish Migrations,” *Global Networks* 9, no.1 (2009): 106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1471-0374.2009.00244.X>.

<sup>40</sup> Mahmoud, “The economics of human trafficking,” 186.

include begging, selling small items, or playing instruments in the streets.<sup>41</sup> Oftentimes, even when the Roma migrate elsewhere in the EU for voluntary or consensual reasons, their vulnerability factors can make them more susceptible to coerced or forced labor.<sup>42</sup> For example, French NGO researchers found that the majority of trafficked Roma migrants in France had originally arrived voluntarily before they became victims of THB or exploitation.<sup>43</sup>

### *State Policy and Institutions*

Romania ranks high on the list of countries with corrupt governmental institutions, and does not prioritize the Roma people in its lawmaking. As outlined in the previous section, the independence of Romania allowed for a new era of institutionalized oppression and attitudes towards the Roma people. Romanian law nominally includes anti-discrimination legislation in regard to employment, education, and crime. However, these provisions are often ignored by public officials and local authorities. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) intervened in several cases where the government failed to enforce this legislation and prosecute violations. For example, the ECHR ruled that Romanian authorities, either by their active participation or their passive indifference, failed to protect the Roma in cases where “racially motivated violence” resulted in

---

<sup>41</sup> Kamelia Dimitrova, Slavyanka Ivanova, and Yva Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking Among Vulnerable Roma Communities: Results of Country Studies in 7 EU Member States* (Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy, July 2015): 5.  
[https://www.bienestaryproteccioninfantil.es/imagenes/tablaContenidos03SubSec/Center%20for%20the%20Study%20of%20Democracy%20Child%20Trafficking%20Among%20Vulnerable%20Roma%20%20Communities\\_28%20may%202015\(1\).pdf](https://www.bienestaryproteccioninfantil.es/imagenes/tablaContenidos03SubSec/Center%20for%20the%20Study%20of%20Democracy%20Child%20Trafficking%20Among%20Vulnerable%20Roma%20%20Communities_28%20may%202015(1).pdf); Friberg, “Poverty, Networks, Resistance,” 228-229.

<sup>42</sup> Arhin, “A Diaspora Approach,” 11.

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Powell Doherty et al., “A Survey of Quality of Life,” 3.



destroyed homes and injuries sustained by a minor of Roma descent.<sup>44</sup> A 2011 Amnesty International report found that the Romanian legal framework regarding housing is not adequate and disadvantages Roma.<sup>45</sup> A 2010 World Bank study found discrimination to be the explanation for one-third of the wage gap between Roma and non-Roma employees in Romania.<sup>46</sup>

### *Public Perception*

The poor quality of life that many Romanian Roma citizens experience parallels the way in which the non-Roma public perceives them. For example, a 2020 survey found that 7 out of 10 Romanians do not trust Roma citizens.<sup>47</sup> According to a 2014 Pew Research Center report 2, approximately half of non-Roma Romanian citizens do not want Roma people as their neighbors and 32% are not even willing to accept them as citizens.<sup>48</sup> When Romanians are asked to describe the Roma in their own words, 20% of respondents choose two words – 'thieves' and 'criminals'.<sup>49</sup> The Romanian media further exacerbates negative stereotypes of the Roma. A paper examining the role of mass media in fueling anti-Roma sentiment found that 5 popular media channels in Romania almost exclusively cover the Roma with a negative bias in the areas of education, employment, crime, et cetera.<sup>50</sup> The only positive coverage is about Roma performance in “televised

---

<sup>44</sup> Csontá and Marin, *Discrimination of Roma Communities*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *Romania 2020 Human Rights Report* (United State Department of State, 2021). <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>.

<sup>48</sup> Pew Research Center, *Views of Roma, Muslims, Jews* (2014).

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/05/12/chapter-4-views-of-roma-muslims-jews/>.

<sup>49</sup> Stefan Candea and Michael Bird, “Anti-Roma Views Rampant across All Romanian Political Parties,” EUobserver, 2014. <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/123907>.

<sup>50</sup> Coman and Andronescu, “Discrimination of the Roma,” 80.

shows or talent contests”.<sup>51</sup> Very rarely are Roma victimization and their precarious living conditions covered by the media. As a result, the general public remains unsympathetic to the Roma’s plight.

These negative opinions are not reserved for the media and the general public alone. Many ranking public officials are vocal about their anti-Roma sentiments on social media and, in the case of right-wing national parties, on their political platforms. On several occasions, the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) has fined<sup>52</sup> and issued administrative warnings<sup>53</sup> to Romania’s former conservative president, and current member of the European Parliament, Traian Băsescu, for making anti-Roma remarks. Even so, anti-Roma rhetoric exists on all sides of the political spectrum and at all levels of government. Parliament member Dan Tudorache of the Social Democratic Party made the following anti-Roma remark on Facebook: "It is minus 14 in Bucharest! Very cold!!! So cold that I actually saw a gypsy with his hands in his pockets."<sup>54</sup> In 2016, Robert Negoitsa, mayor of the sector 3 of Bucharest, expressing his satisfaction with the forced eviction of six Roma families, posted, “Now everything is clean and tidy in Vulturilor!... Now Vulturilor has gone back to righteous people,” on Facebook.<sup>55</sup>

When high-ranking public officials express anti-Roma sentiment so openly, it is not surprising that Roma-targeted social inclusion initiatives and poverty reduction

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>52</sup> European Network Against Racism, “Romanian President Sentenced: Hate Speech IS a crime!,” Press Statement, 2014. [https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2014-02-12\\_romania\\_president\\_roma-2.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2014-02-12_romania_president_roma-2.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Csona and Marin, *Discrimination of Roma Communities*.

<sup>54</sup> Candea and Bird, “Anti-Roma Views Rampant across All Romanian Political Parties.”

<sup>55</sup> Lancione, “The politics of embodied urban precarity,” 188.

campaigns are failing to have a positive impact on Roma communities. Furthermore, the opinions of political officials and the general public reflect the disinterest in addressing factors that make Roma communities, in particular, vulnerable to human trafficking and dangerous migration practices. The perception of the Romani people's poor socioeconomic status as deserved and endemic to their culture poses a great obstacle to anti-trafficking among minority groups.

### Chapter 3. Overview of Trafficking in Human Beings in Romania

#### Overview of THB in Romania

As previously stated in Chapter 1, human trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe began in the early 1990s because of changing migration regimes, deteriorating post-transition economies, and an increased demand for cheap migrant labor in higher-income countries.<sup>56</sup> Since then, Romania has been a dominant source country for human trafficking. In 2014, most European trafficking victims were Romanian citizens.<sup>57</sup> European Commission data shows that nearly three-quarters of trafficking victims identified in EU states come from Romania — more than 1,500 in the two-year period 2015-2016.<sup>58</sup> Romania's legal code began to incorporate anti-trafficking legislation, as shown in Table 1, shortly after they adopted the *2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*.

---

<sup>56</sup>Vall, "Assessing the Impact of the Post-Communist Transition", 127.

<sup>57</sup> Jing Hiah, "(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania: A Labor Perspective," *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, (2020): 1138, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8\\_102](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8_102).

<sup>58</sup> Ani Sandu, "Blind Justice for Romania's Trafficked Roma Children," *Balkan Insight* (blog), December 11, 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/12/11/blind-justice-for-romanias-trafficked-roma-children/>.

Table 1: Romanian Trafficking Legislation

Romanian Law	Definitions of Human Trafficking
Human Trafficking (Article 12 of Law no. 678/2001):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“the recruitment, Transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation of the latter.”</li> </ul>
Child Trafficking (Article 211 of the New Criminal Code):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child, for the purpose of exploitation. Child shall mean any person under 18 years of age.”</li> </ul>
Victim’s Consent (Article 210 par. 3 and Article 211 par. 3 of the New Criminal Code):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“the consent of an individual who is a victim of trafficking does not represent a justifying ground”.<sup>59</sup></li> </ul>

In their 2022 annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, the US State Department listed Romania as a Tier 2 country, stating that Romania, “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so.”<sup>60</sup> Top destinations for Romanian trafficking victims include Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Spain.<sup>61</sup> These are also the top 5 destination countries for emigrants.<sup>62</sup> This lends support to the theory that migration plays a driving role in human

<sup>59</sup> Mutiu 51 “the victim's consent to the recruitment, transport or accommodation by the deceit for exploitation does not exclude the criminal liability of the offender” in anno bib docs

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Embassy in Romania, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022. <https://ro.usembassy.gov/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

<sup>61</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> World Bank, “Romania: Systemic Country Diagnostic. Migration,” The World Bank Group, 2018, 7. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/210481530907970911/pdf/128064-SCD-PUBLIC-P160439-RomaniaSCDBackgroundNoteMigration.pdf>.

trafficking. Sweileh identifies “poverty, social injustice, disasters, substance abuse, family breakdown, and homelessness”<sup>63</sup> as universal push factors, often driven by globalization. This holds particularly true for Romanian trafficking victims migrating from one of “the poorest and most unequal societies in the European Union”<sup>64</sup> with the “highest rates of victimization among its emigrant population”<sup>65</sup>.

Sex trafficking, forced labor, and forced begging are the most common forms of exploitation in Romania. Labor trafficking victims typically work in domestic spheres and agriculture.<sup>66</sup> Internal trafficking is also becoming more prevalent in Romania, though this area is relatively under researched.<sup>67</sup> Although official reports present a decrease in victims over the past few years, NGOs suspect that this “reflect[s] a decline in the efforts of identifying victims”, rather than a decline in actual victims.<sup>68</sup> This assumption is highly plausible considering that the International Labor Organization reported a 300% increase in global trafficking victims from 2005-2016.<sup>69</sup> The World Bank also reports increases in emigration from Romania during this time, primarily from low-income areas.<sup>70</sup>

Like the identification of trafficking victims, convictions of human trafficking in Romania have also been lacking. In 2018, EUROPOL reported that the most suspected

---

<sup>63</sup> Waleed M. Sweileh, “Research Trends on Human Trafficking: A Bibliometric Analysis Using Scopus Debate,” *Globalization and Health* 14, no.1 (2018): 2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-018-0427-9>.

<sup>64</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania,” 1140.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 1133.

<sup>66</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania,” 1138.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 1139; Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Costea “The Evolution of Romanian Law,” 81.

<sup>69</sup> Sweileh, “Research Trends on Human Trafficking,” 2.

<sup>70</sup> World Bank, “Romania: Systemic Country Diagnostic. Migration,” 18.

and arrested perpetrators of human trafficking were from Romania, with Romanian citizens comprising 44% of prosecuted individuals in the European Union.<sup>71</sup> Of the trafficking cases brought in 2018, only 130 traffickers of the 695 new cases were convicted, 30% of whom “received suspended sentences”.<sup>72</sup>

Although Romania’s anti-trafficking apparatus lacks a systematic means of collecting victims’ background information,<sup>73</sup> experts have been able to compile a list of predictors and characteristics of [potential] human trafficking victims based on extensive research. On average, around half of victims are trafficked by someone they know.<sup>74</sup> Several sources cite growing up in state care, on the street, or in foster homes as a commonality among victims, and therefore, a risk factor for human trafficking.<sup>75</sup> It is important to note here that Romani children are overrepresented in state care and among street children in both Romania and Europe as a whole.<sup>76</sup> In a statistical analysis of human trafficking cases in Europe, scholars explicitly found the “merit of being Roma” to be a risk factor for labor trafficking.<sup>77</sup> From 2011 to 2016, most reported victims were women, from rural areas,

---

<sup>71</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania,” 1138.

<sup>74</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 22.

<sup>75</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 19; U.S. Embassy in Romania, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report*; Europarat, *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*, Human Rights Writings (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publications, 2012): 112. <https://rm.coe.int/the-human-rights-of-roma-and-travellers-in-europe/168079b434>.

<sup>76</sup> Kevin Byrne, “Romani children in state care and others abuses of the fundamental right to a safe, happy, and healthy childhood,” (European Roma Rights Centre, December 1, 2021), <http://www.errc.org/news/romani-children-in-state-care-and-other-abuses-of-the-fundamental-right-to-a-safe-happy-and-healthy-childhood#:~:text=In%20this%20%27long%20read%27%2C,a%20safe%2C%20happy%20and%20healthy> ; Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 50-51.

<sup>77</sup> Ella Cockbain, Kate Bowers, and Galina Dimitrova, “Human Trafficking for Labour Exploitation: The Results of a Two-Phase Systematic Review Mapping the European Evidence Base and Synthesising Key Scientific Research Evidence,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (2018): 336. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9321-3>.

and less than 30% had completed secondary school, making low education levels a trend among Romanian trafficking victims as well.<sup>78</sup>

It should be noted that these statistics only account for *identified* victims. While most registered cases involve sex trafficking, some experts in the anti-trafficking field note an underrepresentation of labor trafficking cases, including forced begging and forced pickpocketing.<sup>79</sup> Many trafficking victims, especially those in forced labor and forced begging, are overlooked and insufficiently identified due to the priority given to sex trafficking. Labor trafficking and forced begging are also less likely to be considered actual instances of trafficking and are more likely to be “seen mainly as a labour matter, a civil dispute”.<sup>80</sup> Prosecution rates reflect this reality. In 2018, only sex trafficking cases were prosecuted in Romania.<sup>81</sup> In addition to this general lack of interest in this form of trafficking, labor victims are also less likely to receive free legal aid and are, therefore, less likely to report exploitation or participate in litigation.<sup>82</sup>

### The Trafficking in Human Beings of Roma People

Romani people are drastically overrepresented among trafficking statistics in Romania. Despite making up less than 9% of the population, they presumably account for 50% of all Romanian trafficking victims.<sup>83</sup> Many aspects of the Romanian social system

---

<sup>78</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 17-18.

<sup>79</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania,” 1134.

<sup>80</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>82</sup> U.S. Embassy in Romania, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report*.

<sup>83</sup> Europarat, *Human Rights of Roma*, 112; Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 11.



have failed the Roma. Rather than working to eliminate vulnerability factors, the government remains negligent, and Romani communities still struggle to find access to schools, health services, employment services and many social services in general.<sup>84</sup> It should be noted that many of these vulnerability factors disproportionately affect Romani children and youth.<sup>85</sup> The 2022 TIP report does not explicitly include Romania's Roma population on the list of vulnerable populations, which specifically mentions asylum seekers, migrants, kids in state care, and commercial sex workers. However, they do mention ethnic organized crime as some of the main perpetrators and that Romani children are susceptible to sex trafficking and forced begging. An ERRC report on the Roma population in Serbia outlines many other conditions of HT vulnerability, such as social exclusion when it comes to education and places of work, and domestic violence, which mostly affects women and children.<sup>86</sup> These are more reasons as to why there is a larger population of Roma participating in nontraditional work such as begging, or in the case of children, forced begging.

Tomsa describes the “exclusion cycle” as a generator of human trafficking vulnerability. This cycle includes a lack of socioeconomic stability within the familial unit, a lack of quality education, and “prejudices and stereotypes regarding women and other disadvantaged groups”.<sup>87</sup> When these factors are cross-referenced with Romani experiences in Romania, depicted in Chapter 1, it becomes clear that Roma communities are disproportionately at risk of being trafficked.

---

<sup>84</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> Europarat, *Human Rights of Roma*, 112.

<sup>86</sup> Poucki and Bryan, “Vulnerability to Human Trafficking,” 156.

<sup>87</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 11.

Roma children are at higher risk for THB and forced labor, especially in the form of forced begging and forced pickpocketing, in which children are coerced into begging for money by a trafficker, and the trafficker profits off of their earnings. Roma advocates and human trafficking experts agree that victims of this form of exploitation are disproportionately Roma children.<sup>88</sup> Traffickers, often of higher economic status than the families of the trafficking victims, deceive the victims' families, lured by the financial success of the traffickers, into thinking that their children will be used for mild work and chores.<sup>89</sup> The families are typically never compensated.

It is also generally known that a large proportion of children who are forced into this kind of work on the streets of Western Europe are indeed Romanian Roma, suggesting that they were either trafficked or migrated with their families before being forced into labor.<sup>90</sup> Expert assessments show that 90% of the victims of THB for forced begging and forced pickpocketing in Europe are Roma.<sup>91</sup> For example, in Bulgaria, social service workers and THB experts have observed that most victims in child trafficking cases related to forced begging/pickpocketing have ethnic origins in a Roma subgroup, which could also be the case in Romanian cases. In terms of most prominent forms of exploitation in Romania, forced begging is third, after sexual exploitation and general

---

<sup>88</sup> Dimitrova, Ivanova and Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking among Vulnerable Roma*, " 1,

<sup>89</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists on the Issue of Trafficking in Human Beings in South-Eastern Europe*, (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2006), 11.  
<https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/Isidocs/295%20OSCE%20Roma%20Trafficking%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> Vacaretu, "Trafficking of Children in Romani Communities," 51.

<sup>91</sup> Alexandru, M, "Forced Begging, A Form of Trafficking in Romania," *5th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM 2018* 18 (2018): 255, <https://doi.org/10.5593/sgemsocial2018/3.3/S12.034>.

forced labor, with 9% of all victims of forced labor being those of forced begging. If most instances of child trafficking below are street children who have been forced into pickpocketing/begging, it can be assumed that at least some, if not more, are of Roma origin based on the information given above.

Table 2: Snapshot of Documented Instances of Romanian Roma Trafficking

<b>SNAPSHOT OF DOCUMENTED INSTANCES OF ROMANIAN ROMA TRAFFICKING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A case from 2003-2004 found that a group of Romanian children were trafficked into Calarasi, Italy for forced begging.<sup>92</sup></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arhin cites 4 separate cases of forced begging in Romania and Western Europe. In one case, the victim was definitely of Roma origin; in the others, the children were either homeless or from “challenging backgrounds”.<sup>93</sup></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five Romanian Roma labor trafficking victims were found in the Czech Republic between 2008 and 2009.<sup>94</sup></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2013 a group of adult, disabled Romanian Roma were recruited from poor families and were forced to beg in Italy. They earned 60,000 euros per month for the traffickers.<sup>95</sup></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between 2010 and 2012, there were 22 Romanian boy victims of sex trafficking, all of whom were not referred for assistance.<sup>96</sup></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From 2011 to 2013, Romanian officials registered 13 child victims of pickpocketing/forced petty crime.<sup>97</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>92</sup> Dimitrova, Ivanova and Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking among Vulnerable Roma*, 7.

<sup>93</sup> Arhin, “A Diaspora Approach,” 87-91.

<sup>94</sup> *Trafficking in Human Beings and Romani Women*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Dimitrova, Ivanova and Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking among Vulnerable Roma*, 6-7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

Perhaps the most known instance of trafficking of Romanian Roma is the 2010 case in Tandarei, Romania. For 9 years, over 180 Roma children were trafficked to the UK for forced begging and labor exploitation.<sup>98</sup> Traffickers preyed on poor, rural families and promised them money in exchange for their children. Each child was sold for 20,000 euros, and most families were never compensated. Although the media made sure to highlight that all traffickers were of Roma ethnicity, government officials and law enforcement also aided in the operations of this trafficking ring.

Court documents reveal that local authorities had prior knowledge of the trafficking network, did not report it, and even issued counterfeit travel documents to victims.<sup>99</sup> On multiple occasions, the leader of the trafficking ring, Titi, had contact with local police, compensated them for legal help, and was notified “if there was trouble ahead”.<sup>100</sup> Not only were all the traffickers acquitted, which suggests the inadequacy and corruption of Romanian court systems, but none of the victims have been referred to, or have participated in, social reintegration programs. This is not the first time that state actors have been implicated in human trafficking. The 2022 Trafficking in Persons report and Impreuna Agentia found strong evidence for both the complicity and direct involvement of Child Protective Services (CPS) employees and other staff members of government-run centers for children, who often come from Roma backgrounds, in child trafficking.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Gavra and Tudor, *Addressing the Problem*, 205.

<sup>99</sup> Dimitrova, Ivanova and Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking Among Vulnerable Roma Communities*, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Sandu, “Blind Justice for Romania’s Trafficked.”

<sup>101</sup> U.S. Embassy in Romania, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report*; Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 31.

Rather than question the circumstances that coerce impoverished parents to sell their children, the THB of Roma people, as well as begging more generally, has been perceived as a cultural aspect that is accepted and embedded in Romani communities. Media reports and social scripts routinely scrutinize Roma familial structures and emphasize the Roma ethnicity of certain traffickers, despite the fact that, “there have been no documented findings that show a disproportionate amount of persons engaged in trafficking to be of Roma ethnicity,”.<sup>102</sup> By painting the issue as a “Roma problem,” the resulting backlash, disinterest, and condemnation of Roma in these contexts has made it challenging to garner support for this disproportionately affected group. This has led to both passivity surrounding trafficking and an encroachment on Romani families. On the one hand, countries, such as Italy, have begun “condoning of begging with children as a ‘Roma cultural practice’,”<sup>103</sup> and have taken little action to address the root causes of begging. On the other hand, stereotyping all instances of Roma children living or traveling with extended family members as child trafficking has resulted in the removal of Roma children from their families and their placement in state care, increasing their vulnerability further.

Experts stress that, “there are no specific culturally ingrained practices that make Roma vulnerable to trafficking,”.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, research on human trafficking and diaspora networks suggests that human traffickers from various ethnic backgrounds turn to their own diaspora communities when looking for people to traffic.<sup>105</sup> Trust plays a

---

<sup>102</sup> ODIHR, *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists*, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Gamella et al., *Roma Women in Migration*, 3.

<sup>104</sup> Dimitrova, Ivanova and Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking Among Vulnerable Roma*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Arhin, “A Diaspora Approach to Understanding Human Trafficking,” 82.

crucial role in human trafficking— distrust of the police and trust among diaspora communities. Due to this trust, diaspora communities have a tendency to turn to people from their own national or ethnic background during the migration process and job-hunting abroad.<sup>106</sup> This “co-ethnic identification process”<sup>107</sup> explains why most traffickers are known to their victims and why they are typically of the same ethnic group, in both the case of the Romanian Roma *and* other diaspora networks.

Rather than inherent cultural behaviors, societal marginalization is the best explanation for cooperation with traffickers and ethnic ties among trafficking networks. According to Arhin, societal marginalization operates in the context of human trafficking in the two following ways: 1) marginalized groups who have a harder time accessing jobs in the global economy can come to view trafficking rings as the most viable source of income available to them; and 2) if traffickers are aware of the corruption and prejudice against their own ethnic group perpetrated by law enforcement, they are inclined to believe that their community will not turn them over to police.<sup>108</sup> Arhin also claims that statelessness and human trafficking are correlated since stateless people receive no police protection and “lack access to systems of justice” as a result of their status.<sup>109</sup> Although Romanian Roma are not *legally* stateless, their treatment at the hands of law enforcement and state officials subjects them to a similar predicament.

Human trafficking also frequently discriminates based on geography. This is, as there are large populations of impoverished peoples all over the world, a reason why this

---

<sup>106</sup> Arhin, “A Diaspora Approach to Understanding Human Trafficking,” 95.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>109</sup> Arhin, “A Diaspora Approach,” 80.

information is applicable to not only the situations of THB of Roma people, but to many marginalized, rural communities suffering from varying degrees of labor precarity and THB. From 2011-2016, approximately 60% of Romanian victims were rural residents. In fact, the circumstances for exploitation of the Roma “did not differ qualitatively from practices involving non-Roma groups.” The same structural inequalities that the Roma experience, such as unemployment and hygiene infrastructure, similarly affect non-Roma in rural areas. For example, access to a quality education and educational achievement are extremely limited in rural Romanian communities.

The decline of manual, agricultural labor in post-socialist Romania explains this economic vulnerability, regardless of ethnicity, in rural communities. Although non-Roma do not encounter the same degree of discrimination or social exclusion, they are similarly disadvantaged in areas relating to health, education, and employment which are identified as primary vulnerability factors for human trafficking. This reality strengthens the labor market approach to human trafficking. Hiah lists “a great number of working poor, poor employment conditions, and an extensive informal labor market” as sources of labor market vulnerability in Romania.<sup>110</sup> The overlap of these socioeconomic disparities between rural and urban cities with the characteristics of trafficking victims is compelling evidence in support of the labor market approach.

Furthermore, an overemphasis on the ethnicity of trafficking victims and traffickers can do a disservice to our understanding of human trafficking. While acquiring accurate data on Roma victims can be useful for understanding the scope of the issue and

---

<sup>110</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation,” 1134.

for guaranteeing that victims have access to assistance, focusing exclusively on victim identification takes away from the range of structural inequalities that Roma and rural residents are subjected to long before they are trafficked. Moreover, associating the Roma people with human trafficking is harmful to anti-trafficking efforts and can also lead to criminalizing victims. In Tandarei, 20 of the 24 traffickers had received no education<sup>111</sup>, which likely limited their employment opportunities. If anti-trafficking is solely focused on prosecution and increased policing of Roma communities, then impoverished, uneducated Romanian citizens, regardless of ethnicity, will continue to exploit others or be exploited as a means of survival.

---

<sup>111</sup> Gavra and Tudor, *Addressing the Problem: Institutional Factors that Facilitate Human Trafficking and Potential Preventive Measures Through Communication*, (International Conference RCIC'15: Redefining Community in Intercultural Context, 2015), 207.  
<https://www.afahc.ro/ro/rcic/2015/rcic'15/PC/Gavra%20Tudor.pdf>.



## Chapter 4. *Pro-Roma* and *Anti-Trafficking* Measures in Romania

### The EU Response: Funds, Frameworks, and the Decade of Roma Inclusion

Using a human and labor rights approach, it becomes clear that combating the trafficking of Roma people is more closely linked to poverty mitigation and social inclusion than it is to prosecution and awareness campaigns. Therefore, when assessing anti-trafficking initiatives, it is useful to examine the ways in which the EU, the Romanian government, and NGOs try to alleviate human trafficking vulnerability factors by addressing poverty and marginalization. Shortly after Romania and other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries joined the European Union, efforts to confront and minimize the problems facing Roma populations entered the political agenda. This was partly motivated by Romani communities' new ability to migrate to Western European countries, an opportunity which many took advantage of. To the EU and the receiving countries of these Roma migrants, it became clear that social exclusion and marginalization of the Roma was a serious issue within both host and origin countries.

In 2005, the EU introduced the Decade of Roma Inclusion. This campaign was aimed at improving the lives of the Roma people in their home countries, specifically. However, experts are skeptical of how well the Decade's policies have materialized. For example, a survey conducted among the Romanian Roma population after the Decade concluded that it did not reach its target goal "in the areas of education, housing, employment, and health status of Roma in participating countries,"<sup>112</sup> including Romania.

---

<sup>112</sup> Doherty et al., "A Survey of Quality of Life," 13.

Perhaps the most pressing issue with the EU's response is that their strategies and funding have no mechanisms to ensure compliance on the state level and to monitor the allocation of resources. For example, between 2014 and 2020, Romania received 10 billion euros for regional development projects from the EU. Yet, there is no concrete evidence or progress to show that a required portion of this funding was spent on community-building and assistance programs for the Roma because the EU does not track how the money has been distributed.<sup>113</sup> Consequently, this lack of monitoring can lead to a misallocation of resources in Roma inclusion programs.

Other sources have found that remittances from family members abroad are benefitting Roma communities more than EU structural funds for Roma inclusion due to the “extremely limited use of available EU funding.”<sup>114</sup> This can encourage dangerous, informal migration routes and labor exploitation abroad as it provides the Roma population in Romania with more tangible benefits than those which the government provides. In turn, this encourages a lack of government response as the Romanian economy benefits from the influx of remittances. Among other concerns, child-rights expert Kevin Byrnes fears that Roma children in state care and child trafficking will go unnoticed since the EU Roma Strategy Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020-2030 lacks provisions pertaining to social welfare of children and child protection as thematic areas.<sup>115</sup> Although the Roma are free to migrate to other EU countries, countries like France and Denmark have made “efforts to end migration and

---

<sup>113</sup> Williams, “8 facts about Poverty.”

<sup>114</sup> Guy, “Why Roma Migrate.”

<sup>115</sup> Byrne, “Romani Children in State Care.”

expel Romanian and Bulgarian Romani EU citizens from its territory” through deportations, “mass evictions and forced repatriation.”<sup>116</sup> The exploitation and discrimination that the Roma face abroad insinuates a lack of migrant rights in destination countries. When Western countries force the Roma to return to their country of origin, they are susceptible to taking more dangerous migration routes if they choose to migrate again.

Echoing these critiques, Brüggemann and Friedman identify the four following shortcomings of the EU’s framework: “their insufficient approach to measurement and indicators, the absence of budgeting and provisions for making effective use of EU funds, and their little attention to issues of discrimination in general and the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women in particular.”<sup>117</sup> Despite its good intentions and financial resources, the EU has yet to cope with administrative failures and barriers to national-level implementation. The biggest success of the Decade of Roma Inclusion is “the institutionalization of policies targeting Roma inclusion”<sup>118</sup> on the international and national level, especially in education. However, this well-intended and deserved attention has not led to actual educational inclusion.<sup>119</sup> Even though Romanian schools deny the segregation of Roma children, a 2021 NET-KARD Project Report states that it prevails in 63% of the 77 schools surveyed.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Christian Brüggemann and Eben Friedman, “The Decade of Roma Inclusion: Origins, Actors, and Legacies,” *European Education* 49, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10564934.2017.1290422>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Csonta and Marin, *Discrimination of Roma Communities*.

Ultimately, the Decade has neither mitigated the inequalities between Roma and non-Roma nor addressed the resistance when policies are “implemented” on the local level. In regards to trafficking, specifically, the Council of Europe’s Thematic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion and the EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion in March 2011 are problematic and stigmatize the Roma by labeling early/forced marriages and begging as “Roma practices” linked to trafficking. Not only does this perpetuate the media’s incomplete portrayal of the issue, but it also ignores the role that educational and economic deprivation plays in early/forced marriages and begging.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, the Thematic Plan stressed the need to focus on bringing attention to the negative consequences of early or forced marriages, domestic violence, trafficking and forced begging.<sup>122</sup> This approach only addresses the tail-end of trafficking and does not analyze the underlying causes that lead to these situations.

#### Romania’s Response: Neglect, Corruption, and Discrimination

Anti-trafficking policy in Romania developed in conjunction with the country’s accession into the European Union. The impetus for Romania to develop an anti-trafficking framework was directly related to their integration process into the EU. Their accession was, in part, contingent on their creation of anti-trafficking policy and legislation in accordance with the *acquis communautaire*.<sup>123</sup> This is not to say that the Romanian government does not have a genuine interest in combating human trafficking,

---

<sup>121</sup> Gamella et al., *Roma Women in Migration*, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Costea, “The Evolution of Romanian Law,” 82.

but like their participation in the Decade, their anti-trafficking response arose from a need to keep their status with, and secure funds from, the European Union. When it comes to protecting the Roma, discriminatory comments made by Romanian officials allude to a degree of superficiality regarding policies that target Roma inclusion and human trafficking.

#### *National Strategies and State Agencies: Roma Inclusion*

Romania's National Strategy for Roma Integration (2012-2020) prioritizes anti-discrimination, child protection, housing, health, employment, and education. It makes only one reference to trafficking under the Health sub-section. The Strategy states its intention to prevent human trafficking, mainly via advising Roma women on reproductive health and the dangers of early marriage.<sup>124</sup> However, the discussion on human trafficking ends there, and no elaboration is given as to how ending human trafficking and early marriage can be accomplished. It does not explicitly tie poverty to trafficking and implies that early marriages and domestic violence are the main causes for trafficking among the Roma population. The Strategy fails to recognize the root of the problem and paints trafficking as an issue that is an exceptional occurrence, if not endemic to Romani cultural practices.

As stated previously, the Romanian government does little to ensure that efforts for Roma inclusion receive proper funding. Although the Decade of Inclusion requires the active participation and independent contributions of participating states, Lunca states

---

<sup>124</sup> "Romania's National Roma Integration Strategy" (European Commission, 2012), 13.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-inclusion-eu-country/roma-inclusion-romania\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-inclusion-eu-country/roma-inclusion-romania_en).

that even as of 2015 Romanian politicians and bureaucrats have been reluctant to uphold their political commitment “to allocate funding and implement strategies” and have ignored the European Commission’s request for member states to divert more EU funding toward Roma integration projects.<sup>125</sup> In addition to the misappropriation of funds, the Council of Europe reported that ministries have failed to coordinate with each other and that local authorities, who are “reluctant to launch programs for the Roma”, are not held accountable for implementing such programs.<sup>126</sup>

Romania has three state agencies that target Roma discrimination. These include the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), the Impreuna Agency, and the Fundația Secretariatul Romilor (FSR). The CNCD receives plenty of cases regarding the discrimination of Romani communities, but it does not receive sufficient resources to be considered an effective organization.<sup>127</sup> The Impreuna Agency, which means “together” in Romanian, is designed to help employ Roma workers through job fairs and professional training programs.<sup>128</sup> The Fundația Secretariatul Romilor (FSR), formed in 2009, strives to bring awareness of Roma marginalization to non-Roma communities. Their work employs social inclusion projects to combat stereotyping and stigmatization. However, the Romania government has been reluctant to receive their initiatives, forcing the FSR to collaborate with NGOs instead.<sup>129</sup> Based on the current position of the Roma

---

<sup>125</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “Romania: Situation of Roma, Including Treatment by Society and Government Authorities; State Protection and Support Services Available to Roma (2011-2015),” *Refworld*, October 9, 2015. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/563c58104.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Williams, “8 Facts About Poverty.”

population and the evidence of government pushback on all Roma-related initiatives, it can be assumed that these state-sponsored organizations are meager attempts to include the Roma population in Romanian society. They need more funding and government support for their potential to be realized.

### *National Strategies and State Agencies: Anti-Trafficking*

On the national level, Romania's anti-trafficking work is outlined in the National Strategy Against Trafficking in Persons, also known as the National Action Plan. The five objectives for the 2018-2022 National Strategy include the following:

1. Strengthen prevention measures to “reduce vulnerability in social, economic and education level”<sup>130</sup>
2. Improve social reintegration through enhanced protection and assistance services
3. Increase investigation efforts regarding crimes of human trafficking
4. Improve cooperation in the anti-trafficking sphere both nationally and internationally
5. Increase the quality and spread of disseminated information on human trafficking

The National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP) is responsible for drafting, implementing, and evaluating the objectives of the National Action Plan, delegating responsibilities to different state actors in the field, and providing state funding to NGOs.<sup>131</sup> In accordance with EU standards, ANITP also serves as the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking in Romania.<sup>132</sup> They operate a 24-hour hotline,

---

<sup>130</sup> National Action Plan National Agency Against Trafficking Persons, *2018-2022 National Strategy Against Trafficking in Persons*, 2018, 24. <https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/en/SNITP%202018-2022.pdf>.

<sup>131</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 36.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 27.

produce annual reports on human trafficking, and run awareness campaigns (2023 TIP report).<sup>133</sup> In 2022, they led training programs on labor trafficking for labor inspectors and talks with “embassy representatives of main destination countries for Romanian trafficking victims” (2023 TIP).<sup>134</sup> Their budget, currently at an all-time high, is primarily spent on human resources and “does not include any cost for social assistance because NAATP is not responsible for ensuring protection and assistance for the victims”.<sup>135</sup>

The National Agency for Roma is one of several working groups involved in the drafting of the Strategy.<sup>136</sup> In the most recent Action Plan, Roma vulnerability is mentioned under a section outlining the responsibilities of the Ministry of Justice in regard to human trafficking. This section recognizes Roma vulnerability in the area of employment and assigns the National Employment Agency the responsibility of facilitating employment services and equal opportunity through information campaigns and training programs.<sup>137</sup> While this is a step in the right direction, a previous ANITP awareness campaign aimed at Roma communities, “Ask for help, don’t beg!”, did little to reduce Roma vulnerability beyond disseminating information pamphlets and a documentary on human trafficking to teachers and students.<sup>138</sup> As stated in Chapter 2, the employment and education rates among the Roma community, as well as the pushback

---

<sup>133</sup> Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Romania*, U.S. Department of State, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/romania/#:~:text=The%20government%20identified%20492%20victims,were%20girl%20sex%20trafficking%20victims>.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 27.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> National Agency Against Trafficking Persons, *2018-2022 National Strategy Against Trafficking in Persons*, 31.

<sup>138</sup> GRETA, *Evaluation Report Romania*, 43.



Roma-targeted initiatives receive on the local level, negatively influence the impact of such measures.

Among their 15 regional centers, ANITP suffers from “limited institutional capacity”<sup>139</sup>, a lack of collaboration on the local level, a “lack of interest from authorities”, and “internal barrier[s] to information collection.”<sup>140</sup> Despite the recent creation of the Monitoring Committee, no monitoring reports for the implementation of the Action Plan, which could provide insight into these structural failures, are provided online.<sup>141</sup> While ANITP has made considerable developments to their framework and prevention campaigns, these hindrances ultimately relegate Romania to a Tier 2, and top source, country.

#### *Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking and Access to State Care*

Romania's National Agency to Combat Trafficking in Persons excels in the field of research and statistics. However, in accordance with national law, ANITP is unable to collect ethnic data on the victims or perpetrators of criminal investigations and prosecutions.<sup>142</sup> This law prevents researchers from accessing this data, although it does not actually protect Roma or other ethnic groups, since the media frequently makes the ethnicity of perpetrators known to the public. Additionally, experts project low success rates for the implementation ANITP’s new National Mechanism for Identification and Referral of Victims of Trafficking of Persons.<sup>143</sup> Since Romania has no “systematic

---

<sup>139</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 28.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>142</sup> Vacaretu, “Trafficking of Children in Romani Communities,” 50.

<sup>143</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 26.

collection of ethnically segregated data”<sup>144</sup>, it is hard for researchers to correlate victim profiles with recommendations for local and regional policies. Furthermore, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) experts note that without a systematic method for tracking Roma victims, the vulnerability of the Roma population is not officially recognized, and since fewer Roma trafficking victims obtain material benefits and reintegration services compared to other victims, they therefore become at risk of re-victimization.<sup>145</sup>

### *Carceral Protectionism and THB of Roma*

Although legal action is Romania’s most robust avenue of anti-trafficking, even carceral responses are lagging. The current criminal code and anti-trafficking laws in Romania both have non-punishment clauses, and state that trafficked persons will not be punished for illegal border crossing or other illegal activities related to THB. These laws are not always upheld, and oftentimes charges are indeed levied against victims of THB, in order to force the victims to cooperate, if they do indeed want later immunity or any social services from the state.<sup>146</sup> Thus, in order for a victim to receive any kind of protection or social services, they must identify as a trafficked person. In Romania, this identification often occurs during criminal or law processes, or in the context of interactions with law enforcement or the state. Since the police have a central role in identifying trafficked persons, many victims go unidentified in an official way, as there is a general sense of mistrust and fear of the police due to years of institutional profiling and discrimination by the police against the Roma. Additionally, when trafficked Roma

---

<sup>144</sup> Roth and Toma, “The Plight of Romanian Social Protection,” 719.

<sup>145</sup> Vacaretu, “Trafficking of Children in Romani Communities,” 51.

<sup>146</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 24.

women who are also victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse attempt to gain protection from the state, they are often discriminated against, and do not receive the proper care that they need.<sup>147</sup>

This relationship between trafficking victims and law enforcement is described as carceral protectionism. Carceral protectionism refers to a situation in which assistance is contingent on the victim cooperating with law enforcement and actively participating in litigation.<sup>148</sup> Human trafficking survivors are often hesitant to participate in the legal process and to register as victims because they fear retaliation, distrust law enforcement and the legal system, and worry about being revictimized in court. As a result, they do not receive access to victim care and are often excluded from official trafficking statistics.

#### *Institutional Discrimination and Bias*

The close relationship between law enforcement and access to victim services can lead to an underrepresentation of Roma victims, and an overrepresentation of Roma perpetrators. The discrimination and anti-Roma bias exhibited by state actors, such as the police, healthcare workers, and other professionals, complicates access to victim services and inclusion efforts in general. In 2014 and 2015, several members of the Roma community were frequent victims of police harassment, brutality, and ethnic profiling.<sup>149</sup> Such high-profile discriminatory behavior exacerbates distrust of law enforcement among

---

<sup>147</sup> Roth and Toma, “The Plight of Romanian Social Protection,” 720.

<sup>148</sup> Jennifer Musto, “Collaboration Meets Carceral Protection,” In *Control and Protect: Collaboration, Carceral Protection, and Domestic Sex Trafficking in the United States*, (Oakland, California: California Scholarship Online, 2016), 27. <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520281950.003.0002>.

<sup>149</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “Romania: Situation of Roma.”

the Roma population and can make victims of trafficking or their families less willing to ask the police for help or to register themselves as trafficking victims.<sup>150</sup> It is also possible that ethnic profiling can lead to the misidentification of trafficking cases which further criminalizes Romani communities. If law enforcement assumes the Roma to be the main perpetrators of trafficking, then this bias can cause local authorities to increase their policing of Roma communities. On the other hand, the Tandarei case shows how local authorities are known to be complicit, and even involved, in the trafficking of human beings.

On average, public actors do not interact or sympathize well with the Romani population and trafficking victims. Trafficking victims are often blamed by society for their predicament.<sup>151</sup> When a trafficking victim happens to be of Romani descent, this mistreatment is often compounded by racial stigmatization. When their victim status is made known, trafficked Roma survivors routinely encounter stigmatization in hospitals from the staff as well as prejudice in schools, in which it is already difficult to enroll trafficked children, difficult to the point that social workers prefer to “not inform school principals and teachers about the trafficking experience of their beneficiary.”<sup>152</sup> In fact, programs designed to raise awareness and teach appropriate conduct with victims report that they struggle to change the attitudes of law enforcement, social workers, and medical professionals.<sup>153</sup> Institutional bias in child protection agencies is worsened by a lack of understanding of Romani familial structures and has generated “confused responses” and

---

<sup>150</sup> Kushen, *Breaking the Silence*, 60.

<sup>151</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 33.

<sup>152</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 62.

<sup>153</sup> Costea, “The Evolution of Romanian Law,” 94.

“active complicity with actions that were clearly not in the best interests of the children concerned,” such as removing children from their families and placing them in state care.<sup>154</sup> Such actions and discriminatory attitudes increase Roma vulnerability.

*NGOs: Roma Rights Groups and Romanian Anti-Trafficking Organizations*

Even though Romania has expanded the work of state-level, anti-trafficking agencies in recent years, they struggle to provide quality care and funding for victim services. Although national law guarantees psychological and medical care, compensation, and legal aid to trafficking victims, non-governmental organizations have routinely stepped in to mitigate this gap.<sup>155</sup> According to various estimations, NGOs currently provide the bulk of victim services and anti-trafficking initiatives and programs.<sup>156</sup> The state also regularly falls short in providing adequate support for Romani victims of THB, with the late 2010s seeing NGOs providing a significant amount of resources related to material benefits, and general reintegration resources for survivors.<sup>157</sup> On multiple occasions, the Romanian government has refused to reimburse NGOs<sup>158</sup>, claiming that the state has “no responsibility to ensure that NGOs gain adequate funding to provide their services”.<sup>159</sup>

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is the biggest and most active Roma-led Roma rights organization. They work toward their motto of challenging

---

<sup>154</sup> Byrne, “Romani children in state care.”

<sup>155</sup> Costea, “The Evolution of Romanian Law,” 92.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 93; U.S. Embassy in Romania, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report*.

<sup>157</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 30.

<sup>158</sup> Costea, “The Evolution of Romanian Law,” 93.

<sup>159</sup> Vall, “Assessing the Impact of the Post-Communist Transition and EU Integration on Anti-Human Trafficking Work in Romania”, 130.

discrimination by promoting equality through strategic litigation, advocacy & research, and news articles. Although they are not based in Romania, they have participated in research, legal cases, and news stories that address Romanian Roma populations, specifically. Their work is mainly focused on targeting structural inequalities. They also have extensive reports on the trafficking of Roma people, but there is no evidence that they collaborate with anti-trafficking NGOs beyond sharing their research. Although Romani NGOs have sparse correspondence with anti-trafficking groups, their work still aims to minimize vulnerability factors through educational support, school desegregation initiatives, and advocacy work for improving the living conditions in Romani communities.<sup>160</sup>

The Romanian anti-trafficking organizations *mentioned below* do not provide information on the demographics of victims helped, nor do their websites mention the vulnerability of the Roma population—or poverty and its role in trafficking of human beings for that matter. Most of their work is post-trafficking based, and their prevention component primarily takes the form of awareness campaigns. It is important for these organizations to recognize that human trafficking begins before a person is sold, deceived, or coerced into exploitative conditions. Changing this one aspect of their information campaigns could have a significant effect to help mitigate trafficking of Roma and other impoverished people. However, I recognize that awareness campaigns are cheaper than other prevention methods because they require fewer human resources. The lack of financial resources restricts the work of several NGOs. My intent is not to

---

<sup>160</sup> Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 43.

condemn the work of these organizations; rather, it is to offer a more critical lens through which we can dissect prevention campaigns.

According to their website, Reaching Out Romania has provided housing and psychological, medical and legal assistance to 470 HT victims, primarily Romanian women and girls.<sup>161</sup> They focus on long-term assistance in areas like employment and education. They are working on changing legislation, law enforcement training, and mentalities in order to improve the reintegration process for victims. Their work is primarily assistance-based and does not address prevention tactics beyond cross-border cooperation.

The Association for the Development of Alternative Practices for Education and Reintegration (ADPARE) focuses on the prevention and protection of trafficked individuals. According to their website, they develop assistance and reintegration programs for human trafficking victims and for “high risk” individuals; facilitate access to government and non-governmental services; refer victims to educational or vocational services; coordinate public awareness campaigns; and promote the rights of trafficking individuals.<sup>162</sup> Their work has the potential to have a further reach if they were to incorporate an approach that advocates for the rights of all migrant workers and minority groups, rather than only for the individuals who are legally identified as victims.

The four areas of activity of Eliberare, a self-described “social movement against human trafficking”<sup>163</sup>, are awareness education, prevention training, restoration

---

<sup>161</sup> <https://www.reachingout.ro/about-reaching-out-romania/>.

<sup>162</sup> <http://www.adpare.eu/en/>.

<sup>163</sup> <https://www.eliberare.com/en/>.

assistance, and lobbying events. Their campaign “Bani pe Bune” involves signs advertising for jobs that pay 100 euros per day with a link to recruitment website that redirects applicants to a website with a video and statistics on human trafficking.<sup>164</sup> The goal is to raise awareness about fake jobs abroad that look “too good to be true”—and are too good to be true. However, this campaign can come across as infantilizing and an off-color approach to prevention directed at people migrating for survival. It would be more productive to provide unemployed people with job opportunities and assistance with the application process. Their other campaign, Scoala Altfel, is a national program that provides schools with free educational resources to teach students about human trafficking.<sup>165</sup> In addition to the scrutiny surrounding the efficacy of awareness campaigns, this information is not likely to reach the children at risk of being trafficked—those who are not enrolled in school.

In addition to attempting to influence Romanian anti-trafficking policy, the EU has also tried to encourage greater cooperation between anti-trafficking organizations and the state by platforming and funding various NGOS. Terre Des Hommes, an international humanitarian organization headquartered in Switzerland, and AIDRom are two active organizations in Romania that receive support from the European Union. Terre Des Hommes prioritizes child rights advocacy work, community-building initiatives, and enhancing work readiness skills, “especially [those] of the ethnic minority Roma”.<sup>166</sup> By providing socio-professional, social, and migration services to disadvantaged groups,

---

<sup>164</sup> “Bani pe bune,” eLiberare, 2017. <https://www.eliberare.com/en/2017/04/bani-pe-bune/>.

<sup>165</sup> “Scoala Altfel,” eLiberare, 2017. <https://www.eliberare.com/en/2017/04/different-kind-school/>.

<sup>166</sup> Vall, “Assessing the Impact of the Post-Communist Transition and EU Integration on Anti-Human Trafficking Work in Romania”, 130.



AIDRom works to improve the socio-economic circumstances that facilitate poverty migration. Although these two groups are not officially anti-trafficking organizations, their commitment to upholding human and migrant rights through community-centered and poverty reduction programs plays a significant role in the prevention of human trafficking. However, the Romanian government has been slow to adopt the EU's practices when it comes to financing and supporting these NGOs. For reasons that will be discussed more in-depth in the following chapter, Romanian NGOs routinely struggle with inadequate and unreliable budgets and resources. Ultimately, anti-trafficking and humanitarian organizations have the potential to reduce trafficking among ethnic minorities, and the population at large, if they are adequately funded and supported on the state level.

Without an anti-trafficking label, these groups are avoiding exceptionalism and re-categorization by giving attention to issues beyond Roma people's victim status and by showing that trafficking is not unique given this context. In anti-trafficking discourse, "exceptionalism" is defined as the tendency to view trafficking as an atypical event that is not a part of the larger inequalities or vulnerabilities to which victims have been exposed. Hunt refers to "re-categorization" in anti-trafficking work as an overemphasis of a trafficking survivor's victim status, rather than the multitude of experiences they face such as housing insecurity<sup>167</sup>, and as a result, post-trafficking aid is not about housing justice or mitigating other problems in the lives of victims. Anti-trafficking does not need

---

<sup>167</sup> Sarah Hunt, "Representing Colonial Violence: trafficking, sex work, and the violence of law," *Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice* 37, no.2 (2016).  
<https://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantia/article/view/3042>

to focus solely on awareness campaigns or post-trafficking services in order to minimize the risks that can lead to labor and sexual exploitation. Rather than exceptionalism and re-categorization, the labor market and human rights approach is particularly salient when it comes to the Roma community because it positions trafficking within the context of systemic marginalization and poverty, rather than seeing trafficking as a symptom of Roma cultural practices.

## Chapter 5. Assessment and Recommendations

The Roma people in Romania have a long history of being ostracized by the government and their non-Roma neighbors. While Romanian legislation has nominally attempted to solve Roma exclusion and poverty, the Romani community at large remains disenfranchised and at risk of being trafficked. Not only are Roma people and Roma issues rejected by the general public, but the quality of Roma involvement and attention is also absent in anti-trafficking initiatives. Corruption and bias increase vulnerability, facilitate trafficking (in the case of Tandarei and children in Child Protective Services), and prevent anti-trafficking initiatives from addressing structural deficiencies or from providing adequate care to victims. On a structural level, a more vigorous approach to anti-trafficking necessitates improving laws regarding NGOs, increasing the allocation of funds, and fostering institutional cooperation. According to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the following holds true for all bodies engaged in anti-trafficking: there is no longevity of Roma-targeted initiatives “that do not include Roma in the design, implementation and long-term coordination.”<sup>168</sup>

In Table 2, I present recommendations to state actors, Romanian NGOs, and researchers of human trafficking and Roma-related topics. These recommendations pertain to Roma issues, more specifically, and anti-trafficking, more broadly.

---

<sup>168</sup> ODIHR, *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists*, 14.

Table 3: Recommendations for State Actors, NGOs, and Researchers

State Actors:	NGOs:	Researchers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commit to allocating funding and resources to Roma programs and initiatives (with monitoring mechanisms)</li> <li>• Collect ethnographic data on trafficking victims and socio-territorial disparities</li> <li>• Anti-poverty campaigns in rural areas</li> <li>• Anti-corruption and discrimination measures among government actors and state professionals</li> <li>• Access to state care (revise the policies that tie access and identification to carceral systems)</li> <li>• Adopt a more rigorous labor market approach to anti-trafficking and inclusion policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration and cooperation with Romani Rights and Advocacy Groups</li> <li>• Facilitate victim access to state services</li> <li>• Prevention campaigns targeting poverty (avoiding re-categorization and exceptionalism)</li> <li>• Community Outreach and Advocacy (Roma Representation and Participation)</li> <li>• Devote specific attention and resources to understanding the scope of Roma THB and vulnerability of Roma population</li> <li>• Incorporate a labor market approach to prevention campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct more research on the health of Roma and Rural Populations</li> <li>• Explore the intersections of poverty, minorities, and human trafficking in Romania</li> <li>• Attention to migration flows</li> <li>• Avoid bias and stereotypes</li> <li>• Research THB beyond sex trafficking (ie forced begging)</li> <li>• Assess the effectiveness of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Romania and Romania's National Strategy for Roma Integration</li> <li>• Participatory Research</li> <li>• Apply a labor market approach</li> </ul>

### *State Actors*

Experts identify “corruption, the weakness of state institutions, and lack of adequate social protection measures”<sup>169</sup> as the main hindrances to combating human

<sup>169</sup> Gavra and Tudor, *Addressing the Problem*, 205.

trafficking in Romania. Official human trafficking and Roma rights discourses should acknowledge how institutional discrimination and a lack of political will among state actors stunt any measures in place that nominally target Roma trafficking and Roma poverty. The previous chapter has illustrated the failure of state campaigns to properly allocate funding toward Roma and the consequences of that failure. The government needs to introduce a system of checks and balances to ensure that EU funds are properly allocated, that Roma programs are well-equipped to carry out their initiatives, and that individuals are held accountable on the local level for implementing inclusion policies.

In addition to properly funding Roma inclusion programs, it is imperative that the Romanian government revise policies that hinder NGOs from receiving government funding. Tomsa lists the logistical and legislative problems pertaining to the lack of funding for, and cooperation with, NGOs from the state and the private sector:

In order to access these funds, NGOs need to be accredited to provide services to victims of trafficking. However, it is impossible at the moment to get such a license because according to the Law on social assistance, licensing standards for this type of services do not exist. At the same time, it is not allowed for NGOs to provide services for which they are not accredited. Funding is project-oriented and only lasts for a couple of years, therefore being a barrier for sustainability.<sup>170</sup>

Additionally, organizations are required to pay sizable fees and submit tedious paperwork monthly to maintain their status.<sup>171</sup> In order for NGOs to provide quality services for prevention, protection, and reintegration, the Romanian government needs to work toward amending this legislation. However, the financial and administrative burden of providing quality assistance to victims should not fall so heavily on NGOs alone. The

---

<sup>170</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 36.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 35.

government should also devote more of the ANITP's budget toward victim protection services, in accordance with national law.

Bureaucrats and staff in public institutions should recognize that their poor treatment of Roma individuals interferes with their commitment to anti-trafficking. Public officials and politicians should work on becoming more culturally sensitive and overcoming their personal biases and prejudices toward the Roma population. Despite their awareness of the Roma's vulnerability status, the state has diverted little funding to Roma-led trafficking initiatives and is "reluctant to conduct research and target anti-trafficking projects and programmes towards a social group, such as Roma, they see as culturally distinct".<sup>172</sup> State actors must learn to view Roma-targeted and Roma-led programs as a necessary component of their anti-trafficking strategy.

Regarding child trafficking and protection, Byrne recommends that informal protection mechanisms in Roma communities need to be identified and cultivated with the help of professionals. Rather than placing Roma children in state care, and consequently increasing their vulnerability to trafficking, state actors should equip Roma families with knowledge to avoid child trafficking and resources to counter family poverty. In order to create an inclusive and anti-oppressive environment, Roth and Toma insist that social workers need strong ties to the Roma community, a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic problems that Roma are confronted with in the

---

<sup>172</sup> ODIHR, *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists*, 15.

health, education, and labor sectors, child/victim rights monitoring, and strong anti-discrimination policies.<sup>173</sup>

Institutional cooperation is repeatedly cited as lacking among anti-trafficking and Roma-targeted campaigns.<sup>174</sup> If local authorities continue to hold prejudice against their Roma constituents, official policy written at the top levels of government will have little tangible impact beyond appeasing the EU. Policies regarding the treatment of trafficking victims and of the Roma population need to be harmonized throughout all levels of government and implemented in the localities most affected by trafficking and social exclusion. Similar to implementing accountability mechanisms for Roma inclusion programs, Romania should also increase the work of ANITP's Monitoring Committee and make their results accessible to civil society.

Furthermore, programs designed to identify victims of human trafficking typically include markers of sex trafficking.<sup>175</sup> The state should expand the programs to identification of victims of forced labor and forced begging, which predominantly affect the Roma, including Roma children. Moreover, these training programs need to include public actors such as teachers, doctors, lawyers who are crucial to both prevention and protection—but are often excluded from such training.<sup>176</sup> Current training programs, in accordance with the criminal justice approach to human trafficking, focus primarily on law enforcement. Yet, a human rights approach to anti-trafficking does not necessarily

---

<sup>173</sup> Roth and Toma, “The Plight of Romanian Social Protection,” 729.

<sup>174</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 35; Kushen et al., *Breaking the Silence*, 42; Byrne, “Romani children in state care”.

<sup>175</sup> Tomsa, Hosszu and Duminica, *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania*, 32.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 32, 34.

denote a complete upheaval of police involvement. If the state is truly interested in targeting trafficking within the Roma community, they need to acknowledge that less ethnic profiling and an improved relationship between law enforcement and Roma communities will encourage more Roma victims come forward. However, cultivating this trust will take time. A more immediate solution would be to offer services outside of legal processes in order to increase the number of victims helped.

As stated before, the law prohibiting the collection of ethnographic data on trafficking victims hinders efforts by the state, NGOs, and researchers to understand and respond to the trafficking of Romani people. But a simple solution exists: there is an exception clause to this law, which should be expanded to explicitly allow for the collection of ethnographic data on trafficking victims. The lack of ethnic data collection is also present in areas outside of human trafficking. While conducting research on Roma marginalization in local communities, Vincze encountered difficulties with accessing official ethnic data on socio-territorial disparities and were only able to obtain informal estimates. They cite three reasons for this. The lack of ethnic data suggests that 1) Romania does not want other countries to know how it treats marginalized groups; 2) politicians are reluctant to incorporate this data into structural development programs; and 3) the Romanian government is largely uninterested in addressing Roma poverty.<sup>177</sup> Regardless of the reason or combination of reasons, in effect the prohibition on collecting ethnic data harms ethnic minority communities.

---

<sup>177</sup> Eniko Vincze, "Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization: Experiences from Romania," In *Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Contexts: Hungary, Romania, Serbia*, 74, eds. Julia Szalai and Violetta Zentai, (Hungary: Central European University, 2014), 74.



Authorities argue that this lack of ethnic data collection avoids discrimination, yet they also claim that Roma residential segregation occurs naturally and that ethnic Roma do not deserve the social welfare they receive.<sup>178</sup> Romania must discard the idea that while impoverished *non-Roma* are simply losers of globalization and victims of economic restructuring, the *Roma* “deserve to live in poverty”. These discriminatory attitudes produce a lack of data that prevents policy-makers from making informed decisions to address these disparities. This is why Roma representation is so important. Roma representatives must share their community’s needs and experiences with public officials, and authorities must take this information into account when reporting data and formulating policy. Ultimately, the Romanian government needs to recognize the importance of ethnic data collection for combating human trafficking and addressing Roma marginalization.

ANITP and other institutions involved in the implementation of the National Strategy should take measures to improve the accessibility of their work, such as publishing their monitoring reports, disclosing their qualifications for Identification of Victims and Referrals, and updating their websites more frequently. Providing more accurate information on trafficking victims and more transparent assessments of their work will allow actors in Romanian civil society and abroad to evaluate their work and offer recommendations to improve anti-trafficking measures. Hiah proposes that a step in this direction should include “mechanisms that structurally register the background

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

characteristics of victims”.<sup>179</sup> Access to background information on trafficking victims would help single out certain vulnerability factors among various demographics. If, for example, trafficked women from Oltenia are frequently single Roma mothers without access to running water and healthcare, then improving infrastructure in Oltenia’s Roma neighborhoods would be seen as a logical anti-trafficking measure. These recommendations encourage an approach to anti-trafficking that is founded on prevention, rather than prosecution, which is the tail-end of trafficking.

Moreover, this paper has shown how anti-poverty *is* anti-trafficking. Since the 1990s, poverty has been a steady trend in rural areas in Romania, affecting inhabitants regardless of ethnicity. Scholars like Hiah insist that, “socioeconomic inequalities lie at the heart of trafficking”.<sup>180</sup> The Romanian government has largely failed to connect Roma trafficking to any factors beyond Roma familial practices. They have been unsuccessful in targeting the deep structural inequalities that characterize Roma poverty. If done broadly and without bias, the implementation of more vigorous anti-poverty campaigns and social protection programs directed at unemployment, healthcare, and education in rural areas would reduce migration push factors and vulnerabilities to human trafficking. The Roma—and other impoverished Romanians—would obviously benefit from such policies. Therefore, Romania should adopt a labor market approach to anti-trafficking more thoroughly.

---

<sup>179</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania,” 1138.

<sup>180</sup> Hiah, “(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania,” 1140.

### *Non-Governmental Organizations*

The Romanian anti-trafficking NGOs examined in this thesis need to prioritize and reconceptualize their understanding of prevention. Prevention campaigns should reduce vulnerability factors rather than simply spread awareness. In order to do so, these organizations need to advocate for legislation that grants NGOs more funding and stabilizes their status. Such campaigns can be fostered through close collaboration with ANITP. Together, state and non-state actors can expand their work on prevention campaigns and data collection in Roma communities.<sup>181</sup> NGOs should also promote an inclusive space and guarantee that trafficking survivors will not be turned away or barred from receiving proper care due to their ethnicity. This includes explicitly challenging discrimination by the state when Roma victims are prevented from receiving proper care. In order to achieve this, however, NGO staff need to examine their personal biases and misperceptions of the Roma community.

This cultural understanding can be cultivated through community outreach. In addition to working with state agencies, Romanian anti-trafficking NGOs should establish correspondence with local Romani groups. Currently, very few Romani rights groups collaborate with anti-trafficking organizations. The ERRC and local Romani NGOs should partner with Romanian anti-trafficking groups and establish community outreach programs that do not simply seek to educate the Roma community on the dangers of trafficking, but rather listen to their experience and act as a mediator between them and the state. It is also important for anti-trafficking NGOs to have Roma personnel

---

<sup>181</sup> Vacaretu, "Trafficking of Children in Romani Communities," 53.

and Roma-led assessments. This partnership is crucial for anti-trafficking work to reach Romani communities.

According to an OSCE and ODIHR assessment, “Roma owned-projects” on both the state and NGO-level are poorly funded.<sup>182</sup> This has created a feedback loop in which Roma activists are hesitant to work with non-Roma anti-trafficking NGOS, in turn, fueling a “lack of institutional support” to 1) involve Roma activists, and 2) devise anti-trafficking programs geared toward the Roma population.<sup>183</sup> This lack of collaboration perpetuates a poor understanding of “[Roma]minority cultural practices” held by the non-Roma majority and compels them to see trafficking in an “ethno-cultural context”.<sup>184</sup> By furthering the narrative of trafficking in Romani communities as a “Roma problem”, non-Roma NGOs can obscure the role of poverty and socioeconomic factors in (anti-) trafficking.

Furthermore, awareness campaigns such as ANITP’s “Ask for help, don’t beg” and Eliberare’s “Bani pe Bani” reflect a “fundamental lack of understanding about the forced begging cycle” and of the remedies needed to end it.<sup>185</sup> Romanian anti-trafficking NGOs should work toward becoming more community-based and prevention-centered by adopting models similar to Terre Des Hommes and AIDRom. For these campaigns to be effective, NGOs need to elicit Roma involvement in order to better understand what drives begging and what discrimination ethnic minorities face when accessing social services and jobs.

---

<sup>182</sup> ODIHR, *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists*, 15.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Vacaretu, “Trafficking of Children in Romani Communities,” 52.

## *Researchers*

Only two papers have been published that research the public health of the Roma population. By expanding this research, more information will be available that shows how vulnerability is not tied exclusively to trafficking itself or victim status, but rather to a web of structural issues, such as poor public health and access to healthcare, that drive migration and marginalize the Roma population. In such a way, this research would avoid exceptionalism by demonstrating how trafficking is a microcosm of the structural inequalities that Romani people have long been subjected to.

Migration for begging is a unique and understudied form of economic mobility that functions within the informal labor market and legal migration routes, yet it often leads to exploitation. Therefore, more scholarly work on the realities of, and factors that shape, Roma migration flows is needed. A labor market approach to anti-trafficking research can confront the underrepresentation of labor trafficking in academic literature, with research on finance and economy comprising only 6.9% of published anti-trafficking literature.<sup>186</sup> A labor market approach to trafficking could satisfy the need for more general research in forced begging as well as on how it operates in the Romani context. Bridging this information gap could dispel myths about the ethno-cultural context of begging and bring awareness to the socioeconomic conditions that precipitate forced begging within Roma communities.

Most work on trafficking does not explicitly discuss or focus on the Roma as a vulnerable group. In fact, several studies on human trafficking in Romania mention the

---

<sup>186</sup> Sweileh, “Research Trends on Human Trafficking,” 10, 6.

Roma almost exclusively in the context of organized crime<sup>187</sup>, further stigmatizing them. In my research, I often had to work backwards and connect the dots of HT vulnerability to Romani experiences. For example, the sources stating that children in state care and people without educations are more susceptible to trafficking were separate from the sources confirming that the Roma constitute the majority of this demographic. There is a need to synthesize human trafficking risks and Romani realities in research. Moreover, an expansion in research on the intersections of ethnicity, race, and minorities and HT vulnerability in other contexts can reveal connections between systemic racism, institutionalized discrimination, and human trafficking, thereby advancing the human rights approach to human trafficking.

In an assessment done on Roma activists in South-Eastern Europe, several participants raised concerns about the “lack of data and methods to gather data on incidents of trafficking among Roma populations” and about “what type of approach to data collecting and research would provide practical information on the impact of trafficking on Roma groups”.<sup>188</sup> More generally, researchers should cautiously avoid stereotypes and misunderstandings of Roma organized crime, Roma livelihood, and Roma familial structures. Participatory research serves as a viable solution. Participatory research guarantees that Roma representatives have some agency “in the formulation and conduct of qualitative research”.<sup>189</sup> This approach not only reduces the presence of bias

---

<sup>187</sup> U.S. Embassy in Romania, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report*; Poucki and Bryan, “Vulnerability to Human Trafficking,” 156; ODIHR, *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists*, 14; Molnar, “The Imperative Need for Criminological Research,” 10.

<sup>188</sup> ODIHR, *Raising Awareness for Roma Activists*, 14.

<sup>189</sup> Dimitrova, Ivanova and Alexandrova, *Child Trafficking Among Vulnerable Roma*, ” 2.

and prejudice in research, but it also engages the Roma community in anti-trafficking discourse far more than awareness campaigns and can increase the retention and spread of crucial information regarding prevention and protection.

### *Conclusion*

The goal of this paper is to propose that human trafficking is not about being *Roma* specifically, rather it is being an ethnic minority more broadly. This intersection is crucial to anti-trafficking work because it shows how caring for the socioeconomic well-being of *all* members of society is just as, if not more, effective than conducting busts in organized trafficking rings. The human rights, labor market, and victim-participatory approaches were vital to both answering my research questions and reaching this conclusion. Other approaches would have looked at the structures of Roma organized crime or illegal border crossing or the prevalence of Roma women in sex work without offering any deeper analysis. Anti-trafficking means addressing deficiencies in the labor market that cause poverty, exploitation, and migration (*labor market approach*). Anti-trafficking means upholding the human rights of ethnicity minority groups *and* migrants (*human rights approach*). Anti-trafficking means including victims in the formulation of research methods and policy (*victim-participatory approach*).

By cross-referencing vulnerability factors for human trafficking and statistics of Romani livelihood, I have concluded that the Romanian Roma population *is* disproportionately affected by human trafficking. This heightened vulnerability is largely rooted in their migration patterns and practices, often driven by social stigmatization and

marginalization.<sup>190</sup> I have found a compelling explanation for this persistent marginalization and for the weak responses to Roma trafficking on the state, local, and non-governmental levels. Racial prejudice against Roma permeates all levels of society – the media, politicians, researchers, and other state actors – and the “3P’s” of anti-trafficking: protection, prevention, and prosecution/punishment.

Negative public opinion of the Roma creates indifference toward segregation in housing and education. Then, the media portrays these root problems in healthcare, education, and employment superficially, i.e. the Roma people are dirty, steal, and are unwilling to work. This leads to general apathy toward, or even approval of, the mass exodus of Romanian Roma to Western Europe for survival. Therefore, there is little interest in preventing trafficking vulnerability (*prevention*). State officials also have little incentive to adequately implement inclusion or protection programs. This leads to a misallocation of funds, an outright refusal to treat the Roma better, and discrimination within victim services and reintegration programs (*protection*). Finally, anti-Roma sentiment also causes an under-identification of Roma victims, wrongful apprehensions of Roma people, and unnecessary seizures of Roma children from their families (*punishment*).

This overview has addressed the numerous factors that must be considered when understanding THB of Romanian Roma people, including, but not limited to: an institutional history of oppression in Romania and Europe, vulnerabilities in the form of migration, poverty, and state oppression, the overall lackluster responses from state

---

<sup>190</sup> ODIHR, *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists*, 14.



actors, and the lack of Roma integration into research and policy formation. Due to the continuing deficit of assistance from the state in conjunction with the oppressive nature of existing state policies regarding the legal procedures concerning victims of THB, Romanian Romani are continually at risk for this form of exploitation, and those of all ages who have survived forced labor still do not receive the support that they need to remove themselves from situations of vulnerability and exploitation. Going forward, heavy investments in social services and anti-corruption legislation, accessibility to existing state and NGO care, and increased sensitive and participatory-based research are all necessary starting points at the very least if Romania, as well as other EU countries, are serious about helping Romanian Roma victims of THB. It is my hope that this research can be applied to the greater cause of ending human trafficking in Romania and other countries in the European Union and to more closely scrutinize the relationship between ethnic minorities and vulnerability to human trafficking.

## Bibliography

- Achim, Viorel. "The Communist Authorities' Refusal to Recognize the Roma as a National Minority. A Moment in the History of the Roma in Romania, 1948-1949." *Baltic Worlds* XI, no. 2-3 (September 2018): 51-57, <https://balticworlds.com/the-communist-authorities-refusal-to-recognize-the-roma-as-a-national-minority/>.
- Alexandru, Monica. "Forced Begging, A Form of Trafficking in Romania." *5th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM 2018* 18 (2018): 255–62. <https://doi.org/10.5593/sgemsocial2018/3.3/S12.034>.
- Arhin, Antonela. "A Diaspora Approach to Understanding Human Trafficking for Labor Exploitation." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 78–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2016.1136538>.
- Brüggemann, Christian, and Eben Friedman. "The Decade of Roma Inclusion: Origins, Actors, and Legacies." *European Education* 49, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10564934.2017.1290422>.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *Romania 2020 Human Rights Report*. United States Department of State, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>.
- Byrne, Kevin. "Romani Children in State Care and Other Abuses of the Fundamental Right to a Safe, Happy and Healthy Childhood." ERRC, December 1, 2021.

<http://www.errc.org/news/romani-children-in-state-care-and-other-abuses-of-the-fundamental-right-to-a-safe-happy-and-healthy-childhood>.

Candea, Stefan, and Michael Bird. “Anti-Roma Views Rampant across All Romanian Political Parties.” EUobserver, April 29, 2014. <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/123907>.

Cockbain, Ella, Kate Bowers, and Galina Dimitrova. “Human Trafficking for Labour Exploitation: The Results of a Two-Phase Systematic Review Mapping the European Evidence Base and Synthesising Key Scientific Research Evidence.” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (2018): 319–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9321-3>.

Coman, Claudiu, and Catalin Andronechescu. “Discrimination of the Roma Population in Romania.” *Revista Universitara de Sociologie* 2020, no.2 (January 1, 2020): 79–89. <http://www.sociologiecraiova.ro/revista/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/00.-FULL-VERSION-2.pdf>.

Costea, Corina. “The Evolution of Romanian Law and Mechanism in the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings. A Focus on the Situation of Women.” *Deportate Esuli Profughe* 45, (2021): 80-97. [https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n45/07\\_Costea.pdf](https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n45/07_Costea.pdf).

Csonta, Agnes, and Adrian Marin. *Discrimination of Roma Communities: Romania National Report*. Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, 2013.

[https://www.gitanos.org/upload/44/68/Discrimination\\_of\\_Roma\\_National\\_Report\\_ROMANIA\\_Net\\_Kard.pdf](https://www.gitanos.org/upload/44/68/Discrimination_of_Roma_National_Report_ROMANIA_Net_Kard.pdf).

Dimitrova, Kamelia, Slavyanka Ivanova, and Yva Alexandrova. *Child Trafficking Among Vulnerable Roma Communities: Results of Country Studies in 7 EU Member States*. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy, July 2015, 1-16.

[https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publications\\_library/files/22617.pdf](https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/22617.pdf).

Doherty, Rebecca Powell, Pyrros A. Telionis, Daniel Müller-Demary, Alexandra Hosszu, Ana Duminica, Andrea Bertke, Bryan Lewis, and Stephen Eubank. “A Survey of Quality of Life Indicators in the Romanian Roma Population Following the ‘Decade of Roma Inclusion.’” *National Library of Medicine* 6 (2017): 1–28.

<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.12546.3>.

Elrick, Tim, and Oana Ciobanu. “Migration Networks and Policy Impacts: Insights from Romanian–Spanish Migrations.” *Global Networks* 9, no. 1 (January 2009): 100–116.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1471-0374.2009.00244.X>.

Europarat, ed. *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*. Human Rights Writings.

Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publications, 2012, 1-254. <https://rm.coe.int/the-human-rights-of-roma-and-travellers-in-europe/168079b434>.

European Network Against Racism. “Romanian President Sentenced: Hate Speech IS a crime!” Press Statement. 2014. [https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2014-02-12\\_romania\\_president\\_roma-2.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2014-02-12_romania_president_roma-2.pdf).

European Roma Rights Centre. *Trafficking in Human Beings and Romani Women*. In Parallel Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for the Czech Republic. European Roma Rights Center, 2010.

[https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/errc\\_2\\_czechrepublic\\_cedaw47.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/errc_2_czechrepublic_cedaw47.pdf).

Friberg, Jon Horgen. “Poverty, Networks, Resistance: The Economic Sociology of Roma Migration for Begging.” *Migration Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 228–49.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mny038>.

Gamella, Juan, Leonardo Piasere, Yaron Matras, and Livia Otal. *Roma Women in Migration: Perceptions, Participation and Emerging Opportunities*. Plenary Discussion. University of Manchester: MigRom, September 2016.

<http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Roma-women-in-migration.pdf>.

Gavra, Diana Ramona, and Denia Andreea Tudor. *Addressing the Problem: Institutional Factors that Facilitate Human Trafficking and Potential Preventive Measures Through Communication*. International Conference RCIC’15: Redefining Community in Intercultural Context, May 2015, 205–210.

<https://www.afahc.ro/ro/rcic/2015/rcic'15/PC/Gavra%20Tudor.pdf>.

GRETA. *Evaluation Report Romania: Third Evaluation Round. Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings*. Council of Europe, 2021, 1-63.

<https://rm.coe.int/evaluation-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-council-of-europe-conve/1680a2b0f8>.

Guy, Will. "Why Roma Migrate." openDemocracy, June 30, 2015.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/why-roma-migrate/>.

Hajioff, S. "The Health of the Roma People: A Review of the Published Literature." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 54, no. 11 (November 1, 2000): 864–69.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.54.11.864>.

Hiah, Jing. "(Anti-)Trafficking for Labor Exploitation in Romania: A Labor Perspective." *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, edited by John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones, Springer International Publishing, 2020, 1133–49. *Springer Link*,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8\\_102](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8_102).

Hunt, Sarah. "Representing Colonial Violence: trafficking, sex work, and the violence of law." *Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice* 37, no.2 (July 2016): 25-39.

<https://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantia/article/view/3042>.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. "Romania: Situation of Roma, Including Treatment by Society and Government Authorities; State Protection and Support Services Available to Roma (2011-2015)." Refworld, October 9, 2015.

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/563c58104.html>.

Kushen, Robert, Lori Mann, Ostalinda Maya Ovalle, European Roma Rights Centre, and People in Need. *Breaking the Silence: Trafficking in Romani Communities: March 2011: A Report by the European Roma Rights Centre and People in Need*. Budapest: ERRC,

2011. [http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload\\_en/file/breaking-the-silence-19-march-2011.pdf](http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/breaking-the-silence-19-march-2011.pdf).

Lancione, Michele. "The Politics of Embodied Urban Precarity: Roma People and the Fight for Housing in Bucharest, Romania." *Geoforum* 101, (May 1, 2019): 182–91.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.09.008> .

Mahmoud, Toman Omar, and Christoph Trebesch. "The economics of human trafficking and labour migration: Micro-evidence from Eastern Europe." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 38, no.2 (June 2010): 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2010.02.001>.

Minorities at Risk Project. *Chronology for Roma in Romania*. Refworld, 2004.

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38cf17.html#:~:text=May%2014%2C%201990&text=Cloarba%20also%20claims%20hundreds%20of,is%20the%20worst%20in%20Europe>.

Molnar, Lorena. "The Imperative Need for Criminological Research on the European Roma: A Narrative Review." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, October 8, 2021, 1–16.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211048448>.

Musto, Jennifer. "Collaboration Meets Carceral Protection." In *Control and Protect:*

*Collaboration, Carceral Protection, and Domestic Sex Trafficking in the United States*, 27-47. Oakland, California: California Scholarship Online, July 2016.

<https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520281950.003.0002>.

Muti, Florentina Olimpia. "The European Policies on Fighting against Trafficking in Human Beings Challenges for Romania." *Journal of Eastern-European Criminal Law*, vol. 2016, no. 1, 2016, pp. 48-52. HeinOnline.

National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons. *2018-2022 National Strategy Against*

*Trafficking in Persons*. 2018, 1-33. <https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/en/SNITP%202018-2022.pdf>.

Nicolau, Ingrid. "Rights of Roma in Romania." *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 2017): 223–228.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/950fa6088ff65e8eb59634cce4761fba/1.pdf?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=136105>.

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). *Awareness Raising for Roma Activists on the Issue of Trafficking in Human Beings in South-Eastern Europe*.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, April 2006, 1-18.

<https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/lisidocs/295%20OSCE%20Roma%20Trafficking%20Report.pdf>

Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report*:

*Romania*. U.S. Department of State, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/romania/#:~:text=The%20government%20identified%20492%20victims,were%20girl%20sex%20trafficking%20victims>.

Pew Research Center. *Views of Roma, Jews, Muslims*. 2014.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/05/12/chapter-4-views-of-roma-muslims-jews/>.

Poucki, Sasha, and Nicole Bryan. "Vulnerability to Human Trafficking among the Roma Population in Serbia: The Role of Social Exclusion and Marginalization." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 2 (March 4, 2014): 145–62.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2014.885417>.



“Romania’s National Roma Integration Strategy: 2012-2020.” European Commission, 2012.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-inclusion-eu-country/roma-inclusion-romania\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-inclusion-eu-country/roma-inclusion-romania_en).

“Romania’s President Basescu fined for Roma comments.” BBC News, February 10, 2014.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26125135>.

Roth, Maria, and Stefánia Toma. “The Plight of Romanian Social Protection: Addressing the Vulnerabilities and Well-Being in Romanian Roma Families.” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 6 (August 18, 2014): 714–34.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2014.944813>.

Sandu, Ani. “Blind Justice for Romania’s Trafficked Roma Children.” *Balkan Insight* (blog),

December 11, 2019. <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/12/11/blind-justice-for-romanias-trafficked-roma-children/>.

Suchland, Jennifer. “Trafficking as Aberration: The Making of Globalization’s Victims.” In *Economies of Violence: Transnational Feminism, Postsocialism, and the Politics of Sex Trafficking*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015.

Sweileh, Waleed M. “Research Trends on Human Trafficking: A Bibliometric Analysis Using Scopus Database.” *Globalization and Health*, vol. 14, no. 1, November 2018, 1–12.

*BioMed Central*, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-018-0427-9>.

Tomsa, Raluca, Alexandra Hosszu, and Gelu Duminićă. *Trafficking of Human Beings in Romania: 497 Registered Victims and 130 Convicted Traffickers?*. Bucharest: Agentia Impreuna, October 2019, 1-46.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336847955\\_Trafficking\\_of\\_human\\_beings\\_in\\_Romania\\_497\\_registered\\_victims\\_and\\_130\\_convicted\\_traffickers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336847955_Trafficking_of_human_beings_in_Romania_497_registered_victims_and_130_convicted_traffickers).

U.S. Embassy in Romania. *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report*. 2022.

<https://ro.usembassy.gov/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

Vacaretu, Daniela. “Trafficking of Children in Romani Communities.” *Fiat Iustitia* 5, no. 2

(2011): 47–53. <https://oaji.net/articles/2015/2064-1432804857.pdf>.

Vall, Victoria. “Assessing the Impact of the Post-Communist Transition and EU Integration

on Anti-Human Trafficking Work in Romania.” In *Global Crisis, Local Voices*, edited by

Gabriele Piazza, Megan Jessie Asplin and Kajsa Hallberg, 125-135. London, United

Kingdom: IJOPEC Publication, 2019.

Vincze, Eniko. “Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization. Experiences from Romania” In

*Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Contexts: Hungary, Romania,*

*Serbia*, edited by Julia Szalai and Violetta Zentai, 68-96. Budapest, Hungary: Center for

Policy Studies, Central European University, 2014.

Williams, Collin. “8 Facts About Poverty Among the Roma Population in Romania.” The

Borgen Project, September 5, 2019. [https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-poverty-](https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-poverty-among-the-roma-population-in-romania/)

[among-the-roma-population-in-romania/](https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-poverty-among-the-roma-population-in-romania/).

World Bank, “Romania: Systemic Country Diagnostic. Migration.” The World Bank Group,

2018, 1-22.

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/210481530907970911/pdf/128064-SCD-PUBLIC-P160439-RomaniaSCDBackgroundNoteMigration.pdf>.