

# Sexual Exploitation of Minorities

Certain ethnic groups experience challenges linked directly to their status as a minority among the people with whom they live or survive. Their vulnerability exposes them to the tactics used by traffickers or sexual exploitation networks. One could argue this is the fault of their inability to adapt to 'modern' cultural norms, however, the isolation and the discrimination that they experience should be highlighted *a priori*.

This is the case of the people that North-Americans label Natives, and are in Canada, the natives or the Indians, the Métis and the Inuits. Colonization of these territories brought in cultures entirely unknown to the Natives, who were rapidly reduced to a discriminated minority due to new social criteria. Their way of life, social and family structures, and heritage were fought against, as a living incongruity within the criteria of the colonizers. This caused a spiral of exclusion, a loss of direction, poverty, violence, and abuse of all kinds.

In India, two groups are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, along with all forms of arbitrary violence. The Dalits, more commonly called the untouchables, have been greatly excluded from the two decades of growth that India has experienced. Nothing distinguishes them, *a priori*, from their fellow citizens, except for the stigmatization that they experience due to the persistence of the caste system, even though it has been officially abolished. The Dalit women are oppressed two-fold due, in one part, to their place in the caste, and in another part, to their position as women, in a country where gender equality is viewed as a utopian fantasy. Other minority groups, such as the Nats, are victim to internal trafficking within their community. The women are often condemned as being born uniquely for sexual exploitation. In this case as well, the complicity of authorities, the lack of economic opportunities, and the hostility towards the group, explain, perpetuate, and amplify their vulnerability.

A link exists among these American and Indian minorities with an ancient European Community, the Roma people, who coexist with societies that are often hostile towards them. For this nomadic people who do not conform to European societal structures, their vulnerability is almost innate. Amplified by social exclusion, the Roma are rejected and discriminated against, have a lack of education, experience high rates of poverty, and their nomadic nature makes social aid on their behalf very difficult. At the heart of these three minority groups, young girls are particularly exposed to risk. They are the prey of trafficking networks, which are sometimes their own families.

## Native women in Canada

According to the National Household Survey of 2011, in Canada roughly 1,400,700 people are Natives, consisting of 4.3% of the Canadian population. There are three Native

groups: the “First Nations,” which is the largest group (851,500 people), the Métis (452,000), the Inuits (60,000). The Natives represent a small part of the total population but they make up an important portion of the prostitution and sex trafficking sector. Furthermore, young girls from the First Nations group are overrepresented in prostitution with an exceptional rate of 14% to 60% depending on the region (Farley, 2004). The national statistics reveal that 75% of young Native minors have been victim to sexual abuse. Among them, 50% were younger than 14 at the time of abuse and almost 25% were younger than 7 (Sethi, 2007). In Vancouver, 60% of young victims are Natives (Urban Native Youth Association 2002). Children as young as 9 are exploited in Saskatoon and the average age to start in prostitution is 11-12 years. While the statistics on sexual exploitation are mainly concentrated in large urban areas such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, this does not mean the problem is less prevalent in small towns or rural Native communities.

The internal trafficking of young Native girls takes multiple forms. Firstly, the trafficking can be within the family, with some members forcing others to prostitute themselves. Sex trafficking can also be organized, notably by gangs, through escort services, massages, and dancers. Finally, some hidden forms of prostitution exist such as *trick pads*<sup>1</sup> exist in certain parts of Canada (Urban Native Youth Association, 2002). The displacement of young girls who are victims of sex trafficking is intrinsic to the process of trafficking and follows a triangular model among the different provinces of Canada. For example, in Saskatoon (near Edmonton and Calgary), young girls are displaced in triangles such as Saskatoon-Edmonton-Calgary-Saskatoon and Saskatoon-Regina-Winnipeg-Saskatoon. These triangles, often interconnected, are widespread across Canada and make the young girls invisible.

The vulnerability of Native women presents numerous commonalities with the exploitation of Roma women. 90% of the Native population is unemployed (*The Manitoba Journal of Child Welfare*, 2003). The Native women suffer from a lack of education, a chronic lack of opportunity to find work, the inability to provide housing for themselves and often have trouble providing themselves with food and clothing. However, the original cause of the vulnerability of Native women is different from that of Roma women. It was established during the period of colonization.

### ***The victims of colonization***

Colonization in Canada is a fundamental cause of the sexual exploitation of Native girls that exists today. Numerous aspects of colonization, such as capitalism, the institution of the christian church, and the army, affected family units, languages, cultures and identities, economic status, and the ability of Natives to be parents (Lynne, 1998). The colonial system, which allowed for the destruction of family and social structures, deteriorated the communities, which increased rates of violence, sexual abuse, consumption of illegal substances, and suicide (*The First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 2005). Traditionally in Native culture sex is considered sacred, “a gift from the creator” and a way to communicate. As a result of colonization, sexual abuse was introduced and Native communities now live with the “historical image of Native girls as sexually available.” The girls, who perpetually

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<sup>1</sup>An isolated lodging where young girls are held against their will and forced to prostitute themselves.

suffer from violence and sexual abuse have no other option than to leave their communities in search of a more secure existence.

The system of state boarding schools (an assimilation strategy created by the state and run by the church) had grave consequences for the First Nation culture in general and for women in particular. The system was created to eradicate the Native culture through a process of cultural genocide (Lynne, 1998). A belief in the superiority of the European culture is inherent to this policy of assimilation. As a program of assimilation, the boarding schools were a failure, however, they managed to cause irreparable damages to the First Nation culture. The children were stolen from their families; their communities were held captive in the schools. The care and education of the children was lost and replaced with an institutional, authoritarian system, which led to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (Lynne, 1998). The result of the schools on children and their parents, along with following generations, can be described as a collective trauma. This kind of trauma results from familial separation, the destruction of culture, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse (Lynne, 1998). In summary, the life of young Natives “is profoundly influenced by current and past abuses. Their current problems take root in the history of colonization, in the division of their territories and cultures, in the division of traditions and communities, and in the intergenerational repercussions of the boarding school system” (Canadian Parliament, 2003). Furthermore, this is accentuated by inappropriate cultural practices of the state, and the lack of an adequate support system exposes more youth to sex trafficking. Over multiple generations, the men and women have not learned how to have a “normal” sexuality or how to appropriately educate their children. Due to this fact, numerous “survivors” of the boarding school system sexually exploit their children (Farley, 2004).

### ***Racism within policy***

The systemic racism is present in various sections of society – media, justice, police, legislators, service providers, and Canadian society in general and is very important in understanding the problem of prostitution among Native women. Furthermore, the negative representation of Native people in the media, and stereotypes associated with their culture marginalizes them, in particular the youth. Young girls are seen as “easy and available” due to discriminatory and sexist policies that they have been victims of as well as their inferior status in society. A study of 45 interviews with young girls who have been sexually exploited, showed that young Native girls are not only exposed because they are vulnerable women and without housing, but also because they experience racism and social exclusion (Gorkoff, Runner, 2004). Indifference towards their suffering, which is the result of a “Not my place” syndrome, ignores the gravity of the phenomenon.

Numerous policies and legislation continue to marginalize these people, in particular the women. In the absence of clear policies on the matrimonial property right Native women are forced to leave their homes if they want to divorce. The lack of alternative lodging in the reserves or the rural communities brings these women to move to cities where they live in poverty and become very vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation. Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights legislation, which does not modify the Indian Act, prevents Native people from bringing complaints against the State. Such a clause perpetuates the oppression

of young Native girls and deprives them of the protection that other young Canadian girls have access to (*Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007*).

In some cases, when the authorities adopt a more dynamic approach and undertake investigations, they are often lacking an approach that is culturally relevant or adapted to effectively fight against prostitution. The lack of knowledge about the sexual exploitation of young Native girls, is a barrier to the initiatives in place to combat prostitution. Furthermore, due to stereotypes, sexual exploitation is still viewed as an act that Native people are willing to engage in.

### ***A vulnerability exploited by recruitment methods***

The main difference in the way that young Native girls are recruited into trafficking as compared with young non-Native girls, is the prevalence of Native family members engaging in sex trafficking. Young Native people can come from families already involved in the sex industry, and can be recruited either through their parents (who may be prostituted persons or procurers), or through close affiliates (*Pierce, 2009*). The socio-economic disparities in the living standards of Native families affect their children and make them very vulnerable to sexual predators and sex traffickers. Once they have entered into the sex industry, it becomes very difficult to identify and help a minor, as they are generally held in an enclosed space or their homes. Native women and children make up the majority of victims of domestic sex trafficking in Canada.

### ***Recruiting very young girls***

In cities like Winnipeg, Vancouver, and all cities with a high concentration of Native people, more and more often, traffickers are targeting schools to recruit prostituted persons. They attract girls from the age of 10 during recess or on their way to and from school by promising them gifts and a good life, or by making them dependent on drugs. These young girls are too young to understand sexual exploitation and to defend themselves. "Each spring an active recruitment of young Native girls of fourth and fifth grade takes place," explains Caroling Kraus, the principal of the Grandview elementary school. "We see groups of traffickers and recruiters try to enter school classrooms. Sometimes they enter and try and get the girls to go outside with them." The procurers isolate them, cut them off from their families, and then put them on the streets. More and more, the traffickers are using the internet to recruit young Native girls, particularly in rural communities by evoking the charm of big cities or through false promises of work.

Another method is to use young girls, from the age of 11, to recruit other young girls (*Urban Native Youth Association, 2002*). When young girls approach other young girls with promises of a better life, it seems very real and is very convincing. In the majority of cases, the young girls working as recruiters are being forced to do so, experiencing abuse and violence, and afraid to not provide a "necessary" service. This supports a hierarchical system where the recruiters are in charge of the profits of the girls they recruited. When the recruiters move up the hierarchy they also get to stop working on the streets.

### ***Exploiting the vulnerability of girls who have recently arrived in the city***

Procurers often create a trustful relationship with newcomers by helping them meet people or to help them find housing. Airports are a recruitment place in major cities such as Montreal, with Native girls, particularly Inuit from northern communities, being a big target. Traffickers often know someone in the community who informed the trafficker that the girl was leaving town. Upon arrival, girls are targeted at the airport, where traffickers attract the girls by providing them with housing or giving them access to the resources they need. Bars are also areas for recruitment by traffickers. Native girls who travel from their reserves to major cities go to bars to break their isolation and meet other Native people, particularly since community centers close early in Montreal. Traffickers frequent these places to make friends with girls by offering them a glass or other services. They then sexually exploit the girls. Very often, traffickers seduce girls by buying them expensive gifts or manipulating them emotionally. Therefore, it is not uncommon for young sexually exploited girls to describe their traffickers as their boyfriends. Because of their economic and emotional dependency, many girls refuse to consider themselves sexually exploited.

### **Women from marginalized groups in India**

The extreme sexual violence against women in India has recently attracted international public attention internationally, and aroused reactions from Indian civil society who are outraged and believe the authorities should strongly condemn these crimes. The media-relayed drama of December 2012, where a physiotherapy student of 23 years of age was raped for 45 minutes by six drunken men before having her dead body thrown out of a bus with tinted windows. This incident, is a symbol of violence against women in India and the announcement of her death 13 days later horrified the country.

#### ***Gender inequalities and inequities of caste/ethnic groups***

A study on male attitudes towards women in India by the *International Center for Research on Women -Asia Regional Office* in 2011 revealed that 1 out of 4 Indian men admit to having used sexual violence on his wife or another woman, and 1 out of 5 on a stable partner. Half of Indian men do not consider gender equality as a serious concept. 80% believe that looking after children is women's work and only 16% are engaged in housework (*Redress Information & Analysis*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014). After two decades of economic growth, India is still found to stagnate in 130th place (out of 147 countries) in 2014 regarding the gender inequality index calculated by the United Nations (UNDP India). Misogynistic prejudices that remain in men's mentalities is an illustration, an explanation and a consequence of this situation and is the reason why the country has hardly advanced.

A study by the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) 2007 estimates that 2.8 million people were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in India. The majority of them are women and girls forced into prostitution because of poverty, and in most cases are well under 18 years of age. The demand for younger virgins is increasing, which is partly fueled by the fear of HIV/AIDS. There are new destinations for these trafficked girls and these emerging trafficking networks are becoming more complex and sophisticated.

The 2014 U.S Department of State Report on Trafficking in Persons points out that 90% of human trafficking in India is internal. Those most vulnerable are women and children from

socially excluded groups such as "Dalits" (or Untouchables) or women from minority ethnic groups that the Indian government refers to as "Scheduled Tribes" (Tribes). The 1950 Constitution of the Indian state guarantees the right to equality in Articles 14 to 18. Another Act 1989 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (prevention of atrocities) (Prevention of crimes against castes and tribes) has complemented this guarantee of equal rights in making special provision to protect vulnerable groups from exclusion, violence and arbitrariness.

It is legitimate to ask why this system of exclusion and violence prevails when the country is armed with a flawless legislative arsenal to cope with this problem. The persisting traditional mentality, especially in rural areas, partly explains this phenomenon. Corruption is ingrained in the security authorities, which leads to very ambiguous efforts to enforce the law. They are even entitled to act with impunity thanks to an Armed Forces Special Powers Act (Act respecting the special powers of the armed forces) that was established in 1942. The text was originally part of the state of emergency declared by the British against the separatist insurgency. According to a United Nations study, in 17% of cases of violence (including rape), victims have faced police opposition when they tried to file a complaint. In 25% of these cases, it is the same community of women who were discouraged to report the crime. Finally, over 40% of women do not try to seek justice from the authorities for fear of retaliation from the abuser community and / or dishonor. In only 1% of cases, the abuser was charged (*Redress Information & Analysis*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

### ***Female Dalits (Untouchables)***

The word Dalit comes from Sanskrit and means "broken, oppressed, downtrodden, or oppressed". Dalit applies to members of the servile castes who are born with the stigma of being "Untouchable". They are considered unclean and polluting, and are therefore physically and socially excluded and isolated from the rest of society. Dalits represent a community of 170 million people in India, which is 17% of the population. Because of their identity, they regularly face discrimination and violence that impede the enjoyment of fundamental rights recognized by national and international laws and deprive them of dignity guaranteed to all Indians citizens. It is forbidden for them to eat with higher caste members or enter their homes, use village wells, enter the temples of the villages, wearing sandals or even hold an umbrella in the presence of members of the upper castes; they are excluded and sit alone in restaurants, can not ride a bike in the village, and must bury their dead in a separate field. They are often unfairly evicted by people of upper castes, and are found in the outskirts of villages, on land unfit for cultivation. Dalit women are the victims of the combination of discrimination against both their caste and against their sex, which has the consequence of abuse, violence and exploitation. According to a 2010 study, 21 Dalit women were raped and 13 Dalits (men and women) are murdered every week. The crimes against individuals of this caste are steadily increasing since 2000. In 2006, the conviction rate for crimes committed against Dalits was only 5.3% (*Legally India-Blog*, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

In 2013, the United Nations revealed that 62.4% of Dalit women admitted to having had at least one verbal aggression, 54.8% physical aggression, 46.8% sexual assault, 43% have experienced domestic violence and 23.2% rape (*UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women*, 2013). Recently, the press very regularly reported facts of extreme violence against Dalit women. In June 2015, a Dalit girl was severely beaten and threatened with death by

women from a higher caste because she had projected her shadow on a male relative when she was pumping water at the village well (*The Times of India*, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015). In October 2015, the police force tore the clothes off a Dalit couple and forced them to walk the streets, because they tried to lodge a complaint for a theft. In 2015 again, two Dalit sisters of 15 and 23 years of age were sentenced to undergo gang rape and to be paraded naked through a village council composed solely of men, as punishment because their brother had fled with a married woman of a higher caste. This case aroused such indignation at national and international levels that the Supreme Court finally recognized the need to protect these women.

According to NGOs that defend the rights of Dalits, since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to office in May 2014, violence against Dalits and other minorities has increased by 500%. His government has also cut funds for assistance programs for Dalits and women by 50% (*Salon*, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015). Dalit women are especially vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, because of their extreme poverty that leads to prostitution for survival. However, other factors arising from their poverty and exclusion perpetuate endemic prostitution suffered by Dalit women. The survival of the ritual of forced prostitution within the Devadasi system in this caste is one of these factors. The practice of forced marriages of young girls, who find themselves sexually exploited, divorced and sold to a dealer by their husbands is yet another factor. After being raped, divorced or abandoned, Dalit women are rejected, stigmatized, and have to turn to sex for survival. As the police and the justice authorities do not respond to their caste, women become easy prey to remove, to rape, and to sexually exploit.

#### ***When forced prostitution of women from ethnic minorities is a tradition***

Within these vulnerable groups living in India, the tradition of devoting the girls to prostitution continues from generation to generation. This practice has become the norm. Meanwhile, the rest of society hardly challenges this system that stigmatizes these groups as they are despised because of these rites considered immoral and vicious. About 16% of victims of sexual exploitation were prostituted because of traditional practices (Devadasi and Adivasi) (*International Journal for Equity in Health*, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008). 645 of these groups of Scheduled Tribes (Tribes) were identified in 35 Indian states. Adivasi is the generic term for their members who represent 8.6% of India's population, or 104 million people, according to government census office Census of India ([censusindia.gov.in](http://censusindia.gov.in)). Over 95% of them live in rural areas and 68% fail to reach high school (*Salon*, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015).

In some of these communities, it is considered that the girls have no other fate than to be prostituted person from puberty, as is with groups such as the Nats, the Bedias, the Faasi, the Banjar and Demmuris. Most of these ethnic groups were originally nomads whose business was to entertain the noble class. Over time, they have settled and prostitution of their wives became their main source of income. Victims are forced into traditional prostitution at a young age (9-13 years) by male family members (parents, siblings) who then assume the role of procurers. This economy based on prostitution in entire villages is considered to be partly the result of British colonization. In 1871, the Criminal Tribes Act classified the ethnic groups practising criminal activities. Nomads who practiced the arts were included in the list. As a result of repression and violence, these people have settled and have resorted to prostitution for survival, which then became a tradition.

Nat Purwa (Uttar Pradesh) is the village where this endemic practice of prostitution is the most publicized. This village is populated by the Nat community, but there are hundreds of other villages inhabited by other communities in the Adivasi Indian territory. Prostitution has been considered for 400 years as a tradition in this village of about 5000 inhabitants. Even today, over 70% of women are prostituted (*The Hindu*, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013). NGOs like Apne Aap Women Worldwide, are trying to change attitudes and to offer better opportunities to women and children. But they are regularly intimidated both by the villagers not wanting to lose their main source of income, by corrupt police who protect the interests of dealers, and by notable neighboring towns that are clients of these prostituted persons. Fatima Khatoon, Apne Aap Women activist Worldwide, was born in the Nat community in the state of Bihar. Forcibly married at a very young age, she says: "*When I tried to resist my traffickers and to go to the police to report these networks, the police came to my home, arrested my daughter, at 14 years of age, and kept her in a cell overnight. It was to intimidate me so that I would not resist and send a message to my community: do not oppose the traffickers, prostitution must continue in this community*" (Khatoon, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014). In Dommuri community, it is tradition that the eldest daughter financially helps her family through prostitution since puberty. Men pay between 3,000 and 8,000 INR (45-118 US\$/41 to 109 €) to be their first customer (*BMC International Health and Human Rights*, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006).

***Devadâsî, Yoginis: when the sexual exploitation of the most vulnerable people is considered sacred***

Sanskrit "deva" (god/goddess) and "Dasi" (servant/maid), the Devadasi system continues despite the ban imposed in 1988. It is to dedicate a daughter from a young age to a deity. By region, the deities which are devoted women vary, as well as the name of this rite: Devadasi, Yoginis, Mathamma. This form of sexual exploitation is prevalent in the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. A study in 2007 by *Anti-Slavery International* on the practice of ritual sexual slavery and forced religious "marriages" shows that 93% of Devadasi were from the Dalit caste and 7% are ethnic minorities (Adivasi) (*Anti-Slavery International*, 2007). In 2006, the *Women's National Commission* counted over 48,358 Devadasi women.

A Devadasi is violated for the first time after the consecration ceremony or at puberty, usually by a man who paid for this "privilege". After this, she is sexually exploited in the commercial areas adjacent to the temple or in prostitution neighborhoods in major cities until she is too old and is reduced to begging. Most are "married" between 4 and 8 years, initiated before the age of 12 years and become useless to their exploiters round the age of 30 (*Anti-Slavery International*, 2007). The status of Devadasi is a life sentence of family life deprivation, social stigma and discrimination, sexual exploitation during youth, and extreme poverty, especially in old age. This practice is, rightly, often likened to a human sacrifice to slavery that continues despite its prohibition. In 2014, the Indian Supreme Court, the association S.L. Foundation, sentenced a temple of South India (Karnataka) for operation of Devadasi. The Court found that, despite its illegality, this system mainly persisted in other remote rural areas; it has ordered the government and the *National Commission for Women* to take effective action to stop these practices. Chennawa, 65 and blind, survives on food pieces: "*I was forced to sleep with a man for the first time at 12 years old(...) I was happy to be with Yellama. I helped my mother and my siblings. But look at my fate now (...)My mother, a*



*Devadasi herself, devoted me to Yellama and left me in the streets to be beaten and raped. I want no more of this goddess, just let me die" (The Guardian, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011).* The goddess of fertility, Yellama, is at the heart of this rite that dates back over 2000 years. Formerly, the Devadasi role was to dance and sing at parties and weddings. The performance was originally supposed to be a sensual awakening but over the centuries, the role of Devadasi has come to mean "sexually available".

The Devadasi system is perpetuated by the long-standing complicity of political, socio-cultural realities as well as the considerable business interests. It is more than comfortable for a society dominated by their "superior" male to ensure interests the introduction of girls from disadvantaged groups to the sale of sexual services under the guise of sacred duty that continues in their society. Today, this system and the persistence of beliefs ensures virtually inexhaustible source of victims to those involved in the sex industry organized on a large scale in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Gujarat. The farm crisis and environmental disasters that push hundreds of thousands into these cities, who arrive to seek work without their wives and families. This therefore constitutes a consumer market for cheap prostitution. According to a 2001 study in Belgaum (Karnataka), 30% of the Devadasi women had migrated to Mumbai's red light districts and other major cities (*Padmavati, Dutta, 2001*). A survey of health services to these women revealed that 65% of them do not care about their health. The main problems they encounter are alcohol (87%), sexually transmitted infections (40%), gynecological problems resulting from induced abortions (35%) and physical abuse (25%). Only a few cases of HIV/AIDS were observed, and the infected patients were young women who stayed in the prostitution districts of Mumbai (*Anti-Slavery International, 2007*).

Devadasi's children are also doomed from birth to be discriminated against because their father has not recognized them. Of all Indian children, they are the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, both because of the status of their mother, but also because of their traditional role that is passed down from generation to generation. Obviously if families decide to make their daughters Devadasi it is primarily for economic survival. But in areas where this rite is still highly prevalent, deep belief in the Mother Goddess Yellama and her powers still exist. Dedicating a daughter to her worship is said to bring wealth, health and male heirs to the family over generations. In families where there is no son, dedicating a girl helps perpetuate the name as it will be given to her children. This girl will also take the role of a son by helping her parents economically, without contributing to a dowry. This also empowers women to commit rites at the funeral of their parents, which is a role that is otherwise exclusively for the eldest son. The Dalit group continues to devote their daughters to this ritual today, which make up 97% of their families. Their lack of education explains the acceptance of these beliefs. Families also know that society, which excludes their group, can offer no other survival and social elevations to their daughters.

### **People from the Roma community, victims of prostitution in Europe**

This ethnic minority is the most active in Europe, accounting for 10 to 12 million people spread across the European Union. A study of five countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia), concluded that the Roma community has the most trafficking victims (*ERRC, March 2011*). In Bulgaria, human trafficking is for sexual exploitation, forced

labor, illegal adoption and forced begging. People from the Roma community represent approximately 10% of the Bulgarian population and, according to many Bulgarian police officers, this community constitutes about 80% of those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. NGOs, for their part, believe rather that figure to 50% (*ERRC*, March 2011).

In the Czech Republic, they represent 3% of the total population and the authorities are reluctant to estimate the proportion of people from the Roma community among the victims of trafficking. However, according to Bulgarian official sources, in the border region with Germany, people from the Roma community represent over 70% of victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (*ERRC*, March 2011). In Hungary, according to information provided by two NGOs providing assistance to prostituted persons in the country of destination (Switzerland and the Netherlands), between 25% and 30% of beneficiaries are Hungarian women, 80% are from the Roma community. They represent a large portion of exploited people (*ERRC*, March 2011). In a research published in the last few months, the European Network on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Health Promotion Among Migrant Sex Workers (*TAMPEP*) reported a large number of people from the Roma community among the prostituted persons in Romania.

In Slovakia, 9% of the Slovak population comes from the Roma community. Representatives of NGOs estimate that the percentage of people from the Roma community among people victims of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation would be 60 to 90 % of known cases (*OSCE*, 2010). The issue of ethnic minorities in terms of effects of prostitution is very difficult to treat because it generates special treatment. Thus, the information provided by NGOs that offer assistance to prostituted persons in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland reveals that prostituted persons from the Roma community are treated differently from other prostituted persons from the European Union. According to the NGO Breaking Chains Network working in the area of Antwerp region of Belgium, prostituted persons from the Roma community have, more often than other non-Roma prostitutes, been subject to abuse by customers as well as by traffickers (*ERRC*, March 2011).

### **Why are the people from the Roma community vulnerable?**

In the 2010 report on trafficking in human beings, members of the Roma community are listed as a vulnerable minority in 10 of the 28 member countries of the European Union (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia, United Kingdom). In the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia, women and girls from the Roma community are even considered to be highly vulnerable to internal and external trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation (*U.S. Department of State*, June 2010). Anyone can be a victim of trafficking, regardless of ethnic origin or social status. However, a number of factors make people more vulnerable to trafficking (poverty, social exclusion, education, literacy, children in state orphanages, debt, violent family environment, drug abuse, gender discrimination and ethnic discrimination). The existence of previous experience in prostitution also increases vulnerability to trafficking. Thus, vulnerabilities of the Roma population and those of other populations are mostly similar, especially when the myth that human trafficking is a cultural practice of the Roma ethnic group is still prevalent.

### ***Poverty and Social Exclusion***

People from the Roma community are particularly affected by the problems of poverty and exclusion in their country of origin. For example, in Bulgaria, 49% of people from the Roma community live below the poverty line, 45.5% are unemployed (*World Bank*, 2010), 47.7% of households from the Roma community do not have pipes or sewers, 85% have no toilets inside the home and 32.4% have no access to running water (*ERRC*, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005). In the Czech Republic, it is estimated that at least 60,000 people from the Roma community were excluded from the society in 2006 (*GAC/Ivan Gabal Analysis & Consulting company*, August 2006). Out of 12 people from the Roma community, 10 report that they cannot find a job because of their ethnicity or their disadvantaged background. The girls from the Roma community are more affected by these problems than boys. A 27-year-old Hungarian Roma girl was trafficked to Germany to be sexually exploited. She said: "*When I was 14, my father had an accident and had to stop working. My mother did not work and she had received only basic education, so she could only do housework. We were in a difficult economic situation. My siblings and I spent a lot of time with our friends to avoid having to eat at home. When I turned 17, my mother put me on the sidewalk for me to prostitute myself*" (*ERRC*, March 2011). Poverty is also a barrier to the actions of prevention services that fight against trafficking in the Roma community. In Bulgaria, victim services explain that it is very difficult to maintain constant communication with people from the Roma community since many of them do not have regular access to a telephone and do not use the Internet (*ERRC*, March 2011).

### ***Gender Discrimination***

Due to the feminization of poverty, the low status of women in patriarchal societies and different forms of gender discrimination, result in women making up a significant proportion of trafficking victims in the world, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation (79% of those sexually exploited, 66% were women and 13% of girls ) (*UNODC*, 2009). This model is found precisely among the peoples of the Roma community. 37 trafficked people were interviewed, including 23 women and 14 men. 17 of the 23 women were sexually exploited. Women from the Roma community are often the target of multiple forms of discrimination in a wide range of situations, which greatly increases their vulnerability to trafficking.

### ***The Lack of Education***

Women from the Roma community, who represent the majority of those exploited in these countries have received only very basic education and are often illiterate. Only 25% of children from the Roma complete primary school. The highest level of education among respondents in the Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovakia, is secondary. In Slovakia, of 11 respondents, 4 were sent to special schools for children with mental disabilities. The exclusion of the Roma community from an egalitarian and comprehensive education is real, not only among children but also their parents. This exclusion causes generations plagued by unemployment, increased risk-taking and the use of desperate measures to earn money. Schools only accessible to children from the Roma community are an additional problem. In Bulgaria, municipalities report that they organize lectures by the police and NGOs in schools to raise awareness against the trafficking phenomenon. However, the authorities also state that

these lectures are not performed at schools accessible to children from the Roma community, thus leaving the most vulnerable group without access to prevention of trafficking activities (ERRC, March 2011).

### ***Growing up under the protection of the State***

In the five countries studied by the European Roma Rights Centre, orphanages guardianship of the State, are considered a key factor in vulnerability to trafficking, both for children from the Roma community and the non-Roma community (ERRC, March 2011). Children and young people graduating from these institutions often find themselves isolated, lacking a social network that would otherwise support them. They cannot live independently and have very few job opportunities. A female Hungarian Roma community sex trafficked survivor of 35 years of age said: *"I suffered a lot in my life. I grew up under the protection of the state and I never met my family. People taking care of us abused children were not taking good care of us. With the help of a teacher, I found a council flat and a job at the age of 18. Then I met a man. I do not know who I could trust (...) He tricked me, I lost my apartment and I became homeless. I started drinking and I became a prostitute in Budapest. The police would often find me. Sometimes they wanted to hit me or urinate on me. I met a man who sold me as a prostitute and domestic slave to another man. I finally managed to escape and went back to this man as I was pregnant and we had a girl. A friend gave us an apartment where we settled. Our child was handed over to child protection services because we do not have our own home and we are not working. I'm trying to get my child back"* (ERRC, 2007).

### ***Domestic violence and abuse***

Domestic violence and substance abuse can exist regardless of sexual exploitation of a person, but often occurs when that person is a victim of trafficking. The words of a 35 year old woman from a Roma community in Hungary in March 2010 clearly illustrate this observation: *"I am reluctant to remind myself of my childhood, because as soon as I do, only bad memories come to mind. I think I was about 6 or 7 years old, when my grandfather started sexually abusing me. I was very scared of my grandfather [who lived in the same house]. I would go to the streets with friends, more and more often, to avoid having to go home".* Then she started taking drugs that led her to enter prostitution to pay for her doses. She became liable to a dealer who then sold her. *"The man took me into a car and took me into the woods. He tied me to a tree and raped me. After that, he put me in an apartment somewhere in the city center but I did not know where I was. I do not know how much time has passed, maybe a year since I remember seeing the snow-covered roofs. Every day, the man brought me one or two customers who had perverse demands. I was often struck, but I also had to hit others. There have been times when people put out their cigarettes on me, or I had to meet several men at the same time. He never gave me money, but he brought me drugs every day"* (ERRC, March 2011).

Within the study of sexual exploitation, the three minority communities studied in this text are extremely relevant. In all three areas, women and children constitute the majority of those trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. These minorities are made more vulnerable by economic difficulties, racism and exclusion, which are perpetuated from

generation to generation. The comparison of their situations raises the question of educating people to be independent, which is the only effective fight against vulnerability. Multiple questions emerge: how do we reform orphanages for children from the Roma community in the Eastern countries? How do we eradicate cultural discrimination against the Dalits and Adivasis? How do we reverse the disastrous consequences of colonization such as state boarding schools for Natives?

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