



## Mapping the Trafficking Situation in Albania

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Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

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Good morning, my name is Olivia. I'm a 3rd year student reading Biochemistry at Oxford University in the UK.

I welcome this opportunity to speak to the conference about my experiences in Albania during the summer when I travelled to Albania on behalf of RENATE, a European network of religious that is committed to combating human trafficking and exploitation. Renate is represented in 19 countries.

### **Why did I go?**

My reasons were two-fold:

1. To learn more about human trafficking in Albania, it's root causes and consequences.
2. To learn what is being done **now** to tackle the issue and to discover what plans and strategies are being devised (and by whom) for the future.

I used this experience to produce a report for RENATE that attempts to shed light on specific causes, effects and consequences of Human Trafficking in Albania to establish develop effective strategies to combat Human Trafficking.

### **What did I do?**

I interviewed charity and social workers, Police and Government officials, members of RENATE and some of those at risk in the community.

### **What did I find in Albania?**

A great mixture! Beauty, poverty, discrimination and I even *felt* corruption.

Albania is a beautiful country. It is largely unspoilt and has significant natural resources such as reserves of oil and gas, fertile land and a developing tourism industry.

Despite these apparent advantages, Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe and many of its citizens exist in profound poverty and deprivation.

Albania's home-grown brand of Organised Criminals have a reputation for intimidation and extreme violence. Their reach is far and wide. There is also a suggestion that they operate hand-in-glove with some corrupt officials.

The most vulnerable members of society are victims of circumstance. Their deprivation is caused by factors such as ingrained prejudices against certain ethnic groups, a lack of access to formal education, societal intolerance towards women, widespread poverty, and institutionalised corruption at all levels of society and poor enforcement of the law.

In some groups there is also an enduring mentality that discourages initiative and promotes hopelessness, especially amongst women.

The rise of Organised Crime and the seemingly insatiable demand for prostitutes abroad led to Albania becoming an important source of Human Trafficking in the international Slave Trade.

### **What needs to happen?**

I believe we need to strengthen the following fundamentals of any society if there is to be any hope of eradicating Human Trafficking in Albania.

- Equality (especially women's rights)
- Education (Access to...)
- Enforcement (domestic and international laws, anti-corruption and anti-trafficking)
- Security
- Networks

A cohesive, effective framework to promote these building blocks simply does not exist today in Albania.

**In this talk I'll focus on three of these key areas (Equality / Security / Networks)**

**First Equality**

I believe that promoting equality will reduce human trafficking amongst youth.

Let me take the Roma community as an example.

In Tirana I witnessed an extreme form of discrimination.

As a Roma, you are often not regarded as a citizen by the state and find it difficult to become formally registered. As a result, they have

- no right to vote,
- no formal access to healthcare, education
- little support from the government.

Roma live in appalling conditions in makeshift camps at the edge of the city with no running water or electricity. This group is highly susceptible to trafficking because of the daily desperation to earn enough money for themselves and their family to simply survive.

A Social Worker I met told me that a few years back there was a brutal attack on one of the largest camps situated in Tirana.

- Shacks were burnt down
- Many women were injured.
- Hundreds of families were forced onto the street

This spelt a small-scale humanitarian disaster for Tirana.

When the Roma community sought help from the Police, they were simply ignored or they refused to take statements. There was even suspicion of State involvement as the Roma land was quickly cleared to make way for new apartment blocks.

Fortunately, NGOs fought relentlessly on behalf of the Roma people, and helped secure convictions.

**Here's a picture of Roma life:**

It is extremely difficult to enter the formal work market; you are regarded as wild and on the very edge of society.

Many find their only income through collecting rubbish. A kilo of cans will earn you 10cents. Many others who cannot do this work, are forced to beg. Small children, some as young as 6 months, are being used to beg on the street.

Internal trafficking is rife in these communities.

If someone said to you, 'Let me give your child work, I will give you money and I will give them prospects.'

Many of us here, if hungry, desperate, knee-deep in rubbish would find it difficult to say NO. We NEED to provide parents with an alternative to selling their children.

The prejudice does not stop at this group.

**Women in Albania are not valued.**

For many women in Albania, the following is their reality:

- 35% less pay than a man with the same qualifications for the same job
- Girls are regarded as a burden!

- 60% of abortions are gender selective (particularly in rural areas)
- You are expected to do all the household chores
- You are pressured from a young age to leave school, often compelled to marry at a very young age (especially in Roma communities)
- Your life is governed by men and you are often abused and beaten by those in your own family
- A Roma woman is even worse off. She has NO job prospects. It's not unusual for her to have 6 or more children that she must care for. Domestic violence is very common.
- With no real independence, women in Albania are vulnerable to trafficking; especially young women who still have hope to live a better life. Such young women are easily manipulated by traffickers with their false promises of jobs or adventure.

ATTITUDES NEED TO CHANGE. IF NOT, THE CYCLE WILL PERPETUATE ITSELF.

### **Education**

Albania must invest more in EDUCATION to help bring about Equality. Without education, it stands to reason that attitudes will not change and that Albania as a State cannot succeed.

Albania cannot expect to become a member of the European Community if it does not address the issue of Equality within its society.

### **Lack of support for women and Children.**

Among my visits, one family in particular sticks in my memory.

The mother was a beautiful, shy young mother who told us everything was okay.

Afterwards I was told that that mother had been subject to her husband's violent abuse for many years. In the past, she reached out for help, was desperate to leave the situation, but now she had given up hope. How could she survive on her own? She would receive no help from the state and could not support her children.

It is incredibly harrowing to meet such a woman.

BY INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND INCREASING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY WE CAN EMPOWER GIRLS AND NOT MAKE THEM EASY PREY. WITH AWARENESS AND EQUALITY, WE WILL REDUCE THE DEMAND.

### **My second factor is Security**

What do I mean when I say we need to increase Security to decrease trafficking?

In Albania I'm told there is:

- Widespread corruption
- Poor implementation of the law
- Slow first response from the police
- Inadequate prosecution of Traffickers
- Lack of a victim-centred approach
- Hindering attitudes towards trafficked women, many citizens simply don't understand they didn't choose to be a prostitute

The president of RENATE, Sister Imelda Poole, explained to me that corruption has become so embedded in daily life that few people recognise it in its true form anymore.

"The Norm" is having to bribe your doctor or pay your teachers for essential services.

This deep-rooted corruption is by far the largest challenge faced by anti-trafficking efforts. It will take a generation or more before ingrained attitudes change – a generation has already been spent since the fall of communism and action must be taken now.

ALBANIA'S LAWS ARE VERY GOOD ON PAPER! LACK OF IMPLEMENTATION IS THE REAL PROBLEM.

For example it is now illegal to use a prostitute in Albania, but this law is not enforced and few know about this change.

### **My third factor is developing Networks**

NGOs are working to help the vulnerable and they are doing good work. However, they do not always have a good relationship with government ministries as they constantly have to challenge local authorities to enforce of their own rules and regulations. This is often due to lack of cooperation between various internal ministries.

#### **How to strengthen networks**

We need to increase effective communication and collaboration between Anti- Human Trafficking groups such as:

- European Governments and their various ministries.
- Educators
- Charities
- NGOs
- Religious Institutes
- Expertise from Commercial Entities g. exploit the global reach of Mobile operators

Communication between state departments is lacking, cross border connection needs to be improved. We must be able to match the dexterity of trafficking networks.

In addition, explicit European guidelines on human rights and anti-Trafficking apply to Albania and must be implemented if Albania is to become part of the European Community. To date, Albania does not have a good track record and must take radical steps to improve its position.

This is where RENATE can help – the Network of religious across 19 different countries in Europe.

#### **What are some of my solutions to the problem of human trafficking in Albania?**

The government of Albania has the power to implement initiatives that can make a very real difference.

- In the longer term, Equality through Education and the empowerment of women will help. This can only succeed if the Albanian government makes it a priority. This must come from the “top down”.
- Discrimination must be eradicated. Everyone must to be recognised as having equal rights, regardless of ethnicity or gender. In practical terms this means equal access to formal education, employment, housing and healthcare.
- Awareness – of the trafficking issue – particularly taking advantage of social and media networks to publicise awareness. Create a community that recognises the signs of Trafficking and exploitation so as to PREVENT trafficking.
- Protect victims – support them in their rehabilitation without prejudice.
- Attitudes to corruption must change. Organised Crime must be tackled.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS A PROBLEM CREATED BY PEOPLE.**

It can only be eliminated by OUR efforts.

- Love will overcome greed, but only if there is a coordinated effort to combat the root causes.
- Existing laws and Human-Rights must be enforced
- We must NOT turn a blind eye to trafficking and exploitation in our own countries.
- Powerful security and collaborative networks must be put in place to create a framework for justice.

Human Trafficking is a global problem, it needs global solutions but I believe that the cumulative effect of modest initiatives taken locally can go a long way towards combating this evil. Through increasing Security, Networks and Equality I believe we can work to achieve this.

Thank you for listening to me.

I am happy to take any questions.