Trafficking of children and adolescents

We are launching a campaign for officials at migration posts with the aim of providing information on two problem situations which are affecting many of the boys, girls and adolescents crossing our countries’ borders: trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of underage persons.

As part of this campaign, we have produced a series of leaflets aimed at officials such as yourself, who work at migration posts, with a view to obtaining your collaboration in the protection of underage persons entering and leaving the country.

Although it is true that the majority of persons under 18 years of age crossing borders do so in the company of their families for reasons related to tourism, labour or the search for better living conditions, many other boys, girls and adolescents are taken from one country to another in order to be exploited, and are, therefore, victims of the crime of human trafficking.

 Trafficking in underage persons occurs when a boy, girl or adolescent is lured, transported, transferred, taken in or given refuge for the purposes of exploitation.

The persons who commit this crime are called traffickers, and they use many means for luring their victims, such as, for example: threats, the use of force, kidnapping, fraud, deceit and the abuse of power.

In the case of underage persons, although none of these means are used directly, the mere fact that they are taken from one place to another for exploitation purposes is considered human trafficking. In many cases, payment or benefits are given to obtain the consent or authorization of the person who exercises control over the boy, girl or adolescent (for example their father or mother).
Deceit on the part of the trafficker is exemplified in the following account given by an adolescent victim of trafficking:

"I met a woman who told me to go with her; she said she'd get me a job. This woman took me there and told me we were going to have money, that in two months we would have a lot of things, she said. I believed her and I went with her."

(State statement made by an adolescent victim of trafficking)

Taken from the documentary “If only it were fiction”, IPEC/ILO (2003)

What should be clear is that, regardless of the means used, or the absence of these, for luring a boy, girl or adolescent or for obtaining their consent to be taken to another region or country, the exploitative purpose of trafficking makes it a criminal act that violates the human rights of the underage persons who have fallen victim to it.

The exploitation purposes of trafficking may manifest themselves in any of the following ways:

- **Commercial sexual exploitation**: involves using the underage persons in sexual or erotic activities in exchange for payment or any other type of remuneration.
- **Labour exploitation**: involving children under 15 in work or adolescents aged 15-18 in work that, due to the conditions in which it is carried out (long working days, low or inexistent wages, among others), harm the health, safety and integrity of the boys, girls and adolescents that undertake it.
- **Illegal sale and adoption**
- **Extraction of organs**
- **Slavery** or any practice similar to slavery
- **Servile marriages**
Knowing that trafficking is a form of violating human rights, you may be asking yourself why this problem exists.

### Why does human trafficking exist?

#### Causes of trafficking

What promotes that unscrupulous people use boys, girls and adolescents for exploitation?

- The unequal economic development of certain regions and countries.
- The demand for cheap and submissive labour for dangerous work or that involve inhumane conditions.
- Cultural values that promote inequality between men and women.
- The rise of the industry based on selling sex.
- The search for boys, girls and adolescents for brothels or for performing sex shows.
- The existence of highly organized intermediaries and networks that have made trafficking a very lucrative activity.
- The inexistence or lack of adequate criminal penalties for traffickers.

#### Risk Factors

Why are certain boys, girls and adolescents more at risk of becoming victims of trafficking?

- Because of the conditions of extreme poverty in which many people live and the lack of social policies aimed at the population as a whole.
- Because of the political conflicts and wars in some countries.
- Because of the lack of education opportunities.
- Because of the lack of protection for many underage persons on the part of their families, communities and public institutions.
- Because of natural disasters, which force people to migrate to other regions or countries.
- Because of the abuse and violence they experience in their homes.
Traffickers take advantage of the negative situations (risk factors) that affect many boys, girls and adolescents, in order to deceive them by offering better living condition in another region or country. However, when the victims reach their destination they realize they have been lured into a situation of exploitation and abuse.

“He came around in a car and offered me a job and I needed to work because my parents didn’t support me, and I said alright... and he got me into a bar”

(Statement made by an adolescent victim of trafficking)

Taken from the documentary “If only it were fiction”, IPEC/ILO (2003)

The underage persons who fall victim to trafficking evidently face a series of negative consequences in their lives, some of which include: being taken away from their families and schools, entrapment or isolation, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse that harms their integrity as individuals or may even cause death.

Due to the fact that the repercussions the victims experience are so severe, we wish to detect possible victims and traffickers and, at the same time, prevent more boys, girls and adolescents from being subjected to situations of exploitation. In order to carry out this task we would like to appeal to officials such as yourself since you can collaborate in this mission by:

- Protecting the underage persons by effectively controlling when they enter and leave the country.
- Reporting criminal acts committed by traffickers in order that they may be prosecuted.

Let us put a stop to the exploitation of their dreams and hopes...
RELOCATING BOYS, GIRLS OR ADOLESCENTS FOR EXPLOITATION PURPOSES IS A CRIME

Project: “Contribution to the prevention and elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic”

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