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 international crime, following 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

CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING IN ITALY

Italy is a country of destination and transit for girls and boys trafficked for sexual purposes mainly from Nigeria and Eastern European countries such as Albania, Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria and Ukraine.³ Roma children are trafficked to Italy for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced begging.⁴ Italy’s geographic location and the length of its coast, along with the...
difficulties related to effective patrolling, have long made the country a preferred target for traffickers, as well as for smugglers of illegal immigrants, who use it as a gateway for the rest of Europe.

Who gets trafficked?

With Albanian, Romanian and Nigerian children among the most frequently sexually exploited nationalities in Italy, this proportion is reflected in the nationalities of traffickers apprehended by law enforcement and judicial cases in the country.

Trafficking in persons, including trafficking of children for sexual purposes, is dealt with in a slightly different way by related laws in the Italian legislative system. Articles 600, 601 and 602 of the Italian Penal Code focus on slavery, trafficking in persons, and the slave trade, respectively. It thus often happens that data referring to cases under each above-mentioned article must be summed up in order to have a comprehensive idea of the size of the problem, or at least of its visible part. Prosecutions under these articles have seen a steady decrease between 2005 (949 cases) and 2007 (541 cases), with “trafficking in persons” hovering fairly constantly around 25-30% of cases dealt with under all three articles. Among victims of trafficking in persons identified by law enforcement under Article 601, children represent a minor proportion of the total (5% in 2005; 11% in 2006; 1% in 2007). It is to be expected, however, that these data are but the tip of a much larger iceberg not disclosed to the authorities. Furthermore, the data of the National Anti-Mafia Bureau relayed in the UNODC report do not make gender distinctions among victims. The declining trend shown by the figures reported above is mirrored by the number of police warrants issued for the specific crime of trafficking in children (a subsection of Article 601). After a peak of 46 warrants issued in 2005, the following year totalled 25. Victims of trafficking using Italy as a transit country are normally headed for countries further north in Central and Northern Europe.

Children are especially vulnerable to being trafficked because they are often less educated, easy to overpower and easy to convince. They are also in a position where they believe they must help to support the family and may even be sold or sent abroad by family members to do so. Street children, children in refugee camps, 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. Italy is a destination and transit country.
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 no common profile of perpetrators who sexually exploit children – they may be young, old, married, single; they come from all types of socio-economic backgrounds and work in all kinds of professions.

Italian men figure prominently in generating demand for sexual contacts with children abroad, as well as in Italy, thus contributing to fuelling the market of child-sex tourism in destinations such as Thailand, Cambodia, Kenya, Brazil, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. According to estimates made public by ECPAT Italy, 80,000 Italians leave Italy every year for this type of illicit holiday. 

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. Aggregated data for 2003-2007 from the Italian National Anti-Mafia Bureau, the Justice Department combating all forms of organised crime, highlighted that of 861 prosecutions initiated in...
cases of trafficking, 24% were against Italian citizens. The breakdown for the remaining cases broadly reflects the countries of origin of victims, thus attesting to the existence of trafficking networks relying heavily on fellow nationals when recruiting, transporting and receiving trafficked persons. The largest proportions of cases involving foreigners were Romanian (25%), Albanian (20%) and Nigerian (17%) citizens.

CASE STUDIES

Operation “Abid”
In 2006, Italian police arrested 31 people involved in trafficking humans – originating mainly from Sudan, Morocco and Egypt – across the Mediterranean from the Libyan coast. The organisation had “handling” bases in other parts of Italy (Rieti, Florence, Milan) to follow up on the victims’ transfer from shelters in the south of the country. In the course of investigations, repeated acts of sexual violence against the trafficked victims (including the rape of two children) and the murder of two Nigerian victims were ascertained.

Disappearing minors
Hundreds of unaccompanied children cross the Mediterranean on boats carrying them illegally to Italy’s southern shores. While their age already includes them in the category of trafficked persons, what happens next, when they reach Italy, may bring them a lot closer to a real situation of exploitation. Out of 1,320 children identified upon coming ashore in the first nine months of 2008, about 400 have disappeared and may have been forced into criminal organisations dealing in drugs or the ranks of sexually exploited persons. False names and the fact that – by default – unaccompanied children are initially placed in care homes that have no power to retain them, are among the factors contributing to numerous escapes and disappearances. Also, these children’s lack of awareness of the existence of a protection procedure designed to prevent any harm from occurring to them, is often an element in their decision to leave the care homes and fend for themselves.

How can we stop the trafficking of children?

LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

• Italy should develop and implement a full-fledged Plan of Action against all forms of CSEC (including trafficking for sexual purposes), as existing legislation shows need for revision and updating.
• Italian legislation should make a clear distinction between child and adult victims of trafficking, and remove the need for violence, intimidation or other means as an essential element for trafficking to be qualified as such in the case of children.
• The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which Italy signed on 8 June 2005, is still awaiting ratification by Italy.
• To reduce impunity and ensure enforcement of extraterritorial law, police and judicial cooperation across borders must be strengthened with countries recording a high level of crimes against children being committed by Italian nationals.
• Suitable prevention of and dealing with trafficking cases should be made an integral and compulsory component of training for law enforcers and social workers.
PREVENTION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING AND VICTIM PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE

- Suitable mechanisms need to be put in place to facilitate coordination between the National Anti-Mafia Bureau and local Public Prosecutors’ Offices with a view to swifter proceedings in the prosecution of trafficking cases.
- The establishment of a national focal point on human trafficking with a duty to collect information from and provide coordination to regional (local) children’s ombudsmen. The network of children’s ombudsmen, tested in eight out of twenty administrative regions, should be extended to the whole of Italy’s territory.
- Special requirements providing for trafficked children’s collaboration with law enforcement as a prerequisite for access to social protection and reintegration programmes should be eliminated from the relevant legislative norms.
- Child-friendly procedures – already provided for by the law – during judicial proceedings, in order to avoid the revictimisation of trafficked children, need to be effectively implemented.
TO REPORT A SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD TRAFFICKING, CONTACT:

- National Anti-Trafficking Hotline 800 290 290 (toll free)

MORE INFORMATION

- ECPAT Italy: www.ecpat.it
- ECPAT International: www.ecpat.net
- The Body Shop and ECPAT Stop Trafficking of Children and Young People Campaign: www.thebodyshop.com/stop
Endnotes


