

CRIMINOLOGICAL STUDY ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING DURING THE PANDEMIC IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *In the pandemic context, it is relevant to discuss the challenges imposed by the Covid 19 Pandemic and the main effects and obstacles felt at the level of antitrafficking institutions and organizations in Romania, during the period between 2020-2021. The author tries to make a comparative quantitative analysis of the two years (2020-2021), within the limits of the data obtained from ANITP, the national agency specialized in monitoring and preventing this phenomenon.*

Keywords: *the Covid 19 Pandemic, antitrafficking institutions, comparative quantitative analysis*

1. Pandemic framework

The main feature of the present analysis was generated by the unprecedented situation of 2020, which on a global level was under the sign of the first pandemic in the last hundred years (site ANITP, first semester-2020). This fact led to certain imbalances or syncope's, generated by the prolonged lockdown and the closing of borders, measures which have affected our life in many aspects. Some of the sources of these imbalances are: reducing all types of travel, moving work mainly at home or in an office without interaction with the parties in the process, thus increasing the economic and social pressure that resulted from the drastic decrease in the activity of the entire economic sector, consequently increasing unemployment rate.

There may be other causes such as: the growth of economic and societal inequalities, which are some of the causes of human trafficking (ADPARE, Research report, 2021, p.2) and in this way, creating new risks and challenges for the victims of trafficking and aggravating the vulnerabilities of the groups/individuals at risk of being trafficked. Also, as a vulnerable group we could include people who come from broken families. (Onofrei, 2008, p.56)

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2. Difficulties

The difficulties can be identified both at the level of the employed personnel of ANITP in its efforts to monitor, combat and prevent the phenomenon of human trafficking and also at the level of active NGO workers in the field of victim assistance.

Some of the main of obstacles were:

-the activities which were undertaken by the Joint Investigation Teams were hindered by the impossibility to travel for officers/prosecutors;

- face-to-face coordination meetings could no longer be organized at Europol or Eurojust;
- limitation in the organization of face-to-face courses/trainings in the field of preventing human trafficking;
- at the beginning, the existing infrastructure and staff were not ready to manage distance communication;
- great difficulties in getting in touch with the victims of human trafficking upon repatriation from the country of destination because of the quarantine measure being imposed on them;
- fear of contracting the disease and spreading it among family, friends and relatives;
- reduced contact/ lack of contact with the victims during the coordination programs or during the criminal process;
- limited awareness activities regarding the risks associated with human trafficking in educational units or in other public areas and rescheduling the aforementioned activities online;
- the capacity of state authorities and institutions to provide essential services to victims of this crime diminished;
- a reconfiguration of all the activities in accordance with the new situation was necessary.

3. Legal framework

According to the **Law no. 678/2001** on preventing and combating human trafficking (site), which was modified in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2019, 2022, the Romanian legislation includes into this phenomenon the following crimes:

- ▶ Human trafficking (art.210 PC)
- ▶ Trafficking of minors (art.211 PC)
- ▶ Exploitation of a person (art. 182 PC)
- ▶ Child pornography (art.374 PC)
- ▶ Facilitating the illegal stay in Romania (art. 264 PC)

4. Entities involved in human traffic protection/ prevention

There are two categories of entities involved in human trafficking prevention and victims' protection: public authorities and NGOs.

The Public authorities include: the Ministry of Internal Affairs (**National Agency against Human Trafficking**), The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, The Ministry of Internal Affairs, The Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, The Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Justice, The Public Ministry, local public administration authorities, as well as other government bodies with powers in the field of human trafficking.

The **NGOs** from Romania are gathered into the **ProTECT platform** (site), which is an associative network with over 20 NGOs with responsibilities in the field of prevention and protection of victims of human trafficking (some specialized on and others also including this type of victims).

5. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis below was carried out on the basis of some indicators that can direct the victimization prevention mechanism, regardless of which type we are talking about (primary, secondary and tertiary), such as: the distribution over year, the age and gender of the victims (minors/adults, female/male).

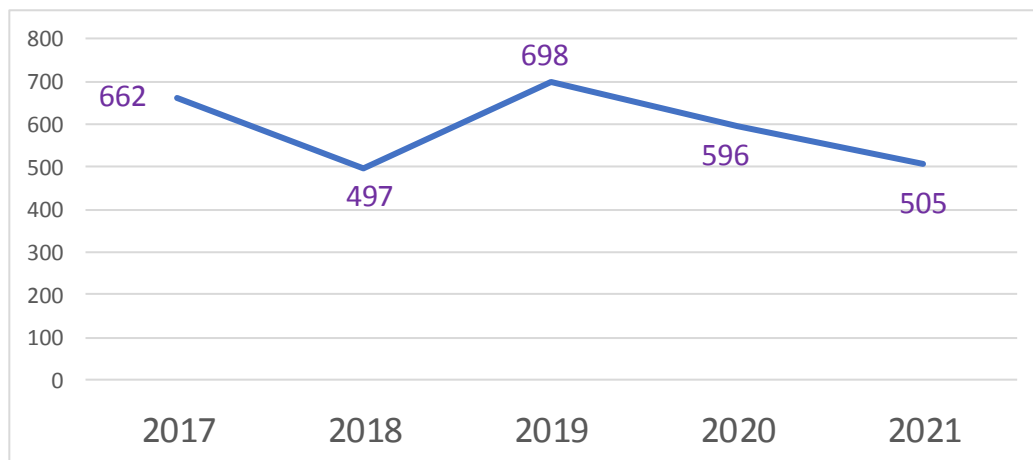


Fig. 1. Multiannual distribution of identified victims

We can see that the number of human trafficked decrease in the pandemic period with 90 persons, so is maintained the trend noted one year before.

Some characteristics of human trafficking in 2020 and 2021 are necessary so, we have to mention here:

- internal traffic was 53,8% from the total (2020)
- the population of minors exploited, in various modalities, was 56% of the total number of identified victims
- sexual exploitation of victims identified and registered in the Romanian anti-trafficking system includes forced prostitution as well as acts of child pornography
- 76% of the victims being thus exploited (2021)

- social networks contribute to an increase in trafficking vulnerability
- over 80% of the victims were recruited directly (2020)
- at least 21% of victims were recruited for trafficking through Internet (2021)
- the statistics on human trafficking and also from the judicial case files, show an increase of child pornography at the national level, a situation that can be attributed both to the isolation restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as due to the expansion of internet use and digitization in the recent years.

Also, Loverboy seems to remain the main method for recruiting victims in the pandemic period. (C. Ghiţuleasa, 2022, p.164)

Figure no.2 includes to figures because they are two criteria in each one: *age and gender distribution*. The number of girls has a worrying trend, while in the case of boys, we notice a decrease.

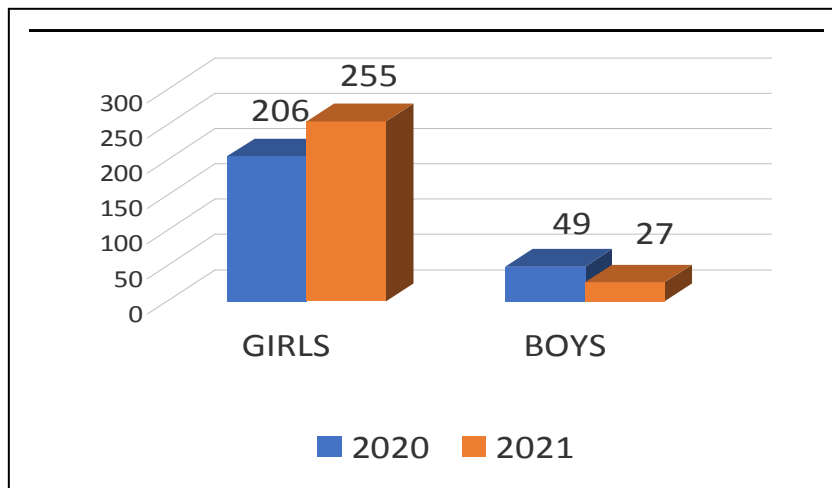


Fig. 2.1 *The minors' distribution*

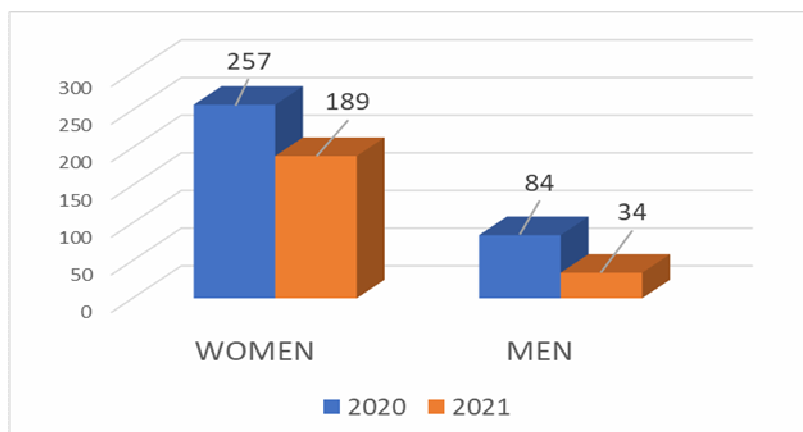


Fig. 2.2. *The adults' Distribution*

As for adults, we noticed that both, women and men registered a significant decrease, in the case of men by more than half.

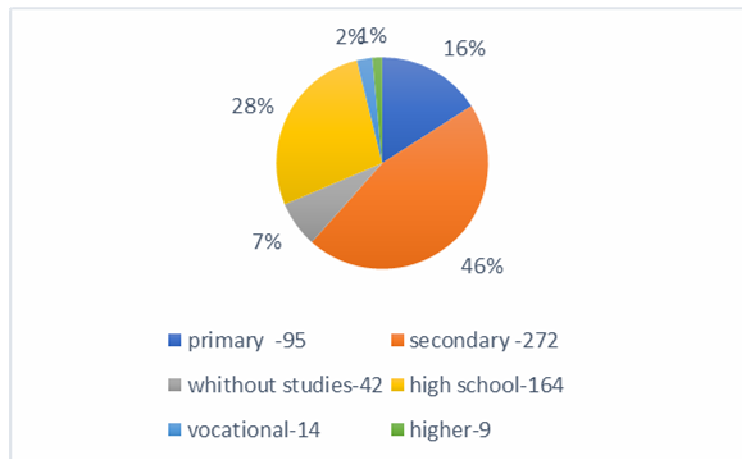


Fig. 3. Victims 'education level

For the indicator *Area of victims 'origin* we processed only the data available for 2020:

- ▶ 52,52% rural
- ▶ 43,12% urban
- ▶ 4,36% Bucharest

As we can notice, the difference between the urban and the rural area is not significant, especially if we add the number of human trafficking victims from Bucharest to the urban category.

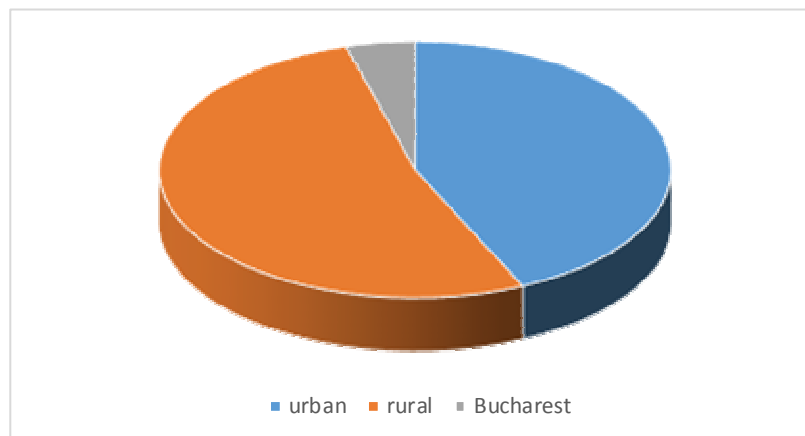


Fig. 4. Area of victims 'origin

Destination countries are presented in a comparative approach between 2021 and 2020, because all the data were available.

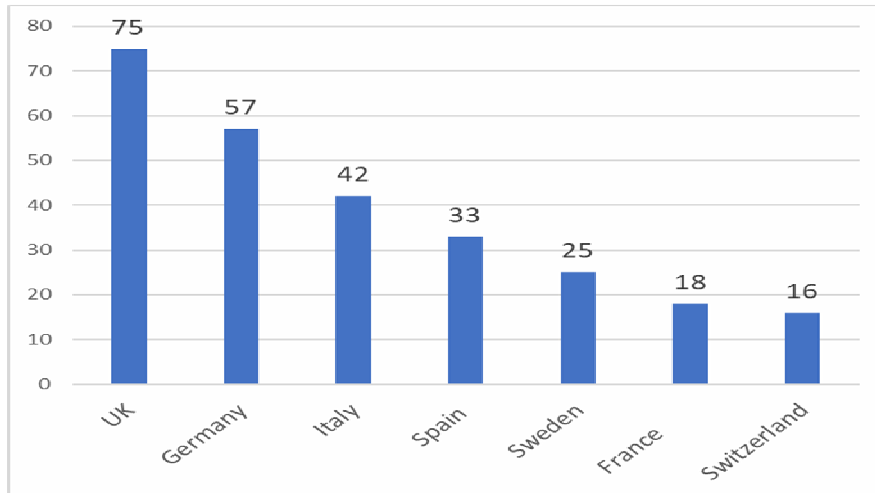


Fig. 5. *Destination countries 2020*

The biggest difference between countries is, in the year 2020, between UK and Germany, (18 persons) considering that the majority of trafficked persons in the UK are for labour exploitation.

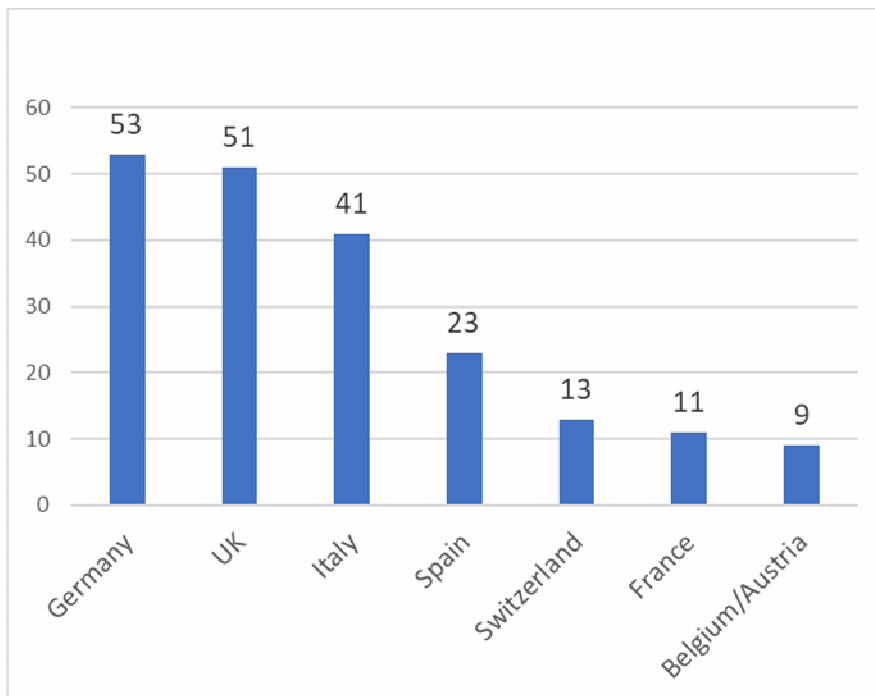


Fig. 6. *Destination countries 2021*

As we can see from the two previous figures, the first four states, namely UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, are the same in 2020 and 2021, only their order was changed.

Also, we have to add as a new statistical indicator the persons who were trafficked in Romania, throughout the country.

- in the year 2020 the human trafficking victims within Romania was 321 from a total of 596 victims;
- the number of victims who received assistance in 2020 (from the total of those identified in the same year) was 289;
- in the year 2021 the number of human trafficking victims within Romania was of 276 from a total of 505 victims

A special mention needs to be noted: all statistical data were taken from the activity reports posted on the National Agency's website (NAAHT), as they could be found at this moment (25th November 2022).

6. Conclusion

Human trafficking is a complex phenomenon, a result of the deficient evolution of several dimensions (social, economic, educational, the continuous increase in the demand for sexual services and for poorly paid labour, etc.), as well as of the influence of some favourable factors: migration, globalization, etc.

The need for an in-depth research into the evaluation of the role of "demand" as an explanation for human trafficking became a priority, at least for the entities listed above.

We think that there should be more information and awareness campaigns, in particular at the level of vulnerable groups and in rural areas, because at this moment of evolution of the society, the territorial borders don't count for the exploitation of the services of the exploited person, unfortunately just the limits of technology matter. (Meeuwisse, 2019, p.35)

In my opinion, it is also necessary to hire specialized staff in regional centres and to do prevention campaigns, especially in the counties where more victims come from, depending on the type of exploitation. As I understand from a short interview with a social worker from the county centre of our National Agency, the lack of personnel could be sometimes an essential impediment for the quality of the services, since there are only 2 persons covering 5 counties around Bucharest.

The pressure increases especially when they are requested in two places at the same time. Also, effective public policies and measures for consistent reduction of vulnerabilities (poverty, lack of education, inappropriate family environment, lack of opportunities, etc.) are more than necessary.

Although, supplementary funds for many NGOs involved in this area are required (ADPARE, Research report, p.28). As we know some of them have closed down during the pandemic due to this issue. Others have preferred to convert into refugees' centres/camps because they succeeded to obtain the necessary funds more easily and more quickly.

From the academic environment, a deep involvement is required in the following directions:

- to organize many more national conferences with national and international participation
- to publish the articles/volumes as result of each edition of these conferences- to promote and participate in more campaigns with all institutions, NGOs, other entities, in the field of preventing any type of victimization
- to promote the positive results of all these activities each time when there is an occasion
- to sign some collaboration protocols between the specialized agencies and specialized research entities for the development of qualitative research.

Also, for a positive feedback it is important to start the research studies with a pilot-unit, to apply for a longitudinal study, to improve all the conditions on this level and then to generalize this type of experience for other counties.

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