STOP SEX TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
What is child trafficking?

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.

UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime

A child is anyone under the age of 18 years.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

What’s the problem?

GLOBAL SEX TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a complex phenomenon fueled by the tremendous growth in the global sex market. Exploitation is driven by poverty, uneven development, official corruption, gender discrimination, harmful traditional and cultural practices, civil unrest, natural disasters and lack of political will to end it.

The number of child victims trafficked worldwide for sexual exploitation or cheap labour on an annual basis is 1.2 million.¹ Human trafficking, the third largest criminal activity in the world, following the international trade in illegal drugs and arms trafficking, is believed to be worth billions of dollars each year. Driving the trade is the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. Seventy-nine percent of all global trafficking is for sexual exploitation.²

SEX TRAFFICKING IN BELGIUM

No reliable data are available on the number of children trafficked for sexual purposes in Belgium. This is due not only to the illegal and criminal aspect of trafficking, but also the lack of coordination between the different services responsible for the reception of victims.³
According to the Immigration Office, 160 victims of trafficking and smuggling in migrants were identified in 2006. From 160 people, 73 of whom were males and 87 females, 22 were victims of smuggling. The total number of minors involved was 14. In 2007, the total of minors was nine. From January to June 2008, the number of minors was eight. With regard to the type of exploitation, the majority of victims were trafficked for forced labour (65 cases) and sexual exploitation (57 cases).

During 2007, the specialised shelter centres providing assistance to trafficked people registered 619 victims. Official data recorded a total of nine trafficked children in 2007; two of them were exploited in prostitution. From January to June 2008, eight trafficked children were identified and two of them were also exploited in prostitution.

Who gets trafficked?

Most of the girls trafficked for sexual exploitation to and through Belgium originate from Balkan and CIS countries (mainly Russia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania) as well as from West Africa (particularly Nigeria). Cases of girls trafficked from China have also been identified, but they were mostly trafficked for labour exploitation and illegal adoption. Despite the vast majority of child victims being females, young foreign boys exploited in prostitution can also be found in the main Belgian cities, such as Brussels, Antwerp and Gant.

Several sources have stressed that the phenomenon of trafficking in minors is strictly connected to the problem of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and asylum seekers, and their inadequate protection and assistance. The ‘Office des étrangers’, or Foreign Office (FO), registers 1,000 UAMs every year. Instances where migrant children have disappeared from reception centres due to a lack of effective supervision have been reported and according to NGOs, the involvement of this particular vulnerable group in trafficking has seen an alarming increase in recent years.

A study conducted by a Belgian University, published in 2007, also pointed to the ineffective support available for trafficked victims and the consequent risk for those not receiving protection from further re-trafficking. More specifically, the research found that most of the 619 trafficking victims (including minors) referred to the three trafficking shelters between 1999 and 2005 disappeared after registering, with only 176 accepting assistance and 2.2 percent ultimately qualifying for victim status.

As in other countries around the world, children are being trafficked to Belgium because they often lack proper livelihood opportunities, are less educated, easy to overpower and easy to manipulate and control. They are also in a position where they believe they must help support the family and may even be sold or sent abroad by family members to do so. Street children, children from ethnic minorities or who have experienced child sexual abuse within the domestic setting, children whose family and community life has been disrupted and do not have someone to look out for them, are all especially vulnerable to human trafficking.

Children may be at greater risk of trafficking from places where they are less protected. This may be because the law is weak or not properly enforced or because children are less aware of the risks of trafficking and are more easily deceived. Countries are considered:
• ‘Sending’ or ‘origin’ - from where children are sent;
• ‘Transit’ - where the children might be moved through and temporarily kept on the way to their final destination; and
• ‘Receiving’ or ‘destination’ - where the children finally end up.

Depending on the reason for trafficking, some countries might only be sending, while others might be both sending and transit. Some countries can be all three. Belgium is considered as both a destination and a transit point for children trafficked onwards to other destinations in Europe, such as the UK and especially Flanders.

Who creates demand?

Traffickers prey on children and young people to meet the sexual demands of paedophiles and people who pay for sex. Any person who patronises the commercial sex market may end up sexually exploiting a child. There is actually no common profile of perpetrators who sexually exploit children – they may be young, old, married, single; they come from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds and work in all kinds of professions. Belgium is also a source country for tourists seeking sex with children, traveling to destinations such as the Dominican Republic, Morocco, the Gambia, Thailand and Cambodia.

Who are the traffickers?

Traffickers can be a stranger or someone the child knows, such as a relative or a friend. Traffickers are often part of an organised criminal network that ‘recruits’ children and supplies them with fake identification. They may also pose as boyfriends
or girlfriends in order to convince children to leave for a new life. Traffickers can be a stranger or someone the child knows, such as a relative or a friend.

In 2007, the government reported over 500 trafficking investigations but official data on the number of cases prosecuted has not yet been released. In 2006, the most recent year for which comprehensive prosecution statistics are available, the government prosecuted 451 trafficking cases. Despite persons convicted for trafficking offences mainly being males, cases of females have also been reported (there were 44 in 2005). Furthermore, it has been noted that criminal networks organising trafficking to France have moved to operate outside of the country, mainly in Belgium and Germany, due to increasing prosecution of traffickers.

Common nationalities for traffickers are Albanian, Belgian, Nigerian, Russian, Bulgarian, Ecuadorean and Brazilian. Albanian trafficking networks traffic women and children from Albania as well as from Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine and from Bulgaria to Belgium. Chinese syndicates, which are traditionally engaged in drug trafficking, money laundering and extortion, have become involved in trafficking in persons in Belgium.

**CASE STUDIES**

**Girl trafficked from Bulgaria**
A young Bulgarian girl was enticed by a man, later proven to be a pimp, to leave Bulgaria with the promise of a better life. The young waitress from Sliven was taken out of the country, on a bus to Brussels, along with two other girls. The bus driver was an accomplice of the man. In Brussels, the girl was met by another pimp and was forced into prostitution the very next day. She was eventually returned back to Bulgaria only to be resold as a prostitute and was sent to the Netherlands. On her next trip to Sliven, she managed to escape and to get in touch with her mother. Both filed a complaint with the police and the girl was placed under police protection. The people involved in the girl’s trafficking, including the bus driver, have been tried and sentenced. In 2008, Brussels police officers dealing with human trafficking investigated 70 cases from Sliven, with a total of 2,000 prostitutes identified from the city in the last few years. Often they are in Brussels only in passing, and are sent to other countries.

**Trafficked to Belgium through Italy**
A 15-year-old Albanian girl arrived in Belgium in 2000. Through the mediation of her aunt’s sister-in-law, a husband had been suggested for her and money was paid to her parents to take her to Italy to be ‘married’. Although, once in Italy, the sister-in-law explained that the intended husband was already married, and the girl was taken to Brussels, where she was forced into prostitution.

**Trafficked to the UK through Belgium**
In 2005, the British Minister of State highlighted a case prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service in London. The case involved a 17-year-old Russian girl who had replied to an ad in a local paper offering work abroad. She was persuaded to leave home in Russia to work, she believed, as a waitress in Spain. She was provided with a false Lithuanian passport, taken first to Germany, then to Belgium where she was forced to work as a prostitute. Then she was sold to a man named Dimitrov (an Albanian) who brought her to London. She was rescued when one of the cleaners of the building where she was being housed tipped off the police.
How can we stop the trafficking of children?

**LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

- Based on in-depth study on the different forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children occurring in the country, the National Plan of Action against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children adopted by Belgium in 2001 should urgently be updated. In this framework, specific measures to combat and prevent child trafficking for sexual purposes and ensure comprehensive assistance and protection of child victims should be planned and implemented, involving different stakeholders. Allocation of adequate human and financial resources and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism are necessary conditions for the successful realisation of the future plan.

- In light of the good results achieved so far in terms of prosecution of trafficking offences as a result of bilateral, international and regional police cooperation, Belgium should continue to promote and strengthen its efforts to collaborate with authorities in countries of origin and in other destinations where child victims trafficked through Belgium end up. Cooperation with countries of origin should be aimed at ensuring that not only traffickers are brought to justice but also that child victims are effectively repatriated and socially reintegrated, when this is in their best interest.

- Capacity building of judiciary and police in the field of child prostitution and child trafficking for sexual purposes, should be carried out on a permanent basis and focus not only on the prosecution aspect but also on child victims’ identification and the special protection trafficked children are entitled to as well as including modules on unaccompanied minors and their rights under Belgian law.

- Police units specialising on identification of unaccompanied minors should be established as a preventative measure, with financial resources duly allocated for this purpose.

- Based on existing coordination agreements and mechanisms, collaboration on CSEC and child trafficking between police at federal and local level should be clearly defined and formalised to ensure that effective coordinated responses are implemented in the field.

- Belgium should expedite its reporting obligation on the *Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*.

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<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Initial Report – 1994, 2000, 2008</td>
<td>In response to the 2000 CRC report, in 2003 the UN Committee made the following recommendations in terms of child trafficking: 1) Strengthen the implementation of policies and programmes in accordance with the Stockholm Agenda for Action and Yokohama Global Commitment and allocate human and financial resources for this purpose; 2) Continue to recruit female police officers to improve communication and contacts with foreign girls and women exploited in prostitution;</td>
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<td>Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress &amp; Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women &amp; Children</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour</td>
<td>2002</td>
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#### PREVENTION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING AND VICTIM PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE

- As Belgium is a Federal State, resources for preventing child trafficking for sexual purposes and providing assistance to victims should be allocated and distributed equally among the different local administrations, as such ensuring adequate services are provided all over the territory.
- Efforts to increase awareness regarding domestic demand for commercial sex acts with children should be strengthened, taking as model campaigns already implemented successfully (see ‘the Stop à la prostitution enfantine’ initiative [www.stopprostitutionenfantine.be](http://www.stopprostitutionenfantine.be)) and allocating resources on a long-term basis so as to stimulate a real behaviour change.
- Measures should be put in place to improve the protection of separated and trafficked children, namely their identification, age assessment, registration, family tracing, guardianship, best interests’ determination, treatment and care. In this framework, it would be necessary to develop and implement codes of conduct establishing minimum care standards for care staff to ensure that children entered into the care of social services receive adequate assistance and are not exposed to the risk of being trafficked or re-trafficked.
• Protocols for an institutionalised collaboration between police, the justice system and NGOs dealing with child victims' assistance should be developed and implemented to improve the prosecution of suspected cases while ensuring more comprehensive support services.

• It is necessary that screening procedures to identify potential child victims in the commercial sex trade are formalised and adequately implemented.

• There is a need to create more residential structures and shelters to provide assistance to child trafficking victims, both girls and boys, and especially in smaller cities, as they are currently insufficient.

• Belgium should consider formally allowing all victims of trafficking who assist with law enforcement efforts to obtain residency status, regardless of the outcome of the prosecution and regardless of their nationality, so that all EU citizens such as children from Romania and Bulgaria can also be adequately protected.

TO REPORT A SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD TRAFFICKING, CONTACT:
Child Focus supports investigations on the disappearance, abduction or sexual exploitation of children, including child trafficking. The emergency number 110 is active 24 hours, 7 days a week.

MORE INFORMATION
• ECPAT Belgium: www.ecpat.be
• ECPAT International: www.ecpat.net
• The Body Shop and ECPAT Stop Trafficking of Children and Young People Campaign: www.thebodyshop.com/stop
Endnotes

5. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
15. Protection Project. Belgium. Available at: www.protectionproject.org


