

Protect children on the move



## **Vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking of Bulgarian children and adolescents in Greece**



Title: Vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking of Bulgarian children and adolescents in Greece. A case study of street based survival strategies in Thessaloniki

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Author: Dr Antonella Invernizzi

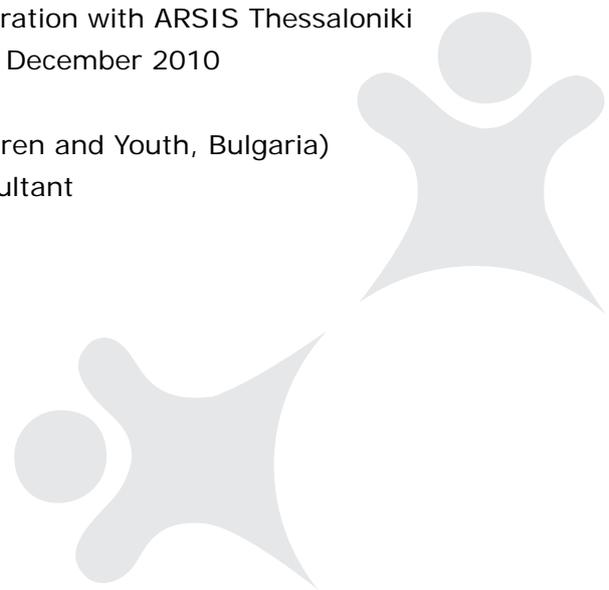
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# VULNERABILITY TO EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING OF BULGARIAN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN GREECE

A case study of street based survival strategies  
in Thessaloniki

RESEARCH REPORT

Organisation: MARIO Project, Budapest in collaboration with ARSIS Thessaloniki  
Research start and end date: 22 November 2010 – 31 December 2010  
Data collection: Valbona Hystuna (ARSIS)  
Ulyana Matveeva (Alliance for Children and Youth, Bulgaria)  
Report author: Antonella Invernizzi, research consultant



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# FOREWORD

This research has been done within the framework of the Project Mario,<sup>1</sup> an initiative that represents a further step in the long-standing cooperation between Terre des hommes and ARSIS, its ultimate goal being the protection of the rights of children at risk or victims of exploitation and trafficking.

The immediate objective of this research is to give an indicative as well as detailed picture of the extent and specific dimensions of the phenomenon of mass begging in Greece, particularly of children and families from Bulgaria. This group has increased rapidly in recent years, particularly in Northern Greece, with Thessaloniki, where the research was mostly carried out, as a main destination. The data gathering exercise lasted a month and through social work on the street and interviews with relevant services, providing thereby relevant information.

For ARSIS as for the partners of the Project Mario, the reason behind this action is not limited to theoretical interest but has multiple other values. The long term aim consists of creating favorable conditions for the improvement of strategies, management methods and solutions to tackle the problem in the best interests and for the protection of the child.

This goal takes into account the transnational/European dimension of the problem and is based on the involvement of the relevant frontline services and stakeholders in both countries (Greece and Bulgaria), as well as the concerned European bodies and institutions.

The information gathered throughout the research and the main conclusions reached point to the clear and urgent need for transnational coordination and immediate adoption of measures in both countries.

These measures should be part of a comprehensive and effective plan of action aimed at understanding, monitoring, tackling and ultimately addressing the phenomenon as well as creating/activating a web of services for social assistance and protection of children.

The key elements of such a plan should include:

- The conclusion of a specialized intergovernmental agreement
- The transnational coordination and cooperation between law enforcement authorities, the judiciary and the social services of both countries
- The creation or activation of national networks of services and agencies for the direct management of cases in the country of origin, that is Bulgaria, and the destination country, Greece. The main areas of intervention should be:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.marioproject.org/>

- In Greece: information and public awareness actions; intergovernmental social research – assistance and temporary accommodation – voluntary repatriation keeping the best interests of the child as a primary consideration
- In Bulgaria: prevention – reception and assistance as well as reintegration as part of durable solutions keeping the best interests of the child as a primary consideration

The Project Mario partners and ARSIS are willing to provide all the necessary support to any initiative of Greek and Bulgarian authorities going in that direction.

The two organizations therefore call:

- Both governments to tackle adequately and in a timely fashion the child protection concerns identified in the research, especially by setting up concrete transnational programmes involving public and private stakeholders.
- The European Union and other regional organisations to increase their efforts to identify and address highly sensitive child protection issues between Member States but also with non Member States
- Donors to support transnational activities immediately addressing the needs identified in this research

**NIKOS GAVALAS**  
founding member of ARSIS

## Acknowledgments

This report is the result of the joint efforts of ARSIS staff, particularly Valbona Hystuna and Nikos Gavalas in Thessaloniki, Ulyana Matveeva, from Alliance for Children and Youth in Sofia, the Terre des hommes staff of the Regional Office in Budapest and the research consultant. Further support for the research has been given by volunteers in ARSIS Thessaloniki as well as Athens.

A number of stakeholders and staff in various agencies and organisations have also taken time to provide us with relevant information on the situation of Bulgarian children and adolescents in the streets of Greece; among them the police unit for minors and of organised crime, both in Athens and Thessaloniki, prosecutors working on cases of minors and trafficking in Athens, Bulgarian Embassy in Athens and Bulgarian Consulate in Thessaloniki, the Children's rights department of the Greek Ombudsman's office, E.K.K.A, NGO A21, and ARSIS shelter for temporary accommodation.

# INTRODUCTION

Streets and public spaces in Greece are vibrant and lively spaces during the day as well as night for leisure and social life and also for a number of very diverse economic activities. One might mention artists such as musicians or actors, elderly people selling coffee or cigarettes, people selling snacks or lottery tickets, women near markets selling cloths and curtains, adults and children selling candles or other religious items, tissues, CDs and DVDs, flowers, with beggars seemingly gaining the sympathy by showing disability or family responsibility, which usually means carrying a baby or a toddler in their arms, or being accompanied by a disabled child. We also observed an adult with an adolescent seemingly in need of care, with a sign explaining about the surgery she needs. At the traffic lights, young people might hand out advertising material or leaflets to drivers whilst adolescents and adults clean windscreens. This is the scenario in which this research took place. Such a broad range of economic activities are carried out in the streets by a very heterogeneous population: old and young, of Greek as well as foreign nationality, of Roma origins as well as belonging to what it is usually considered as Greek mainstream society.

Streets in the cities are often fast changing and some of the street work observed during this research might be the survival strategies of particularly vulnerable individuals facing hardship as a result of the economic turmoil. This might include internal or international migrants looking for income in very difficult circumstances. For others, such as students and young artists, the street is a space for generating income as well as having an audience for performances, thus incorporating a dimension of rehearsal and training. For those who beg or sell services or goods of limited use, the need is to generate compassion and empathy in order to gain some kind of income. Where this entail situations of authentic distress and extreme uncertainty, begging equally involves a display of the suffering and powerlessness to persuade the potential benefactor to support the beggar. In some cases, the display might be quite aggressive, as in the case of a woman with a baby showing her breast to drivers to bluntly point to the fact she was breastfeeding. Some beggars might act out fake disabilities, for instance a young woman who cleverly hid her arm in the sleeve of her coat whilst begging or pretend to have family responsibilities by carrying a child in her arms who might be that of a friend. Begging might also be a sort of cover for other activities such as picking pockets and for spotting potential victims or distracting them. More worryingly, both begging and delinquency might be, as information on trafficking shows, for the benefit of others whereby individual children and adults might be working under the hidden control of more powerful and sometimes well organised adults who are forcing and exploiting them into these activities.

It is in this complex, constantly changing and very diverse environment that street social workers act to support children and adolescents facing hardship and risks and attempt to protect children from the most negative aspects of the street life. This includes identifying abuse and exploitation as well as, when and wherever possible, potential patterns of trafficking. Professionals need to build at least an often implicit framework to distinguish fake needs from 'real' ones whilst accepting that display of misery is part of begging. They have to identify potential delinquent behaviour behind the 'less unacceptable' and often tolerated survival strategies and, when it comes to family survival strategies, make

the part of that which is the outcome of poverty, instability or particular widespread practices of some categories of the population from what is abuse or exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. They also need to keep an open mind on the possibility of trafficking in human beings.

This research was aimed at supporting policy making and programmes active in the field by contributing to a better knowledge of the situation of these populations. Whereas street economic activities, including the most marginal and problematic ones, are from far not a question of specific grouping or categorisation but by and large cover a broader number of national and foreign ethnic and age categories, the specific focus was on Bulgarian children in the streets of Thessaloniki as part of the activities of the MARIO project. It resulted out of a partnership between MARIO project, Terre des Hommes and ARSIS Thessaloniki. ARSIS has proven expertise in the area of child trafficking and has already implemented a number of programmes in Greece and Albania with children working in the street that include prevention and protection in relation to trafficking as well as support for families.

Whilst the population of Bulgarian children in the streets of Thessaloniki was seemingly increasing, communication and intervention with this population was confronted with barriers in communication and lack of background information on these specific groups. MARIO project's set up for the study thus included a research team made of ARSIS based social worker, Ms Valbona Hystuna; Bulgaria based social worker, Ms Ulyana Matveeva (Alliance for Children and Youth, Sofia) and the research consultant who is author of this report. The research set out to examine the situation of Bulgarian children and adolescents living and/or carrying out economic activities in the streets of Thessaloniki with an examination of migration patterns, vulnerability to and experiences of exploitation and, in the event, of patterns of trafficking.

## 2. THE RESEARCH

### 2.1. Key concepts

**Children and adolescents.** The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child applies to all persons under 18 years old and is thus the age line retained for this research. A few cases of young people aged 18 are also mentioned in the report since their vulnerability raises cause for serious concern. It has been opted to discriminate, where possible, between babies and toddlers, children and adolescents given the nature of the very different needs that usually characterise their situation.

**Economic activities in the street.** The notion of economic activity includes informal work, trade or services provided in streets, squares or markets as well as what is commonly not seen as 'work'. That includes, for instance, theft, begging or prostitution which, however, are means of generating income. Called sometimes 'marginal activities', most of them are also illegal. Work, vending, begging and theft cannot always be entirely differentiated and a grey area exists. The trade children (and adults) carry out can, for instance, take on the appearance of begging when the service is of little use to the client, the price is disproportionate or when the attitude of the child is of incessant demands and thus synonymous with that of begging. Similarly, the offer can be made with an implicit or explicit threat to the potential customer who might buy a product or pay for a service as a means of avoiding theft or damage to property, for instance to their car. Begging is also used in some places as the first stage of pickpockets' tactics to approach potential victims. Beside difficulties in classifying some of street based economic activities, it is useful to consider the fact that begging might be seen and referred to as 'work' by those who perform it.

**Family based survival strategies.** Survival strategies include economic activities that generate very little income, such as those above as well as insecure street trade. Among the characteristics of them are low incomes and the precariousness of the economic activities whereby individuals' efforts are solely oriented towards covering the cost of basic needs. In family based survival strategies, the organisation of daily routines is often a combination of income generating tasks with those of care and supervision of children.

**Migration.** The broad notion of migration is employed in the sense of the physical movement of human beings from the place of birth or residence to another. This does not take into consideration the legal status migrants have at their destination which usually differentiates between internal (national) and international (immigrant) individuals. Account must also be made of the legitimate and/or legal nature of the move which is to say accounts for whether frontiers have been crossed legally or illegally and how far such movements are accepted within society.

**Exploitation.** The notion of exploitation has different meanings depending on the intellectual tradition and the values of those who employ the term. The use of the notion of exploitation generally refers to an abusive treatment and an excess, out of which one will always arrive at a moral judgement (Schlemmer, 1996, 2000). The exploitation

of children has traditionally been conceptualised as having two dimensions (Rodgers and Standing, 1981). The first relates to the added value taken away from the child. The second relates to the situations where the added value a third person removes exists owing to working conditions that have a detrimental effect on the child's health or development.

In the field of child trafficking, the focus on exploitation is on exchanges other than those between biological parents and the child and the intent to exploit is the motive behind the movement (of children) from one country to another. A list of the main forms of exploitation is spelled out in UN instruments, namely in the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Trafficking Protocol):

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3, Para a)

As Dottridge remarks,

[t]his definition applies to a range of forms of exploitation, such as commercial sexual exploitation (i.e. child prostitution or the production of child pornography), forced marriage, and any occupation in which a child is forced to work or make money for someone other than a parent or guardian. (Dottridge, 2007:12).

**Child Trafficking.** The definition of trafficking in persons is as follows:

'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (Trafficking protocol, Article 3, Para a)

In the case of children, however, the means adopted by the trafficker are not necessarily relevant for the definition of trafficking:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article. (Trafficking protocol, Article 3, Para c)

In previous Terre des Hommes publications, key characteristics that allow the distinction between trafficking and other forms of migration or work have been identified thus:

What distinguishes cases of trafficking in children from other situations in which employment agents or other intermediaries help children to leave their homes or their countries and to relocate elsewhere is that trafficking is characterised by a phase of exploitation. [...] This definition applies to a range of forms of exploitation, such as commercial sexual exploitation (i.e. child prostitution or the production of child pornography), forced marriage, and any occupation in which a child is forced to work or make money for someone other than a parent or guardian. This definition covers situations in which children are abducted or enslaved. It also

includes situations in which children are in servitude, for example in debt bondage (the situation when a child is required to work in order to pay off a loan which either the child her/himself or one of the child's relatives has borrowed). Children are forced to work in a wide variety of occupations, such as begging, domestic work, and various forms of agricultural or sweatshop work. With the exception of commercial sexual exploitation, it is not the fact that a child is working in one of these sectors which signifies that she or he has been trafficked, but rather the fact that the child is subjected to some form of force or constraint and is not entitled to leave. Traffickers who recruit and move children have an awareness or intention that the young people concerned will subsequently be exploited. This distinguishes them from other recruiters or intermediaries who help children find work but who either have no intention of putting the children into a situation of exploitation or no knowledge whatsoever of the constraints imposed on them after they start work. (Dottridge, 2007: 12)

## 2.2. Research methods, ethical issues and child protection

This research aims to achieve a better understanding of the situation of Bulgarian children and adolescents found in the streets of Greece with particular focus on Thessaloniki. Initial questions focused on a rough assessment of the number of children and adolescents, exploration of their needs, examination of migration patterns, potential mechanisms of exploitation and, if any could be identified, of trafficking. The main methods used were street observation and informal interviews with children, adolescents and adults as well as interviews with a number of stakeholders, organisations and social actors who, in different ways, might be in contact with Bulgarian nationals working in the streets.<sup>2</sup> An interview/observation schedule was prepared and a number of characteristics noted by social worker for each child and adolescent in order to gain a basic overview of the situation. Yet, on some occasions very little could be learned, when the environment was one in which noise and traffic stood in the way or simply when adolescents didn't wish to stop working to talk to the team. Considerably more information could be gained from adults, mainly women, who carry out street economic activities in the centre of Thessaloniki. This report essentially reflects these differential levels of information. More attention might be paid to family based survival strategies and less to the experience of adolescents who work without visible adult supervision.

Research questions and methods were discussed within the research team and members of the organisation's partner in the project during a workshop at the beginning of the research. Particular attention was given to ethical issues and child protection with emphasis placed on child protection mechanisms in place and on how to ensure that the best interest of the child was considered in all aspects of the research. This entailed thinking about the rights to privacy of children and adults, confidentiality of information as well as acceptance of a sort of 'uninformed dissent' whenever informants were unwilling to talk to social workers. Tools for recording information were tested and adapted during the initial days of the research. The research questions and methods as well as key ethical issues are described in Appendix 1.

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<sup>2</sup> This included A21, NGO supporting women victims of trafficking, Social Services (EKKA), representatives of the Police of Minors and the Police of Organised Crime both in Athens and Thessaloniki, the Prosecutor of Minor and of Trafficking in Athens and Social Services associated to the Court, the Children's Rights Department of the Greek Ombudsman as well as the Bulgarian Embassy and Consulate.

## 2. THE RESEARCH

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Data were collected by a team composed of two social workers, a Bulgarian speaking street social worker from Sofia and a Thessaloniki based street social worker. The lead researcher also accompanied them in street social work over a period of two weeks. Two volunteers and a few visitors also supported the research in the early stages by mapping the presence of Bulgarian children in selected locations; although no in-depth communication could take place in the absence of a fluent Bulgarian speaker. The research started on 22 November and was concluded on the 31 December 2010.

A three days fieldwork in the streets of Athens also was planned in order to contrast and compare the situation in Thessaloniki. However strikes in public transports undermined street work during that period since most of the children who usually travelled to the city centre to work were unable to do so during the strike period. Only one woman with a child of Bulgarian nationality was found in Athens.

It is common in street based research to consider an opportunistic sample that is to include in the study the persons who are actually met at some point in time in the street. This was indeed the only option available as no programme was actively working with these populations and no previous knowledge of their situation was available. Research questions set up at the beginning of the research equally could only be opportunistically answered, depending on the quality and the depth of information gathered. As an exploratory study, however, it permits formulating questions for future research and identify key dimensions to be considered for policy making and programming.

Data presented have to be read in the light of a number of limitations this study entails. Firstly, the paucity of information, due to the lack of time team had to contact children and families. Their economic activities were located over a very large area. Whereby adults found at the centre of the city could be met a few times, many adolescents could be found at traffic lights outside the centre in situations where it is relatively difficult to maintain a conversation for more than a few minutes. Where research cannot rely on existing positive relationships this means only superficial information can be gathered. Conversation sometimes remained very much embedded in strategies adolescents and children deploy in their everyday lives. Seeking economic rewards and maintaining the highest possible level of anonymity seemed to be the priority for a number of young people. This influenced information they gave to social workers about the length of their stay in Thessaloniki and their accommodation which was imparted cautiously by some informants. Indeed, begging is illegal and some of these minors work unaccompanied whilst others are in Greece without their parents. This is more than a sufficient explanation for their cautiousness.

A second restraint concerns the information on family relationships. When examining the possible occurrence of child trafficking this issue is of importance as theoretically children might be presented as family members by those who exploit them. Clearly, only a formal authentication of their identity could confirm or challenge the statements made about the relationship between children and adults accompanying them and, thus, produce 'hard' evidence. Yet social research usually recognises that what is said by informants, although not hard evidence and to be handled with care, becomes data. An alternative option would consist of questioning any informants' statements and / or including identity controls as part of the research design. Yet, a systematic distrust would certainly hamper any analysis in terms of migration, survival strategies as well as, almost certainly, lead to a highly negative and stigmatising attitude towards this population.

Street based social research generally opts for an alternative approach consisting of a non-judgemental and respectful attitude, triangulation of information (that is repeated exchanges, often in different settings and exchange with different individuals) as well as a relatively long presence within a particular milieu (for instance Lucchini, 1993 and 1996). The combination of research with intervention, when possible and when accurately planned, can also support information gathering (Invernizzi, 1999). However, only some of these approaches could be attempted during the short research. Respectful and non-judgemental attitudes of social workers who repeatedly met some families in the city centre and, wherever possible, provided some minimal support with basic items and, indeed opened access to information in some depth with a number of families, presented in this report. The third limitation of this research is to be found in the partial information on adolescents working with peers or on their own and, equally importantly, their views. Child focused research enables understanding of the meaning children give to their experience in the street (for instance Lucchini, 1993 and 1996) or their work (for instance Hungerland et al, 2006). Projects that do not consider children and adolescents' motives and views are likely to be less efficient. Children and adolescents have an important contribution to make to research that aims to gain a better understanding of their situations as much as to interventions of which they are supposed to be the beneficiaries. Yet, given the limitation of the research setting described above, their point of view is not sufficiently made available through this research.

## 3. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE STREETS OF THESSALONIKI

### 3.1. The range of populations carrying out economic activities in the streets

Adults and children engaged in economic activities in the street are a heterogeneous group (see introduction). Beside Greek nationals, other groups of immigrants work on the street using a variety of strategies, products and services.

**Children of Greek nationality** found in the street are generally assumed to be Roma. It should be mentioned that a number of individuals of other ethnic origin can also be seen in the streets of both Athens and Thessaloniki although more rarely accompanied by children. Adults from a number of other countries also use the street to generate income, but again are more rarely seen with children. Greek Roma children could be met only rarely in Thessaloniki but several could be contacted in Athens in a single day.

**The Romanian population of children and families** carrying out economic activities in the street is quantitatively relatively important and visible both in Thessaloniki and Athens. Numbers of nationals of one or another country nonetheless vary over time. In 2009, during a training organised by MARIO project in Thessaloniki, a considerable presence of Romanian nationals was recorded beside that of Bulgarian nationals. One year later, the number of Romanians in the streets had considerably reduced in Thessaloniki whilst the number of Bulgarian children and families working in the street had apparently increased. In the view of stakeholders and other agencies, their presence is more numerous in Athens than in Thessaloniki. Indeed some could be approached in Athens. Beside the higher number it is possible that a qualitatively different phenomenon that requires closer examination may be found in Athens. What is different to that observed in Thessaloniki, is that children as young as five years old of Albanian, Greek and Romanian nationality have been encountered whilst working in the street without adult supervision. Street economic activities might trigger specific difficulties for younger and/or inexperienced children facing a relatively complex environment without the support of adults or, as in the few cases observed, older children and adolescents. Research with children working or begging in the street in Athens has, for instance, shown that younger children express their fear of drug users who, they indicate, do antagonise them and/or take their money (Prokopou, 2008).

**The Albanian population of street working children** is very present in both Athens and Thessaloniki. In Thessaloniki, this was the most visible group of children who circulate around restaurants in the centre of the city in the afternoon and evening without the constant supervision of adults. Older children seem to look after the younger ones, although adults seem to be overseeing them from a distance. As ARSIS social worker noted regarding the difference of other groups of street working children, these groups appear relatively well dressed and generally tend to attend to school and work part-time. This is partly the outcome of ARSIS programmes since 2002, in collaboration with

Tdh and partners in Albania<sup>3</sup>. What was described by ARSIS social worker is a sort of professionalisation of those children who moved away from more marginal economic activities towards selling variably more valuable goods and services. This observation correlates with other studies which have evidenced how children's work evolves both in the meaning given to the activity and the way it is performed (Invernizzi, 2001). Younger or inexperienced children under extreme pressure to generate income will tend to focus almost solely on tasks that generate income whilst not being excessively tiring, whereby more experienced children who are not under strong pressure from poverty or parental expectations and/or have a good knowledge of the working environment will tend to make space for play, exploration and peer relations whilst they progressively look for economic activities that are recognised as more dignifying or more skilful.

Beside the evolution of individual economic activity, it is the evolution of the situation of the overall group or community that bears an influence on the children's situation and daily routines. Albanian immigrants are relatively well established when compared to other nationalities. Migration and work involve gaining a basic knowledge of a city and its streets, the potential dangers, police attitude, of resources, services and potential jobs available, etc. This knowledge and skills help individuals to cope with risk and become more established within a determined space and is reflected in a more relaxed attitude in the street. ARSIS social worker observed changes over the years. She mentioned a progressive improvement in their working conditions, including in some cases a better division of labour within the family where a number of mothers were, for instance, selling items nearby the market of Thessaloniki rather than exclusively supervising their children during work. More importantly, according to ARSIS, most working children were attending school and working around school hours. The overall process thus appeared to entail the elimination of a number of negative aspects of children's work. It is worth noting that some Albanian working children were allegedly of the second generation and, inevitably, enjoyed different circumstances to the first arrivals.

### 3.2. Bulgarian children, adolescents and families

Between November and December 2010, 62 Bulgarian children and adolescents were approached in Thessaloniki, most of them carrying out an economic activity of one kind or another in the street. In addition, four young adults aged around 18 and 19 were included in the research as they either accompanied other adolescents or carried out economic activities possibly associated to exploitation or detrimental outcomes. Two of them were disabled young persons begging at traffic lights and a 19 years old girl was arrested for delinquent behaviour together with a 15 years old peer.

It is very unlikely that the number of children and adolescents contacted during the research reflected the entire Bulgarian population as the research team could not cover the extended area in which they carried out their economic activities.

Information collected is also fragmentary and cannot be seen to reflect a representative sample of the population. One has furthermore to consider that children and families change location regularly, and might carry out more than one economic activity.

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<sup>3</sup> In the framework of TACT project. More information is available at: <http://www.tdh-childprotection.org/projects/tact>

### 3.2.1. Children and adolescents by age

The ages of children and adolescents varied. In some cases, they were vaguely assessed by social workers. Notably, there were considerably more younger children and adolescents in the street than primary school children:

Under 2	Age 2-5	Age 6-11	Age 11-14	Age 15-17
12	10	13	18	9

Babies and toddlers, as well as children as old as five years old, were often found in the arms of adults begging and this particular economic activity explains their notable presence on the streets: more than one third of the children encountered are aged 5 or younger. Given the generally low ages, it is not surprising that most of the children encountered were directly supervised by an adult (40 cases). Most of the adults claimed they were the mother (30 children and adolescents). In one case, informants identified the adult accompanying the child as the father and in nine cases as a relative, either grandmother or more often aunt.

Unsurprisingly, adolescents have more often been found working at traffic lights cleaning windscreen, begging or selling small items. In Thessaloniki, they make up most of the minors working seemingly without adult supervision, and more often work in small groups of peers (16 older children / adolescents) and more rarely seemingly entirely on their own (5 adolescents).

The situation of Bulgarian nationals in the street stands a little in contrast with what was observed in groups of other nationalities. As mentioned above, Albanian children, for instance, often work in groups moving more freely, although an adult will be present at a reasonable distance. In Athens, a small number of very young children, including two girls as young as five, were working apparently unaccompanied by adults.<sup>4</sup> This might be due to the fact that Bulgarian nationals are not established in the streets of Thessaloniki and, as we shall see later, some of them seem to circulate repeatedly between Greece and Bulgaria. A few adults expressed a number of fears in relation to their children, for instance babies being taken away from mothers giving birth in Greek hospitals or 'white' children being 'stolen'. This seemed to reflect a feeling of insecurity which might trigger stronger supervision of younger children.

Given the possibility that children and adults carry out more than one economic activity, information on that likelihood has to be handled with care. At the time of contact, a significant proportion of children were begging or supporting adults begging in the street and a smaller number of them sold small items.

<sup>4</sup> These children were of Romanian nationality (two girls age 5) and of Greek nationality (three siblings age 11, 6 and 5 who were seen descending on their own of a bus).

## 2. THE RESEARCH

<b>Economic activities</b>	<b>Number of children / adolescents</b>
Mother / carer begging with a baby/ child in his/her arms or nearby	18
Windscreen cleaning	12
Begging	10
Selling tissues, candles	9
Playing a musical instrument or helping parent/carer who plays music	3
Pickpocket	1
Unknown	10

Among adolescents apparently working on their own there were a small number of disabled young people begging at the traffic lights outside the city centre. Boys and girls aged 17 and 18 were moving between cars stopped at traffic lights and supported themselves with walking sticks. We also met three other unaccompanied minors, aged 12 or 13, who were begging or selling small items. They usually displayed a distrustful attitude towards the social workers; so that the first and generally sole contact with them did not allow them to gather precise information about their situation.

### 3.2.2. Origins

The origin of the Bulgarian nationals found in Thessaloniki varied and included a number of provinces in the north, east, west and centre of the country. Amongst the places of origins given by informants were Varna region, Dobrich, Pleven, Ruse, Sofia, Shumen and Vidin. A considerable number of children, making up nearly one third of the total number, appeared to have originated from Ruse<sup>5</sup>. A couple of our informants furthermore described belonging to a group of women and children travelling together. They tended to have young children with them and begged with a child or baby in their arms.

<b>Origin</b>	<b>Number of children</b>
Ruse	18
Pleven	6
Sofia	6
Elin Pelin	4
Varna region	4
Shumen	3
Vidin	2
Kostinbrod	1
Unknown	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>

A general assumption among professionals and most of the stakeholders is that Bulgarian children and their families in the streets are all of Roma origin. Bulgarian ethnic and Roma identities are however relatively complex issues in Bulgaria and elsewhere (Giordano and Boscoboinik, 2003). In Bulgaria, the so called Roma community includes groups of different origins, religions and practices. As Kostova notes, Roma identity is more a matter of being imposed by other ethnic groups and has less to do with

<sup>5</sup> In 2009, street work carried out during a short training organised by Mario in Thessaloniki showed that most of Bulgarian children were from Sofia and Ruse (see <http://tdh-childprotection.org/news/we-need-bulgarian-street-workers-to-work-with-us-in-thessaloniki> )

identification of themselves in terms of particular characteristics or practices (Kostova, 2003). Beside relatively larger families in comparison with the general population, very few practices can be assumed to be a reference in terms of identity. As Kostova indicates, 90% of the Roma population in Bulgaria is defined as sedentary rather than nomadic.

For the purpose of this research, there was no systematic attempt to investigate the ethnic origin case by case. Many informants spoke about Roma language or explicitly identified themselves as Roma; in a single instance, however, an informant did explicitly reject a Roma identity and defined herself as 'white'. It is important to avoid simplification regarding ethnic origins and avoid misrepresentation or potentially stigmatising assumptions that do not account for the diversity of experiences and identities. That said, the portion of Roma people met in the street is high. Literature on Roma background accept that rather than identity, what characterises many Romani in Bulgaria is the social isolation and lack of integration, with, for instance high levels of poverty, unemployment and barriers to and within the education system (Kostova, 2003.) In Kostova's words, '[t] is further increases the mistrust not only in all these institutions but also in society as a whole. Therefore, the group closes further onto itself or chooses illegal strategies for survival (2003: 52). It is in this context that migration and survival strategies need to be replaced.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bulgarian rate of at-risk-of poverty in 2008 was of 21/4%, ranking just below Greece in EU countries. As Greece, Bulgaria encounters low impact of social benefits in alleviating poverty. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Living\\_conditions\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Living_conditions_statistics) Bulgarian population includes around 3% Roma. This category presents considerably higher levels of unemployment and poverty as well as lower school achievement (for instance Kostova, 2003). As in other countries, significant number of human rights violations against Roma population have been evidenced, including violence, forced eviction and high level of discrimination (See for instance: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/bulgaria> and <http://www.hrw.org>)

## 4. MIGRATION AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Survival strategies are a matter of influence at each social, cultural, economic and political level as well as the result of the creativity and skills of those involved. In relation to Romani, the literature shows that they have traditionally carried out specific economic activities which are sometimes apparent in the name of their ethnic group (Kostova, 2003). Migration, as the literature indicates, is often a family matter:

[o]ne significant difference between Romani and non-Romani migration remains: [...] Romani migration is never a migration of an individual, but of families and extended families (Sobotka, 2003).

For Roma population in Romania, Pantea (2009) also notes how 'traditionally' both migration and work have been actions of families rather than of some of its members.

Although an increasing number of families from the majority population of Romania also experience problems of unemployment and poverty, solutions for them are often very different. With the majority population, one or both parents may emigrate to find work, whereas with the most deprived Roma families, parents are more likely to remain at home with their children. The same pattern was seen in relation to the Roma in Albania (De Soto et al. 2005). The main reason why Roma from Albania do not emigrate (which I found for highly deprived Roma from non-traditional communities as well) is that they lack both the initial money and social capital (De Soto et al. 2005). If they do, they tend to emigrate together with their entire family, including children, and have very little trust in the institutions aiming to 'mediate their positions'. (Pantea, 2009:26)

The widespread possibility of family migration and family work among the Roma population clearly bears an influence on explanation of the very presence of children in the street who are accompanied by adults and are generally described by informants as parents and relatives.

The very notion that family migration and work are a widespread or 'traditional' practice among Roma population warrants scrutiny as well as a few other observations. A detailed analysis of situations observed indicate that only in few instances Bulgarian nationals seem to be in a situation where all family members are found together in Greece. What was indicated in two cases points furthermore to the fact that this is the outcome of a number of trips back and forth between Bulgaria and Greece for several years. The first visit to Greece did not necessarily involve the complete family.

Of the 17 women the research team could discuss with in greater depth, 10 stated that they had left children at home, often at very low ages, in the care of relatives. The families described are relatively large and the likelihood of three or more children is not infrequent, which indeed appears to reflect the overall family structure of the Roma population in Bulgaria (Kostova, 2003). The case of women leaving some or most of their children at home was particularly notable among a number of women who came from the same district and were begging with their very young children as in the case of E. below.

Temporary migration and repeated movements between Bulgaria and Greece (circulatory migration), appear to be a recurrent feature among the groups studied. When information on this topic could be gathered, women frequently declared having been in Greece previously. A few considered they were relatively well established in Greece with some returns to Bulgaria from time to time. A few seemed to make regular moves between Bulgaria and Greece.

No assumption should be made either about 'traditional' practices of Roma or about a general pattern in relation to movements between Bulgaria and Greece. The diversity of immigrants' geographical origins and diversity of situations they face, as shown in the next paragraph, do not allow for that kind of generalisation.

#### 4.1. Examples of different family based survival strategies

Data collected among adults is considerably better developed than that gathered among adolescents working without visible adult supervision. This clearly has an implication for the subsequent analysis, where little is said about the organisation of the group of adolescents working independently from parents or other relatives.

Information on survival strategies provided by women with children in the street points at a diversity of survival strategies and variably effective movements to Greece. Whereby some informants describe situations of powerlessness and extreme difficulty, including covering basic needs for children, other adults appeared to describe flexible plans which, albeit extremely uncertain, allow them to generate some income. Among them the case of E., who was approached several times by social workers.

*Begging in the centre of Thessaloniki, E. generally had her four years old child sleeping on her arms whilst her older child was sometimes with her and (she was) sometimes with another woman. She was occasionally found by the social worker outside a supermarket and with regular contacts some conversation followed. The social worker noted how the older boy, an active and smiling nine years old boy, was progressively able, after a few weeks in Thessaloniki, to initiate communication with people in Greek language. E. stated she did not have the support of the father of her children and was bringing them up on her own. Two other children were at home in Bulgaria. E. indicated she came from a town in northern Bulgaria. Differently to other women approached, E. moved with a group of other women and children who, she stated, supported and helped each other. The migration strategies seemed to follow a particular scheme as E. stated she relied on a return train ticket. This minimised the risk of being 'stuck' and unable to go back home should the situation in Thessaloniki become difficult. Her daily incomes seemingly allowed her to save some money - she stated between 5 and 10 Euros per day - and in her discussions with social workers she anticipated which goods she could possibly buy and take home, mentioning for instance meat for the Christmas meal and some medicines.*

E. stated she planned to return to Thessaloniki in the future. One can easily see that her survival strategies were relatively better developed and that the social capital she possesses ('the group of families who help and support each other') is an important part of the equation.

Like other Bulgarian adults, E. seemed to have found a more or less viable economic strategy for a relatively short term migration. Yet, detrimental aspects of work for

children in this situation are noticeable; including exposure to very cold weather and other features detailed in the following paragraph (para. 5). In a relatively different situation, another small group of young women who were usually begging with their babies in front of a church likewise described a relative satisfaction in relation to the outcome of their migration, particularly when compared to the situation of newcomers who were homeless and 'slept in card boxes'. A mother clearly claimed that in Greece they could 'earn more money' and that people gave them clothes and bought them food. The small group relied on mutual support and these women were living with their husband and family members but differently to E. they were able to share the cost of renting a flat. Their situation, however, was apparently the outcome of a longer process whereby some of these women had been in Thessaloniki for five years. Other Bulgarian nationals living in Greece for a relatively long period would carry out other jobs such as office cleaning, metal collection and garbage removal. Incomes, in their view, were higher than those they could expect in their home towns in Bulgaria. Beside this, some migrants also clearly expressed the notion that in Greece Romani faced less discrimination than in Bulgaria. Nonetheless, their living conditions remained relatively poor. A visit to a flat where a group of families lived showed that their accommodation lacked all basic services such as water and electricity.

The variable outcomes of migration become apparent when comparing the above statements with those made by R., another woman begging in the streets in the centre of Thessaloniki who was approached a few times.

*R. had with her two children aged seven and two. Another child, five years old, was left in Bulgaria. R said that her husband had left her a few years earlier and she was bringing up the children on her own.*

*Sitting on the large pavement of a main avenue, the seven-year-old girl would beg a few meters away from her mother who was also begging with the youngest child in her arms or near her.*

*R. said, during the first conversation with the social workers, that she was 'cheated' and brought to Thessaloniki with the false promise of a job. It took a few meetings before she would provide details about these events. She stated the family came to Thessaloniki by train and the ticket was paid for by a group of men who promised her a job picking fruits and also looking after an old person. She said that on their arrival they were then taken from Thessaloniki railway station to an apartment where she was told she would work as a prostitute. They were locked in the flat and because she refused she was hit in front of her children. R. claimed they ran away when the door of the flat was left unlocked and she has never met these men again. In the files, social workers recorded how little the child would reply to her or the mother's questions and the absence of any smile during conversations which is relatively unusual when compared to other children. In the social worker's view, the little girl was traumatised by the events. Indeed the mother mentioned an incident when they once went to the police station and her child screamed in fear, refusing to get into the police car. They were released after two hours.*

*The mother also claimed that her children were becoming ill from the exposure to cold weather and were regularly asking to return home, missing their brother and being worried about him. R. stated they were sleeping on their own in an empty field and sometimes used the railway station to get warmer. She also said that she did not have any support in Thessaloniki. In her own words, she was earning very little money, sometimes not achieving even 5 Euros income a day. She aimed to accumulate sufficient money for a train ticket to return home. However, after a few weeks in Thessaloniki, this appeared to be a difficult aim to achieve.*

#### 4. MIGRATION AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

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R's story should clearly be examined within a trafficking framework (see paragraph 6). However, it should be stressed that other Bulgarian families whose experience did not include any attempted trafficking displayed distress and hopelessness, suggesting high levels of risk and serious difficulty in ensuring family survival.

*G. was a 23 year old mother of a four-year-old and 10-month-old and accompanied by her own mother. Like other families, some children were in Thessaloniki whereas others were left in Bulgaria. In this case it was the grand-mother who had left two children in Bulgaria as, she stated, they were in school. Showing more optimism at the first meeting, they mentioned the support of Greek people sometimes buying them food or giving money and a general environment where Roma were less subject of discrimination than in Bulgaria. Living in an abandoned house in the centre, they had people around them who gave them some furniture. At the second meeting, however, they appeared less confident. They regarded it extremely unlikely that they would find a job in Greece as they had hoped. In her distress, the children's mother mentioned the death of her husband, Christmas coming and her inability to provide her children with a toy for a present, her helplessness when facing the prospect of further street begging as well as the odds of having to prostitute herself to generate money.*

In this case, as in that of R., the vulnerability of family survival strategies is evident. It is a reminder that **a plan that might at one stage seem viable in terms of survival might instead become an even more unsafe situation of vulnerability to exploitation.**

Some cases seem to suggest that begging was regarded as an economic strategy with perhaps some hope to move on to other options if a job could be found. Other Bulgarians, alternatively, explicitly claimed that the rationale of their move from Bulgaria was the job they were promised. Beside the case of R., another Bulgarian woman talked about an attempt to force her into prostitution. Two other Bulgarian women stated they came to Thessaloniki with the intention of working. The team was told they were brought by road with private transport and left at the train station to wait for collection by employers who never showed up. Neither Thessaloniki nor begging was seemingly contemplated as they had expected to work in agriculture (harvesting potatoes and olives). When this did not materialise, they were left 'sleeping in card boxes' and begging, which was nonetheless carried out in a rather 'unconvincing' manner. It was the outcome of a move from Bulgaria that 'went wrong', thus leaving street economic activities as the last resort strategy.

Begging, cleaning windscreens or selling tissues generates very little income. Yet, they require a number of skills and information. There is the need to know where, when and how to address the potential customer and to deal with competition among individuals and groups for the most advantageous locations. Discussion among women revealed some were expelled by others from specific spaces. Even small incomes, thus, require an effort and skills that some individuals do not have and perhaps do not wish to gain. This is well illustrated by the number of cases whereby adults and children moved to Greece for a job that did not materialise and thus ended up carrying out street economic activities as a means of survival.

## 4.2. Some key features of family movement and survival strategies

### *Opportunities offered by public transport*

For a significant number of adults and children encountered, it is transport facilities that tend to explain the movement to Thessaloniki rather than elsewhere and that makes circulatory migration possible. The direct train from Bucharest that stops at some of the places from which immigrants originated is apparently an important criterion.

### *Poor living conditions*

The outcome of movement might be that low incomes do make a difference in the family budget when returning home or even in Thessaloniki itself, as a few informants seem to suggest. Yet, this could not be assessed in the study. A disquieting feature is, however, the unspeakable living conditions in which some Bulgarian adults and children live along with extreme difficulties in covering basic needs.

Accommodation was a critical issue that could not entirely be examined with the required depth within the research period. Many Bulgarian adults and children met said that they were sleeping in the open, particularly those who had very recently arrived in the city. Yet, some of these statements were occasionally a strategy to avoid being too precisely located. What was usually said the first time was that they arrived a few days earlier and slept around the railway station. This allowed them to maintain a level of anonymity and avoid situations that could undermine their safety. In one way or another, any economic activity they could carry out presented itself as illegal whether begging, work on the black market or delinquent behaviour. One young girl clearly made a request for discretion in relation to their accommodation and requested that the social worker 'not to ask' about the location of the hotel room in which she was living with her sibling and aunt as, she claimed that adults would deeply dislike having strangers come to see her there. Sleeping in room hotels was the other claim made by some adolescents who were often even more concerned than adults about their anonymity.

Undoubtedly a number of our informants did sleep outdoors with no facilities in extremely harsh conditions and sometimes with very young children. Other Bulgarians and particularly those who were in Thessaloniki for a few years lived in rented accommodation. Although of varied costs, a large group of individuals seemed to be able to afford the rent of a single flat or house. In this case, it was specifically the cost of accommodation that would be at the top of the list of what they had to cover with their marginal activities in the street. Yet, comparatively speaking, these adults judged their situation as considerably better than those who were homeless. The existence of basic services in accommodation could not be assessed. Only one home was visited during research and it lacked all basic services including electricity or water.

### *Gendered economic activities*

The fact that the large majority of adults encountered in the street were women deserves special attention. Many of them claimed they had family responsibilities without support from children's' father. That information need to be handled with care as it can be explained by serviceable begging strategies where women sought to provoke compassion

and support rather than entirely reflecting their situation. However, the representation (and possibly overrepresentation) of single mothers among adults and children carrying out marginal activities in the streets does require further examination.

On the other hand, a gender perspective is imperative since the majority of adults involved are women. That approach often enables proper understanding family organisation where children are involved. Basically, when child care is involved it would be inappropriate to examine survival strategies solely as a means of generating income. In these situations, adults generally need to combine work for generating income with the care and supervision of children and this predicates the particular way they perform their daily tasks. Women need to find ways of conciliating or at least avoiding entirely dismissing the needs of children, nutrition, rest, warmth, etc. In these situations, networks of mutual support are of crucial importance. Whereby some women and families were relying on a network within which to support each other, some stated they did not have any such support and could not trust other members of the Bulgarian community.

**Far too often family survival strategies put in place by women are assessed either in terms of economic efficiency or in terms of childcare. Either consideration will inevitably be negative: they will earn less and be economically less efficient than an adult without childcare and they inevitably will be seen as less efficient at looking after their children than adults who do not have comparable responsibilities or need to combine them in such an insecure setting. Generally, little attention is paid to the attempts and strategies of adults to conciliate income generation with care and supervision of children.**

Yet, this is frequently the only option available to these women. Research on street working families in other regions has shown that how women organise survival strategies in the street will largely depend on the support they have financially (for instance, the contribution to the household by partner, husband or other adult) or as childcare that allows time free for economic activities (for instance, the presence of older children, grandmother or other relatives). Other aspects further influence the way survival strategies operate of which some have been identified above: the presence of social capital (for instance, a support network), economic capital (for instance, afford the costs of transports or whether to buy a return ticket), skills and knowledge of the specific economic activity (which, for instance, include knowledge on what makes a place suitable and viable for selling specific items or begging as well opportunity for finding less marginal jobs), the woman's own identity, her health, psychological and mental condition <sup>7</sup> (for instance, the powerlessness and the victimisation mentioned in the case of R. above).

**A gender approach and examination of resources women can rely on to accomplish survival strategies is of critical importance when examining these situations. On the one hand it is vital for policy making and programming that aims at child protection and/or improving living conditions. On the other hand it is crucial for any analysis in terms of exploitation and negative aspects of work.**

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<sup>7</sup> See Invernizzi, 1999 and 2001 for Peru.

## 5. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF STREET BASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND INDICATIONS OF EXPLOITATION

### 5. 1. Assessing aspects of work detrimental for children and adolescents

The main challenge when assessing potentially negative or detrimental aspects of children's work is that much of that might be more the outcome of poverty and instability as well as lack of services rather than the economic activities themselves. This means they would exist even if the child did not work. It also implies that **in the absence of those economic activities and income that the child contributes to generating, his or her circumstances could possibly be even more severely affected, albeit in a different way**. A further challenge is that some of what society sometimes considers negative in children's work is actually negative for the society and its economic development (a human capital approach) or refers to standards (such a minimum age) that do not apply well to members of some societies, categories or groups who adopt different child rearing practices. This does not necessarily conform to a child focused approach where children's needs and rights should be put at the centre (see for instance Ennew, Myers and Plateau, 2003).

An additional difficulty is that whereby an approach in terms of exploitation rationally tends to focus on the child worker, the organisation of work by an adult might logically tend to improve the conditions of all family members. This means **an adult organising a family survival strategy might be confronted with the dilemma of submitting a child to harmful working conditions or, in the absence of that income, face a decline in the living conditions of this child and also siblings or other vulnerable members of the family**. Although those predicaments remain largely unexplored through this research, they need to be further explored to correctly plan interventions aiming at the protection of working children and support for these families.

Economic activities in the street in a foreign country carry a number of added risks and given the extreme insecurity of their position, children and adults are sometimes exposed to severe working and living conditions. Among those, sleeping and working outdoors in adverse weather, sitting in relatively dirty environments and, perhaps in some cases, coping with dangerous traffic.

**During the move to Greece as well as when they are there, and when incomes are very low, it can mean children will not have the nutrition, rest and overall care they need. No doubt the detrimental effects of these economic activities for children can be severe. Condemnation of such unacceptable levels of deprivation should, however, also consider how to support women in their efforts to conciliate care of children with income generation.**

### 5.1.1. Formal education

Information gathered suggests that, as far as it could be assessed, none of the children of school age attended school in Thessaloniki. Most claimed they had attended school in Bulgaria and in a few cases it appeared that children never went to school at all. It was not possible, in the short research period, to examine what the exact situation of school attendance and achievement was in Bulgaria. As one of the mothers implicitly appeared to say, governmental benefits are conditional on school enrolment in Bulgaria which was an important reason for retaining children in school, an aspect equally stressed by researchers (Kostova, 2003: 47). As mentioned above, most children and adults contacted did not seem to have established themselves in Thessaloniki but were rather more moving between the two countries. Many of them faced a situation of extreme uncertainty. **Both temporary migration and insecurity in Thessaloniki might explain the enrolment of children in Bulgarian schools rather than Greek ones.**

School attendance is usually defined as a key issue when assessing child labour. Nonetheless, school attendance itself poorly reflects the complex issue of exactly how work undermines education, access to professional qualifications and or improved adult economic conditions.<sup>8</sup> Only detailed examination of school attendance patterns, access to school, quality and effectiveness of educational systems for these specific categories of children would allow correct assessment of the situation and plan policy making and programmes accordingly.

### 5.1.2. Concerns about the wellbeing of younger children

Beside potentially or actually detrimental general aspects of work, a few specific concerns have been identified during the research with Bulgarian nationals in the streets of Thessaloniki. The wellbeing of babies and toddlers in the arms of their mother whilst begging was one of these concerns. Social workers systematically encouraged communication with young children. In a few cases such as the one of R. described above, young children showed fear and distrust beyond what was usually seen in the street. For a few babies, concerns were expressed about sleep when the mother was begging. In one case, the social worker and mother were unable to wake up a baby. In another case, where mother and young child were approached several time, the social worker was never able to see the baby awake. Concerns were expressed about the possible use of substances to induce sleep in babies in order for the mother to beg. That issue has been raised in the past with reference to beggar women in different parts of the world. This requires separate consideration and equally needs to be handled with extreme care since substantiation is required that extends well beyond the simple observation of sleeping patterns. Only medical evidence could corroborate the use of substances and eliminate other possible explanations about these sleeping patterns. Needless to say, this is particularly important given the number of prejudices that exist against these groups of vulnerable people.

More detrimental aspects of work can be regarded to be a problem for younger children, particularly in relation to various risks present in the street. This research shows however, that younger children were generally found on large pavements and squares away from the roadsides and accompanied by adults. Research disclosed no hard evidence of younger children working unaccompanied among Bulgarians in Thessaloniki. In general,

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance: Boyden, Myers and Ling, 1998; Invernizzi, 2001 and 2005.

children seem to be subject to a level of supervision or control limiting risk of accidents beyond what may be observed in other settings such as in Athens and/or among groups of other nationalities (see above). Work at traffic lights, particularly outside of the city centre, was generally carried out by adolescents, and mostly without visible supervision. Because they are more experienced, those adolescents were more likely to cope with this particular working environment. Yet, precise risks associated with those activities, if any, could not be assessed.

### *5.1.3. The need to explore potential exploitation of adolescents and young adults with disabilities*

The slightly different situation of older adolescents with disabilities was similarly only superficially examined during this research. They could be seen and contacted on only one opportunity whilst they were begging among cars waiting at the traffic lights. An identical pattern was observed for the three young people, of whom at least one was under the age of 18: they would move among cars stopped at the traffic lights with the aid of a walking stick. Clearly, that task may entail higher risk for young people with limited mobility which, however, would require further examination. The potential risk of exploitation should also be explored (see below).

## **5.2. Identifying exploitative patterns**

Identification of exploitation in relation to children is not hard science and generally relies on a moral judgment of what is or is not acceptable (Schlemmer, 2000, 1996) well beyond the usual economic analysis. Whereby assessment of exploitation in adult employment might depend on minimum wages and legislation defining unacceptable working conditions, that precision does not exist for informal work and marginal economic activities, which is even more problematic in family based work.

### *5.2.1. Family work*

Family work is largely embedded in cultural definitions of family and the specific way it is organised to respond to the need for income. In some countries and in some sections of the population, family work is widespread and understood as a natural feature of family life. Each member is expected to contribute to family wellbeing. This has been observed in sectors of the population in so-called developing countries and similarly in the European context, amongst others within the Roma population in Romania (Pantea, 2009).

**To further complicate any assessment of family work in terms of exploitation are the changes in family organisation as a result of problems such as impoverishment, death or illness of adults, separation, unemployment etc. This often leads to changes in the roles of members. Where adults are unable to generate income, the responsibility might fall to children or adolescents. A simple analysis of economic exploitation in terms of added value unduly removed from the child or detrimental aspects of work for the child who is engaged in rarely reflects the complex situations encountered. Analysis needs to incorporate an understanding of a specific image of the family and the division of labour as too the essence of what poverty dictates to parents and children in terms of survival strategies.**

Information gathered during this research more than adequately illustrates the dilemma of interpreting situations. The case of women 'using' their babies or toddlers to beg can be postulated as exploitation since no such income could possibly be gained without the presence of the young child to encourage compassion. The child might be suffering from adverse weather conditions as well as all the detrimental features of street life, including sleeping outdoors. A further case is the one of a woman found in the street with her disabled child who told the social worker her child had a declared 80% disability. In the view of the social worker, that statement indicated the girl was entitled to governmental benefits. The woman indicated she had five other children left at home, aged between one and 17 years, with the older children looking after the younger. An analysis could easily conclude on the exploitation of this disabled child who was brought by the mother to boost her ability to beg as a disabled child was more likely to generate compassion. Yet, there is lack of evidence to sustain that analysis. The choice of the mother could be based on the fact that this particular child required specific care and attention that other children could not provide and thus her inability to leave her at home. It could equally be based on a less detrimental outcome for this child in terms of education when compared to the other children. The strategy may also be embedded in extremely difficult living conditions where income gained may support all family members. Other hypotheses or speculation could be postulated. The conclusion, however, is that despite the possible presence of some negative aspects of work for this child, no exact conclusion can be reached in terms of exploitation. Any analysis would require knowledge of the family background and exact living conditions at home, as well as the real alternatives available for this family to generate necessary income and ensure care of children within the family. Allegations of exploitation, as well as abuse, should be based on sound evidence since they carry the risk of stigma and spread prejudice against a population already discriminated against. Yet, this does not undermine any assessment of the needs of children and adolescents and of any detrimental effects of work that would need to be addressed, although within a broader framework of child protection and provision of appropriate services.

One item of data collected in the street also points to the possibility of minors being forced to beg. In one instance, the Greek social worker observed an old woman physically forcing an adolescent to sit on the floor in front of a church, clearly with the aim of begging. The issue of forced labour is critical in its link to trafficking. In this respect Delap indicates in a recent publication:

While it is necessary to distinguish between children being forced to beg by their parents or guardians and by third parties, particularly in order to determine appropriate responses, it is also important to remember that there can be strong links between the two forms. ARSIS, the partner NGO in Greece, for example, reported increases in parents forcing their children to beg following more stringent anti-trafficking provisions between Greece and Albania. Parents found that it was no longer 'cost-effective' to send their children to Greece with third party traffickers as the risks of them getting caught had increased. Parents also realised that they could gain a more substantial share of the profits from begging if they sent their children out to beg themselves. It is interesting that no evidence of children being forced to beg by parents was found in the literature review conducted as part of this research. Although this could indicate that this is not a widespread phenomenon, this lack of evidence is more likely to be a reflection of a lack of attention paid to exploitation by families and a preoccupation with trafficking by third parties. (2009:8)

The notion of exploitation within families has received attention in the past. The perception of parents 'forcing' children to work is relatively well known in the field of child labour and was a widespread conclusion of much research in developed countries in the early 1990s. As experts in child labour have noted, however, there is a need to break the vicious circle that consists of admitting that poverty and exclusion are the main cause of children's work whilst blaming parents for child labour (for instance, Bonnet, 1999). Attention has been paid to the need to address exploitation within families (for instance Nieuwenhuis, 1996) yet, the unease in applying exploitation criteria is to be found in the risk of fuelling prejudice against sectors of the population where child labour can be found instead of policy making and planning that appropriately address vulnerability and exclusion in which those practices are rooted.

Analysis of practices such as the example above when a child or adolescent is visibly forced to carry out an economic activity need to be carefully thought through and should at least include documentation of the views of the child and the adult and information on exact conditions. Otherwise, analysis risks solely resonating particular conclusions rather than proper examination of exploitative patterns. The use of the force or threat, a heavy disciplinary approach as well as physical punishment requires attention within a child protection framework. These are unfortunately widespread parenting practices employed to resolve all sorts of conflicts, including school attendance, what they eat, discipline issues of all kinds, etc. In insecure economic conditions or where work is an acceptable practice for all family members, such an authoritarian attitude might inevitably include the tasks of generating incomes. Research with working children in other settings shows that conflict between children and adults is not necessarily always about the choice to work or not to work but often about how, where or with whom the child would like to work (Invernizzi, 2001). Since most adolescents approached in Thessaloniki work with peers and sell items or services rather than begging, one could easily speculate that conflict could well occur between the adult and the adolescent who do not wish to beg. Yet, no evidence can be produced.

**Only proper examination of family practices and the views of adults and children could differentiate exploitative patterns from problematic and abusive parenting practices. Meanwhile, unacceptable parenting practices can be tackled by interventions with an appropriate and culturally sensitive framework for working with the questions of physical punishment or abuse.**

### 5.2.2. *Work outside the family*

The notion of children being exploited when they work outside of the nuclear family also needs to be scrutinised. A number of adolescents and some young children were accompanied by relatives, who were very often presented as aunts and uncles. No precise information could be collected on working conditions, use of adolescents' incomes and the nature of their treatment and the care the adult would provide children with. Similarly to nuclear families, the absence of that information undermines any possibility of assessing just how far these practices are rooted in networks of mutual support or instead imbued in clearly exploitative networks. It is likely that a grey area exists between the two extremes of care and supervision on the one hand and that of exploitation and/or abuse on the other.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The team was confronted with information that could be assessed in either direction. The practices of a mother leaving her child with another adult beggar could be seen as exploitation by third parties as well as the possibility of it being care by another adult within a network of mutual support. Discrimi-

**Only precise evidence permits corroboration of the hypothesis of exploitation and or maltreatment. A number of other cases observed also need further attention. The situation of a small number of young adolescents working without apparent adult supervision, sometimes in very hard conditions, is among those that urgently need further investigation. Similarly of particular concern was the situation of young people with disabilities begging at traffic lights. Cases of organised trafficking of adults with disabilities for begging including appalling levels of violence and injuries to generate further disability were confirmed by the police. This appears to be a group particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and further examination would be essential.**

Beyond direct exploitation within work, other forms of exploitation occurring in the street should be considered in future research and action. For instance, one could possibly examine the disproportionately high cost of rent for accommodation and payments made to ensure protection or ability to work in the street. No evidence could be gathered in this area except for a statement by an adolescent claiming that policemen do sometimes take her money.<sup>10</sup>

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nating one from the other is not easily done. In this exact case, for instance, the mother's explanation for what appeared to be an isolated event was that her child, on an extremely cold day, would be able to keep warm inside the railway station accompanying another woman rather than in the street with her, as she usually did.

<sup>10</sup> Police officers and government officials' involvement in trafficking networks is mentioned in both Greece and Bulgaria within the sexual exploitation sector (US Trafficking in Persons report 2010: 94 and 159). No information is however provided in relation to street economic activities.

## 6. VULNERABILITY TO TRAFFICKING

The empirical research in Thessaloniki provides adequate evidence of situations that require further attention where children and adolescents face deprivation of different types and extremely harsh living conditions. Exact patterns of what may possibly be exploitation could not be identified. As pointed out above, the option of simply incorporating detrimental or negative aspects of children's work, poor parenting practices and/or indications of abuse within a trafficking framework raises the risks of initiating inappropriate policy making and interventions. Only further investigation could provide relevant and sound information on trafficking in most situations outlined in this chapter.

### 6.1. Indicators for vulnerability to trafficking according to the UN Trafficking Protocol

A small number of statements gathered during the research referred to possible instances of trafficking identified by the trafficking protocol.

#### **Trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes**

Two Bulgarian women with children found begging in the street separately reported having been 'cheated' and brought to Thessaloniki with the false promise of a job. They both travelled with their children. The men involved subsequently attempted to force them into prostitution and in one case the woman was subjected to physical violence when refusing to become a prostitute. One of these testimonies is detailed earlier in this report (the case of R.). The second case was described by a woman approached in the street with her 10- year-old son whilst she was begging among restaurant tables. She told the Bulgarian speaking social worker she was collecting money for a train ticket in order to return home. She was brought to Thessaloniki with the promise of a job as a dishwasher and she said that on arrival she was told she would have to become a prostitute. She said she could escape with her son. Social workers did not meet her again.

Thessaloniki police are familiar with trafficking of women for sexual exploitation which has been experienced regularly among Bulgarian women. Nonetheless, the trafficking pattern described by the head of police section for organised crime does not involve children being moved to Thessaloniki with their mothers but them usually being left at home. In this case, it is believed threat to children left at home provide the means for controlling the woman in Greece.

In the event that the attempt to traffic these women reflects an existing pattern of trafficking between Bulgaria and Greece, attention should be paid to women as well as children who, as in the case of R. detailed above, experienced particularly traumatic events.

The mention of prostitution by Bulgarian women has been made by other adults and children, including a mother talking about the odds of having to become a prostitute

should the income she was earning from her very marginal activities in the street being insufficient. A 10 year old also brought up the theme of prostitution in his conversation with social workers mentioning brutality toward women he witnessed in Thessaloniki.

**This suggests the sexual exploitation market is relatively close to Bulgarian nationals carrying out other marginal activities in the street. Whereby the entry of these individuals into the sex industry is not necessarily considered under the trafficking protocol, it requires further attention.**

### *Trafficking for labour and forced begging*

Among police officers interviewed during the research, two seemingly opposed views could be identified in relation to begging related activities. Some officers suggested that begging is an element of family strategy and thus falls outside the framework of trafficking. Conversely, other informants clearly suggested that begging is (at least in part) organised and pointed out the existence of structured networks beyond family economic activities.

Data suggest that begging includes a variety of situations and strategies. No sound evidence of exploitation, forced labour or begging was found during the research period. Survival strategies appear to constitute a significant portion of the sample. Yet, lack of evidence on trafficking or forced labour/begging is likely to better reflect the elusive nature of the phenomenon and the limitations of this research rather than the entire situation in Thessaloniki. Further information is required on the situation of older children and adolescents begging, selling items or cleaning windcreens at traffic lights, many of whom claiming that they lived with a relative. A number of them were disabled.

Similarly the lack of evidence of control over families might simply reflect the elusive nature of the phenomenon rather than ruling out the existence of patterns of trafficking.

Finally, a small number of our informants expected to be collected from Thessaloniki and transported elsewhere for work in agriculture. Begging was apparently a last resort strategy because they were never collected. The occurrence of trafficking of persons for forced labour in construction and agriculture, a recognised trend in Greece<sup>11</sup>, should not be ignored.

### **6.2. Evidence of vulnerability to child trafficking**

Research found very variable concepts of exploitation used by stakeholders and other actors within agencies or organisations that have contacts with Bulgarian nationals in the street. This included notions of exploitation of children solely based on the belief that children should not work or on one-off observations of potentially negative features of work or questionable parenting practices. Some professionals proposed the notion that the Greek population who provide support to these children and adults are, as a matter of fact, the victims of exploitation. Others dismissed the risk of trafficking and stressed the 'traditional' nature of begging and street work among the Roma population.

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<sup>11</sup> US Trafficking in Persons Report, 2010: 158.

The overall tendency in some professionals is, however, to produce an assortment of statements in relation to exploitation that are too quickly positioned within the framework of trafficking. Child protection measures should instead deal with evidence based specific and clear indicators. Efforts initiated by Save the Children Italy (2009) in identifying acceptable indicators should be continued to include a broader perspective and knowledge acquired disseminated through appropriate training.

### *6.2.1. The position of family survival strategies within the framework of trafficking in persons in relation to forced labour and begging*

The interpretation of the provision made in the 2000 Protocol on trafficking in persons has apparently been made clear in relation to family survival strategies. A number of documents attempt to provide appropriate definitions.

Under the definition of trafficking in persons, the 2010 TIP report by the US Department of State states that:

Indicators of possible forced labor of a child include situations in which the child appears to be in the custody of a non-family member who has the child perform work that financially benefits someone outside the child's family and does not offer the child the option of leaving. Anti-trafficking responses should supplement, not replace, traditional actions against child labor, such as remediation and education. However, when children are enslaved, their abusers should not escape criminal punishment by virtue of longstanding administrative responses to child labor practices. (US Trafficking in Persons report 2010).

Recently amended EU legislation, yet not in force, is as follows:

In order to tackle recent developments in the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings, this Directive adopts a broader concept of what should be considered trafficking in human beings than under Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA and therefore includes additional forms of exploitation. Within the context of this Directive, forced begging should be understood as a form of forced labour or service as defined in the 1930 ILO Convention No. 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour. Therefore, exploitation of begging, including the use of a trafficked dependent person for begging, falls within the scope of the definition of trafficking in human beings only when all the elements of forced labour or services occur. In the light of the relevant case-law, the validity of any possible consent to perform such a service should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. However, when a child is concerned, any possible consent should never be considered valid.<sup>12</sup>

The need to avoid confusion between begging as a family strategy and forced begging is likewise underlined by the OSCE report:

When addressing trafficking for forced begging, which needs to be effectively prosecuted, it is necessary to consider the different problem of begging as a strategy of survival for many families who live in poor social and economic conditions. In this context, children are seen as contributors to their family survival and are not nec-

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2010-0471>.

essarily coerced, even though their rights are severely affected. Poverty, discrimination, lack of alternatives, and weak social protection systems are the main root causes that should be addressed by States to offer holistic viable options to vulnerable groups in order to minimize begging as a means of survival, while protecting the rights of the children concerned. (OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2010:16)

That distinction is important for avoidance of undue criminalisation of practices by families from poor backgrounds where income generated by begging is redistributed within the family to cover basic needs and where it is likely that no or limited alternative income strategies exist.

Another possible argument to propose in favour of that distinction is that although extremely insecure and sometimes very problematic, family survival strategies, particularly when associated with enlarged networks of mutual support within communities, might constitute a sort of protection against the worst forms of child labour. This has been suggested by Pantea (2009) in relation to Roma families in Romania. That hypothesis should be the subject of further study to include not only coping mechanisms within family based survival strategies but also the role enlarged families and mutual support network play in protecting and limiting the vulnerability of children to worst forms of exploitation and labour including trafficking.

### 6.2.2. *Exploitation of criminal activities*

Within EU legislation, exploitation of criminal activities is defined as follows:

The expression 'exploitation of criminal activities' should be understood as the exploitation of a person to commit, inter alia, pick-pocketing, shop-lifting, drug trafficking and other similar activities which are subject to penalties and imply financial gain. The definition also covers trafficking in human beings for the purpose of the removal of organs, which constitutes a serious violation of human dignity and physical integrity, as well as, for instance, other behaviour such as illegal adoption or forced marriage insofar as they fulfil the constitutive elements of trafficking in human beings.<sup>13</sup>

The issue of illegal adoption is not addressed in this report. Organised Crime Police in Thessaloniki did however mention investigation in this area concerning Bulgarian nationals. Social workers came instead across one case of a minor allegedly involved in picking pockets:

A 15 years old girl of Bulgarian nationality was met by social workers at the police station together with a 19 years old peer. Both claimed their innocence. The 15 years old girl stated she was living with an aunt in Thessaloniki. The girl provided a telephone number of her relative and social workers contacted them on the same day. The adult woman stated she was in the position to provide assistance from a lawyer to support the girl and did not request any support. ARSIS learned subsequently that the prosecutor was presented with an uncle on the following day and decision was made to release the adolescent to his care. According to ARSIS, no

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2010-0471>.

investigation was made on the role of the uncle beyond verification that he had the same family name as the young girl.

This clearly does not provide any evidence of trafficking. It does however show that the option of investigating a possible exploitation of criminal activities is not systematically chosen by prosecutors. ARSIS information indicates that this is not necessarily the practice all prosecutors would have adopted as in other instances such investigations would be carried out.

Whereas the role of families in trafficking is apparently ruled out for forced street vending and forced begging, it is considered by experts as associated to trafficking for the purpose of criminal activity. There is little knowledge of those activities. According to the 2010 report by the OSCE Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, there is in particular a lack of knowledge in relation to the interrelatedness of illegal practices:

Forced drug dealing, burglary, pickpocketing and counterfeited products selling are also associated with human trafficking. Data for these forms of trafficking are also scarce; however, a few police investigations and exploratory studies carried out in a few countries of the OSCE region provide some important information. Most identified victims are children, adolescents and young adults generally from South-Eastern Europe and North Africa. They are forced to perform these illicit activities by family members, acquaintances or criminal organizations. Interrelations between different forms of trafficking have also been detected: for instance, trafficked persons exploited as drug dealers or burglars may also be coerced in prostitution (2010: 16).

### 6.2.3. Definitional problems

Increased knowledge on child trafficking has led to precise definitions of the phenomena in legal standards as well as research. Yet lack of clarity was found among some stakeholders and professionals in agencies and organisations. Accurate definitions of trafficking should be imparted to organisations and stakeholders and appropriate training given to avoid mixing up of situations.

Definitional problems can lead to both hindering correct identification of trafficking of children and adolescents and arbitrarily include situations that are not included in international instruments. This situation might inevitably obstruct correct policy making and programming.

**A narrower definition of child trafficking might be seen as unduly reducing the scope of programmes, particularly in relation to family based street economic activities. Whereby the distinction between family survival strategies and trafficking for forced labour does not offer a framework for interventions, it should be stressed that the broader child protection framework permits addressing abuse or maltreatment of children within a family setting. This can and indeed should enable policy making and programming in this area.**

## 7. SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ENGAGED IN STREET BASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND FAMILY SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Recent research has assessed legal standards and the overall implementation of anti-trafficking measures in Greece (for instance Kalantzi, 2008, US Trafficking in Persons Report 2010). Although incomplete, Greek legislation is designed to make provision that broadly speaking conforms to international standards and places specific focus on prosecution of offenders and the protection of child victims of human trafficking and provide them with appropriate support (Kalantzi/FRA, 2008). Concerns are expressed in relation to the central management of information of child trafficking and deficient implementation of measures for the protection of the victims of trafficking (ibid). Information by the 2010 US Trafficking in Persons report also includes a widespread view among NGOs that insufficient attention is paid by the government to victim identification.<sup>14</sup>

Information gathered in Thessaloniki and Athens points at limited attention by the police and prosecutors to street based economic activities. The case of the 15 year old girl arrested on the grounds of alleged pickpocketing and released by the prosecutor into the care of a relative (see above) illustrates those limitations. In Thessaloniki, however, a case of organised trafficking of disabled adults for begging was reported by the police unit dealing with organised crime (see above). Police representatives mentioned their limited capacity to deal with begging, which is illegal, and investigate potential trafficking. This was explained by the family nature of the economic activities and the avoidant attitude of the population. Informants stated that when arrested, individuals often 'disappeared' before appearing before prosecutors. When they appeared before a prosecutor the outcome was largely influenced by the intervention of lawyers to defend their interests.

Whereas police of organised crime pointed out strong collaboration with Bulgarian authorities in the identification procedures, there does not seem to be similar collaboration in relation to child protection measures.

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<sup>14</sup> Whereby governmental statistics report that 125 victims of trafficking were indentified in 2009, NGOs have provided assistance to at least 3376 victims. In relation to investigations and prosecutions, the same report indicates: 'The police conducted 66 human trafficking investigations in 2009, a 65 percent increase over the 40 investigations in 2008. Fourteen of the new investigations involved forced labor, compared with only two in 2008. The government reported 32 new convictions of trafficking offenders, 12 cases acquitted, and 42 ongoing prosecutions in 2009, compared with 21 convictions, 17 acquittals, and 41 ongoing prosecutions in 2008'. (2010: 159)

### 7.1. Lack of appropriate accommodation for children and adolescents

A key problem identified by stakeholders and police representatives in relation to minors is the lack of accommodation for children and adolescents. The lack of appropriate accommodation was felt acutely in Thessaloniki. The head of the juvenile police said that one of the two offices of the department had been periodically arranged to provide shelter to minors and in one case to a mother allegedly begging with her baby. Also reported both in Athens and in Thessaloniki was the option chosen by prosecutors of placing children and adolescents in hospital during investigations and legal proceedings.

In Thessaloniki, two shelters offer temporary accommodation for children victim of trafficking under the aegis of the National Centre of Social Solidarity (EKKA), Ministry of Health. These are the Smile of the Child and ARSIS shelter. They however have limited funding to maintain their service and ARSIS has no capacity to accommodate children beyond the five actually in their shelter. Further accommodation for under 18s has in the past been found in adult shelters. A21 offers crisis and rehabilitation programmes for adult women victims of trafficking. During the two years of activity the NGO has received around 60 women and said that around 25 were Bulgarian nationals. Five children have also been accommodated in their shelter because, despite the inappropriateness of the setting for children, no alternative shelter could be found. Three of the minors were Bulgarian nationals and one of them as young as 11.

### 7.2. Child protection and welfare services

The absence of protective measures for children and adolescents in cases of potential or confirmed trafficking clearly bears an influence on the way government agencies and NGO staff will assess the best interest of the child.

Broader child protection services do not appear to be accessed by Bulgarian children and adults who work in the streets of Thessaloniki. Information by public social services shows these populations are not within the focus of their work. Social workers within EKKA identified only one case of each a Bulgarian and a Romanian family in their caseload. Intervention, in the case of the Bulgarian family, focused on support to the mother in seeking employment and school enrolment of children.

A number of generic health and welfare services for immigrant children and families working or living in the street have been available over recent years. Material assistance (such as food and clothes), health services as well as specific support, for instance for women or persons with disabilities, have formerly been offered by a number of organisations and charities.<sup>15</sup> At the time of the research however not all of these organisations were active and/or able to deliver services.

ARSIS implemented a number of projects in relation to trafficking of Albanian children between 2002 and 2009 which included work both in Greece and Albania. In Thessaloniki, in the past it set up a variety of services relevant for the situation of Bulgarian nationals detailed above. This includes legal advice, counselling and psychological support, support for searching for employment and referral to other services. Beside overall intervention

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<sup>15</sup> Service providers included Thessalonica municipality, the Hellenic Red Cross, Several churches, Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, ARSIS, Doctors without Borders and Praksis.

on vulnerable groups such as the homeless, a number of generic projects implemented by ARSIS were specifically targeting children and adolescents and included support for school enrolment and homework, language teaching and computer skills. ARSIS carried out regular street work up to 2009. Most of these programmes were no longer implemented at the time of the research due to lack of funding. Street social work was carried out irregularly as volunteer work and only the basic provision of clothes and food could be offered to Bulgarian immigrants in the street who participated in this research and a few cases were referred to other NGOs for health care.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 8.1. Main research findings

Research findings are fragmentary and partial and more reliable information could only be obtained with appropriate research preparation and design. A number of features of migration and survival strategies are however highly relevant for advocacy and programming.

**8.1.1. Sixty two children and adolescents of Bulgarian nationality were met during the research period in Thessaloniki. Most of them were accompanying an adult who was begging or doing so themselves whilst others were selling small items or services. Amongst the places of origin given by informants were Varna region, Dobrich, Pleven, Ruse, Sofia, Shumen and Vidin.**

**8.1.2. Temporary migration, mainly circulatory, is the main trend among Bulgarian nationals.** This includes repeated short trips to Greece in some cases or regular movements in others. In the words of a good number of adults, economic activities in Greece are economically more viable than any they could carry out in their home country. Yet, some **children and adults face very harsh living conditions** including sleeping in the street and difficulties in covering the basic needs of children.

**8.1.3. Migration strategies more or less explicitly focusing on very insecure street trade or begging appear to coexist with other strategies whereby Bulgarian nationals intended to find a job in agriculture or other sectors.** When the job anticipated did not materialise, begging became the only available strategy. Some families in this situation faced difficulties accumulating the funding necessary to return home. It is also worth bearing in mind that, despite its extreme riskiness, **marginal street activities and begging do not constitute the very worst option for these populations. Prostitution and delinquency are well within the range of economic activities on hand to these populations.** These were not sufficiently examined in this research. In two instances, women described an attempt to traffic them for the purpose of sexual exploitation from which they escaped.

**8.1.4.** Only formal identity checks could confirm actual relationships between adults and children. Yet, research findings reasonably point out that an **important part of economic activities carried out in the streets are family based survival strategies organised around a female adult.** Whereby a young child (and sometimes two) often accompany the woman, other children are apparently left at home in the care of relatives. In relation to these situations, concerns are to be expressed in three areas.

- 8.1.5.** Firstly, **most of the migrants face extremely harsh conditions and serious deprivation including temporary homelessness.** Yet, some of them appear to claim that incomes generated do make a difference to the family budget. Deprivation can entail serious effects on children's development.
- 8.1.6.** Secondly, possible concerns related to child protection were expressed by social workers in a particular case where a young child was repeatedly found asleep in the mother's arms. The use of substances to induce sleep in babies and young children for the purpose of begging is an issue regularly raised by media. Clearly this kind of issue requires appropriate analysis of germane literature, if any, as well as systematic investigation, which would necessitate incontrovertible evidence, well beyond simple observation. If so, this should be done in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner avoiding rumours and prejudices that often characterise the field.
- 8.1.7.** Thirdly, the **organised nature of begging deeply rooted in family networks** which police officers claimed this was the case, should be explored further. In the examination of such a network, **care should be taken to examine patterns of mutual support as well as possible aspects of exploitation.**
- 8.1.8.** The alternative situation in which a significant number of older children and adolescents were found was in street economic activities apparently unsupervised by adults. Where information could be gathered, **migration appeared often to be with relatives.** No information on migration patterns could be gathered from unaccompanied adolescents and young people with disabilities begging at traffic lights. **Concerns were expressed about potential patterns of exploitation within both groups. In this case too, care should be taken to investigate cooperation and supportive practices beside possible exploitative or abusive behaviours.**
- 8.1.9** Information provided by stakeholders, organisations and actors in contact with Bulgarian nationals in the street was very fragmented. Many informants seemed to better describe the difficulties they encounter in their actions due to the economic crisis, lack of co-ordination or clear policy but lack any picture of the problems encountered by Bulgarian children and immigrants in the street. **Many professionals seem to be unable to rely on a conceptual framework to identify exploitation or abuse within survival strategies, particularly when it is family based.** Within that conceptual vacuum, the risk is that one begins to see stereotypes and prejudices that are used instead of evidence and knowledge. Those situations clearly add the risk of increasing stigmatisation and discrimination that Bulgarian nationals in poverty already suffer.
- 8.1.10. Lack of shelter or accommodation for children** is the main barrier expressed by professionals concerned with procedures for the identification of child and adolescent victims of trafficking. Research would suggest that **protection measures for children and adolescents are not in place.** In Thessaloniki, no places in shelters appear to be available and professionals say that minors in conflict with the law or involved in legal proceedings are accommodated in inappropriate settings such as adult shelters, hospitals or police stations. Beyond procedures that strictly focus on trafficking, **the overall services for children and families require assessment.**

## 8.2. Adopting a HRBA approach to programming and services for children, adolescents and adults carrying out street based economic activities

The situations encountered during the research require attention at different levels and data collected suggest that **a narrow approach to trafficking (including identification, support for victims and prevention) is likely to have a limited impact on child victims of trafficking and appropriately address the acute problems encountered by them. Experts and organisations have increasingly often recommended that a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) is adopted to address child trafficking.** That approach aims to maintain the individuals, and particularly children, at the centre of policy making and action as well as promoting a very much needed holistic approach to policy making and programming. A comprehensive analysis of how a HRBA approach would exactly apply to the situation of Bulgarian children and adolescents in the street is beyond the focus of this report but a number of issues should be mentioned.

**Without appropriate provision of protection services for children and adolescents, identification procedures appear to be hindered.** Whereas police departments point out strong collaboration with Bulgarian authorities in the identification procedures, there does not seem to be similar collaboration in relation to child protection measures. This appears to be an insurmountable barrier for agencies and organisations attempting to work in the field.

**Adequate attention should be given to the rights to privacy of both children and adults.** Whereby appropriate evidence to support identification of cases of child trafficking requires meticulous information on family link assessments and the option of systematic use of such procedures should be measured against relevant human rights instruments.

**A thorough rights based framework should be promoted.** Whilst incorporating protection measures with a child trafficking component when and where needed it would have to address possible exploitation, inappropriate parenting practices, inadequate division of labour, delinquent activities, as well as situations of deprivation and extreme poverty and overall provision of services.

A number of cases identified in this research do not necessarily fit within current definitions of trafficking in persons yet they do require urgent attention. They violate rights of children set out in the CRC. This research has showed professionals' implicit definitions of exploitation are simultaneously narrowly placed within the framework of trafficking and have become confused and 'diluted'. **Indicators should be rather more reliant on the existing framework of children's work and child labour. That framework does not seem to be known or contemplated by stakeholders and other actors involved.** Accurate examination should focus on article 32 of the CRC and relevant right based approaches incorporated into advocacy, policy making and programming. In the case of unaccompanied minors in the street, a HRBA approach to so called 'street children' might offer the relevant and complementary framework.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Beyond exploitation, other features of the migration and street survival strategies require urgent attention as they are potentially very detrimental to children and adolescents and constitute serious violations of their rights to protection and development. **Parenting practices, possible abuse and deprivation should be replaced in the broader approach of child protection.** This corresponds, for instance, to UNICEF's key recommendations, although it is suggested that more research is needed in the area (ICAT, 2010).

There is general acknowledgement that **further research is needed to gain a better knowledge of trafficking in relation to street economic activities** (for instance; 2010 report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings). Yet, proper settings and design should be put in place to ensure a rights based approach could be applied. Research should also support the efforts to **relocate child trafficking within the broader field of child protection.** As indicated by UNICEF:

First and foremost, better research is needed to link child trafficking and other child protection issues, including children's rights to access education, to survival and development, to health and other services as well as the mitigation of children's vulnerability to exploitation throughout the migratory process and the protection of children whose lives have been negatively impacted by migration. The root causes of and the contributing factors to child trafficking need to be discussed holistically in closer relation to other child protection concerns. These include violence and abuse in the community, at home or in institutions; gender-based and other forms of discrimination; social and economic marginalization; livelihood opportunities for children and young people; and social norms including systems and structural factors that put children at risk of being trafficked or otherwise exploited. (Recommendations by UNICEF in ICAT, 2010: 50).

**A focus on communities of origin should be included and a study of interrelated forms of lack of protection** as suggested by UNICEF. Further knowledge should be gathered on practices of single parent headed families and extended families. Extended families and networks clearly constitute a grey area within the conceptual framework of child trafficking. The search for contextualised indicators for trafficking and exploitation within such networks should be accompanied by a search for indicators of mechanisms of protection and coping strategies that could and should, subsequently be promoted through preventative programmes.

**A gender analysis should be integrated given the gendered nature and the central role women play in street based survival strategies.** Proper consideration of parental practices beyond problematic cases of abuse should be maintained to conform to a HRBA approach that promotes support and respect of parental responsibilities. That approach is likely to provide highly relevant knowledge for culturally sensitive approaches to address child trafficking.<sup>16</sup> This would help ensure that programmes do not inadvertently generate harm,<sup>17</sup> undermine the scarce resources and support that actually might sustain

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance ILO, in ICAT 2010,: 'Outreach and assistance measures to actual and potential trafficked persons have to be tailored to fit different needs of men, women and children coming from different cultural backgrounds. These measures have to be sustainable in order effectively to prevent trafficking, addressing vulnerabilities and root causes, and empowering communities to take action against trafficking.' (2010:43)

<sup>17</sup> See Dottridge: 'Another key principle concerning the primacy of human rights points out that measures to prevent trafficking should not "adversely affect the human rights and dignity of persons"' (2007: 36).

the resilience of children and or trigger further insecurity within these already vulnerable groups.

The lack of basic services in Greece has serious implications for Bulgarian children and adolescents as well as adults accompanying them. Some of them live in extremely harsh living conditions and face problems in covering the basic needs. **Survival and development rights of children are at the core.** Whereby Bulgarian nationals are entitled to access a number of services, in practice they face considerable barriers as they often do not possess the knowledge and language skills needed to actually access such services. That situation might have a highly detrimental effect on children in terms of physical, mental and psychological development. In this context, generic services offer a critical role in ensuring basic needs, including minimum health care and alleviation of extreme poverty.

Participation rights also have to be considered. **Participation in the field of child trafficking should at least involve listening to child and adolescent victims of trafficking and promoting a general involvement of children and adolescents in prevention measures** (Dottridge, 2007). It is suggested that further involvement of children and young people would be more efficient and constructive if related to broader aspects of interventions and within a rights based approach that goes beyond trafficking and exploitation to include rights to protection and provision. Unless well rooted processes of consultation are in place, focus should be on everyday lives of children and adolescents rather than on abstract policy or programming issues.

The limitations of this research in examining the views and experiences of children and adolescents themselves hinder proper planning. **Design, setting up and location of further research, if any, should ensure that researchers have access to children and adolescents in favourable conditions for exchange.** Consultation processes could also be included but this should be only done when proper resources to support the process are available and thus avoid token exercises.

Research findings also point to the need to involve adults in these same issues. This appears to be vital not only because of the high numbers of babies, toddlers and younger children found, but also because of the central role adults have in the migration process of adolescents and the organisation of their work, which seems to be explained beyond individual family practices. Careful consideration has to be given to potentially negative outcomes of programmes and campaigns in terms of respect of dignity and identity of ethnic groups involved. This cannot be considered without relying on relevant knowledge of the socio-economic background and social practices that are common within these groups. Beside involvement of Bulgarian stakeholders, participation at community level would ensure programme and policy making are culturally sensitive.

### **8.3. Recommendations for action**

**8.3.1.** Policy making and programming in favour of children involved in street based survival strategies poses a number of challenges. Among them the broad range of interrelated needs and rights violations that have to be addressed as a priority; the high level of mobility and fast changing nature of migration and economic activities and the lack of information and understanding of social, economic and cultural backgrounds of these populations. Advocacy and policy making in Greece should principally focus on implementing services for the protection of children

which should go beyond offers of services on the grounds of vulnerability to child trafficking and include a diversity of problematic situations. Greek authorities should however take measures to ensure that services conform with a rights based approach with proper consideration of its key principles. Provision of crisis shelters to accommodate children when they need to leave the street is vital. Yet, the best interest of the child should be given proper consideration when examining available options. Unless those services are complemented with a number of street-based programmes it is unlikely that the elusive nature of the phenomenon can be overcome and the complex needs of children and adults addressed.

- 8.3.2.** International co-operation between Bulgaria and Greece is essential to address the needs of children in terms of child protection and identify appropriate practice. This research indeed provides relevant illustration of how the joint knowledge and skills of Greek and Bulgarian professionals can achieve a considerably better understanding of needs and rights of Bulgarian nationals in the streets. Action and services seemingly need to rely on that framework. It is recommended that options for international cooperation are explored to facilitate the work of governmental social services as well as NGOs.
- 8.3.3.** A rights based approach embracing a holistic child protection strategy should be adopted to ensure that situations that do not exactly correspond to the trafficking of persons under the international instruments, but which raise serious concerns about the needs and rights of children, are addressed. Such initiatives should rely on existing expertise in policy making and programming for the protection of street and working children's rights. Appropriate training should be provided for professionals to ensure correct identification of the nature of exploitation and the detrimental aspects of children's work with particular focus on situations that this research could only superficially address, which is the case of adolescents working seemingly unaccompanied and who moved to Greece with relatives or other adults.
- 8.3.4.** Culturally sensitive interventions should be designed and a gender perspective included as it is vital for proper understanding of how interventions can efficiently tackle problems within migratory survival strategies but also take into account the difficulties children left at home might experience. A central focus on communities of origin should be maintained.
- 8.3.5.** Further research should support above initiatives with particular focus on generating greater knowledge on family based survival strategies and the detrimental outcomes they potentially trigger, as well as the exact characteristics and functioning of enlarged networks that might at the same time provide support for vulnerable individuals and/or entail exploitative and abusive mechanisms. Academic networks with research expertise in areas related to child trafficking, child labour, child migration, street social work and Roma communities could be encouraged<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Suggestion has been made by staff within the Bulgarian Embassy to organise an event aiming at identification of best practices in working with adults and children involved in street based survival strategies within the region.

**8.3.6.** Patterns of migration change relatively rapidly over time, as the case of the dramatic decrease of Romanian nationals in Thessaloniki shows. Inevitably initiatives can only be taken at regional level to increase viability. The option of a network involving more than two countries should be explored in order to ensure the mobilisation of resources and expertise where and when needed. Ideally, this requires joint efforts by networks, gathering existing expertise from a variety of experts including policy makers, human rights organisations, researchers and academics, representatives of governmental social services and NGOs. Best practices in the region could thus be identified and implemented widely.

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# APPENDIX 1.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS, ETHICAL ISSUES AND CHILD PROTECTION ADDRESSED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE RESEARCH (RESEARCH PROTOCOL)

Question	Methods
1. How many Bulgarian children are there in the streets in Thessaloniki?	Rough counting and mapping of children per location with information on gender, age, ability/disability, economic activity
2. What is the situation of Bulgarian children and families in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration patterns</li> <li>• Vulnerability to trafficking</li> <li>• Vulnerability to exploitation through work, indirect exploitation and hazardous /detrimental work of children?</li> </ul>	Observation and conversation with children and families in the street by a team composed by a Greek and a Bulgarian Social worker
3. What are the needs, wishes of children and what are the indications suggesting possible resilience?	Observation and contact in the street and contact in ARSIS where relevant <hr/> Small number of interviews with adolescents in ARSIS when possible
4. What is the situation of the community of Bulgarian immigrants in terms of welfare and rights, safety, exploitation, vulnerability to trafficking?	Observation during street work Observation and contact in the location where families gather and sleep overnight (railway station)
5. What is the situation in Athens in relation to Bulgarian immigrant children in street situation?	Observation and contact during a short visit to Athens based ARSIS programme

It is recognised that whilst research with children should adhere to a single set of ethical standards, that and also studies of other vulnerable groups require a few further considerations.

For this research the following issues are relevant:

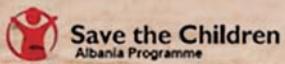
Child protection. All staff, consultant, volunteers, observers or visitors involved in the research to adhere to:

- All staff, volunteers, observers or visitors have to consider the *best interest of the child* when carrying out research. Situations which might entail immediate danger for the child have to be reported to ARSIS social workers to find appropriate solutions.
- All staff, volunteers, observers or visitors have to agree to Terre des Hommes' policy in relation to *child protection* and relevant TdH forms were signed during the first meeting. *Implementation* of child protection policy rests with ARSIS in recording relevant information and making appropriate contacts for transnational investigation of specific cases.

- *Informed consent.* Given the sensitive nature of the field, a number of precautions have to be taken in order to ensure that participants (children or adults) are not subjected to abuse or deterioration of their living conditions because he or she has taken part of in the research. Informed consent is obtained verbally from research participants. Particular attention has to be paid by researchers to dissent whether it is *informed* or otherwise. *Uninformed dissent*, which is when children or adults do not wish to enter into an exchange with street workers, has to be accepted. This is intended as a means of avoiding any situation wherein children or adults are placed under constraint or control and could consequently be further abused by an adult controlling them because they have talked to the social worker.
- *Anonymity* will be respected in all documents detailing the research. This means that no research participant can be recognised in or through documents or publication. Information required for programming or specific child protection intervention will be separately stored by ARSIS.
- *Confidentiality* will be ensured as far as it does not conflict with the child's best interest and with child protection procedures. This means that information given by the research participants will not be communicated to third persons. Only with the exception of child protection related issues may this information will be communicated by ARSIS staff who will decide on the appropriate procedures and professionals to be involved to ensure the safety or wellbeing of the child.
- *Confidentiality* about the general information collected during the research must also be emphasised. Most of the participants have signed a confidentiality form. Any public communication in relation to the project should involve an explicit risk assessment in terms of publicity about the situation of Bulgarian immigrants and the detrimental measures that it could be trigger, including fuelling actions conflicting with the best interest of these already vulnerable children and communities.
- Information will be *stored safely* in a computer in the ARSIS office. The copy of data in the possession of the research consultant will be destroyed after the conclusion of the final report.
- To ensure that exchanges with social workers do not generate further feelings of distress or hopelessness in children, a few questions to conclude the contact with the child have been prepared. Focusing on more positive aspects of the child's life (what he or she likes or who he or she loves), they will permit conclusion of the exchange on a positive climate whilst also potentially providing relevant information.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This specific features draws on the work by Beazley, Bessel, Ennew and Waterson, 2005.



JOINT ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM EXPLOITATION IN EUROPE