



PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT OF VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MOLDOVA

A UNTFHS funded project implemented by UNDP, IOM, and UNFPA
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Stories of success from the field

Background

The citizens of the young Republic of Moldova experience poverty, unemployment, inadequate public services, high rates of emigration, and increasingly, a breakdown of social and family structures. In many cases, vulnerable women and children are the most affected by these social and political challenges. It is not surprising then, that many of these vulnerable women and children fall victim to violence: at home in the form of domestic violence and at large in the form of trafficking in human beings. Both domestic violence and human trafficking are fundamental violations of human rights and serious threats to human security, and they are occurring in epidemic proportions in Moldova.

In response to this alarming situation, UNDP, IOM and UNFPA collaborated on the joint programme supported by the UNTFHS. The programme aimed to strengthen the capacity of Government institutions in partnership with civil society to provide quality identification, protection, and assistance services to victims of human trafficking and domestic violence on a sustainable basis. In tandem, the programme worked to empower communities, civil society organizations, and individuals to be better able to address the human security issues of human trafficking and domestic violence and to provide basic services for at-risk persons.

While there is still a long road ahead, the project achieved some important successes and improved the lives, livelihood and dignity of many individuals and families in Moldova. Below are a few of their stories.

COMBATting SLAVERY IN THE 21st CENTURY

Lilia's story

Lilia is 21 years old. She never got to know her parents. She was brought up in an orphanage and spent her childhood within the walls of a residential institution. The teachers and the children from the boarding school were her only friends and acquaintances. Lilia never knew life outside of the boarding school, but this did not prevent her from dreaming of going to university, buying a nice house, and getting a good job. Students



Credit: IOM Moldova

that graduate from boarding school have very low chances to continue their education and the majority of children from boarding schools enter vocational programs. Some graduates go to colleges and very few continue to university. Lilia was not lucky enough to continue her education once she left the residential facility. She only attended some tailoring training courses. It was very difficult for her to survive. She had no house and the money she earned was hardly covering the costs for meals and other necessities. *“What shall I do? Where shall I live? In the street, at the station?”* these were the questions haunting the girl when she had no money left in her pockets. Her desire to have a decent income and the continuous failures to find a job in Moldova pushed the girl into the trap of the traffickers.

For a while, Lilia was an agricultural worker in Moldova. Her employer offered her a similar job in Ukraine, but with a much better salary. It seemed to be the only chance to get things moving in the right direction. The positive experience of migrants that came back encouraged her to look for a job abroad. She was brought to Ukraine together with a group of other girls and when they arrived they were told that the only job that they would get was to provide sexual services to clients.

“I was destroyed gradually. They were taking me apart piece by piece. We were treated like merchandise. They could do whatever they wanted. They took our documents away and locked us, so we had no chances to escape. Several times I asked some clients to help me run away, but no one did”, Lilia says, remembering the nightmare she had been through.

After five months of slavery in Ukraine, Lilia was brought back to Moldova and forced to be a domestic worker in her trafficker’s house. Numerous times she was forced to have sex with the “master”. One day she found out that she got pregnant, but the trafficker wanted her to end the pregnancy, threatening that he would turn her life into a nightmare. After this, Lilia got over her fear and decided to run away.

When she tried to get away to another city, Lilia met another girl with similar experiences, who encouraged her to seek help from the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

“She told me that the specialists from this organization helped her to rebuild her life. She has the same story – graduated from a boarding school, got trafficked for sexual exploitation in Russia, and now she brings up a child all by herself”, tells Lilia.

Thus, Lilia came to the Chisinau Assistance and Protection Centre (CAPC) for victims and potential victims of trafficking in human beings, where she benefited from social, medical, psychological, and legal assistance. Later, Lilia was referred to a maternal centre where she stayed with her child during the first months after the baby was born. As Lilia did not have any relatives or acquaintances in Moldova, IOM together with CAPC helped her to buy a house outside Chisinau, where the property is much cheaper. Part of the costs incurred for the house as well as for other objects of need for her and the baby were covered by the ‘Protection and Empowerment of Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence in Moldova’ project. Today Lilia owns a house and has the means to take good care of her child. The specialists continue to monitor her case. Although she is safe and certain that she will not fall into the same trap again, the girl relives the nightmare she has been through every time she gets reminded of this time in her life. All victims of human trafficking need a lot of time to recover, sometimes their entire life.

BUILDING UPON EXISTING CAPACITIES

The psycho-social centre in Vulcanesti – first aid in cases of violence and trafficking

Nadejda Mocan, the Director of the psycho-social centre is well-known in Vulcanesti. Some people were her students in the lyceum, where she has been teaching psychology and family life education for more than 15 years. Others know her from her volunteer work for supporting people in difficult situations, which she has been practicing for more than ten years.

We met her for an interview in her office in the Theoretical Lyceum in Vulcanesti. The door opens every five minutes from people seeking advice, opinions, or wants to sign up for a consultation. People come here, to the lyceum, if they do not find her at the centre, which is hosted by the town hall.



Credit: IOM

Mrs Mocan tells us that she works with supporting domestic violence victims for a number of years, but now, due to the financial assistance from the Protection and Empowerment of Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence Project, she has the possibility to support a greater number of people. The people she works with are women beaten by their husbands, children abused by parents and grandparents, as well as people subjected to trafficking, who return in poor health, with no money, no hope, and angry with the world. It is not easy to work with people with such traumas, but Mrs Mocan says that she gets the most satisfaction from dealing with the more difficult cases.

During one year of activity, the psycho-social centre in Vulcanesti granted psychological assistance to over 500 persons that were victims of domestic violence and their families. At the same time, about 100 victims benefited from legal assistance. Hundreds of teachers, doctors, and social assistants from the district attended anti-violence seminars and disseminated the acquired information in their localities. For the three employees of the centre, the psychologist, the social assistant and the legal advisor, such an ample intervention would have been impossible without support from the project and without the contribution of the local public authorities.



Credit: UNDP

In order to inform the people about the centre's activities and to disseminate the anti-violence information, Mrs Mocan has organized dozens of seminars for parents, teachers, and social assistants. During this year, she has supported a psychological consultation column in one of the most popular local newspapers.

The children of migrants represent a special category of the centre's beneficiaries. As in many other localities, many children are left behind in Vulcanesti.

Their parents go abroad for work, leaving the children to their grandparents or neighbours. It is very difficult to imagine the psychological traumas these children go through. During a period of only a few months, the employees of the centre assisted two cases of suicide attempts among this category of children. Thanks to the intervention of the specialists from the multidisciplinary team who support the centre's activities, it was possible to rehabilitate these children, helping them to overcome their problems and to become fully integrated in the school community.

Until recently, the majority of these children were saying that they would also migrate, similar to their parents. *“The seminars organized for them induced a change in the attitude towards migration, and more children encourage their parents to come back and find their place at home”*, says Mrs Mocan.

The launch of a regional centre for domestic violence victims is among the future plans of the centre. Mrs Mocan is sure that she will find resources for equipping and furnishing this centre. The only problem is to identify its future location, which is supposed to be a regional one, serving the districts of Vulcanesti, Taraclia, and Cahul.

TAKING A PREVENTION ORIENTED APPROACH

The mayoralty of Cobalea village establishes a centre for children and youth

The inhabitants of Cobalea village, Soldanesti district, believe that the children and young people have the energy and power to change things for the better among their friends, within their families, and in the communities in which they live. Sometimes they even succeed in situations that adults cannot easily cope with. Therefore, they decided to prevent domestic violence and trafficking in human beings by investing in youth.

Currently, Cobalea village is bustling with activity. Adults and young people are working together to create a centre for children, youth, and members of vulnerable families from the village. The centre is being developed with financial support granted by the UNTFHS under the project “Protection and Empowerment of Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence”.



Credit: UNDP

“It is very difficult to change the mentality and the lifestyle of an adult. It is more efficient to invest in children and youth, in activities that help them network, cope with risky situations, develop life skills, and to motivate them to convey these messages to their peers, and - why not - to adults as well”, says Ana Cuceinic, the mayor of Cobalea village.

The centre in Cobalea opened at the end of 2009. It includes a number of clubs, including dance, sports, photography, journalism, hairdressing and make-up. A social assistant from the community will visit the centre several times a week to offer assistance and counselling to children.

“I am so eager to come here”

The centre opened within the premises of the village school and all the children from Cobalea village are able to come here. Adults are also invited to take part in some of the centre’s activities. All activities are free of charge and local authorities estimate that about 220 children, young people and adult members of vulnerable families from the village will benefit from the centre’s activities.

“Can we help you somehow?”, “will it be really opened by December?”, “I am so eager to come here”, “can we subscribe to several clubs?” – are just some of the numerous questions asked by the children during its construction.

“Children are very impatient. And when they met me on street during the summer time, they would stop me and ask me to tell them details about the future centre”, says Angela Spivac, the Principle of School No. 2 from Cobalea village.

The children's impatience and interest are understandable. The new centre will be the only one in Cobalea village. Until now, children and youth from the village had no other alternatives than to spend their spare time watching TV, hanging around in the street, or going to the bar or the disco club.

"We were so bored and we really envied the young people from the cities. We wanted to graduate from school as soon as possible and leave the village. But from now on we will have useful and necessary activities. I can't wait for the gym to open. For a while I used to go to Soldanesti to play football with the team from the town. But I was not always able to afford the transportation, so sometimes I had to stay home", Andrei, 14-year old, tells us.

How did the idea come about?

The idea for the creation of the centre was presented in February 2009. A group of villagers gathered at the mayor's office and discussed the most important problems of the village. They created the Organizational Committee, composed of the mayor, a social assistant, the school principle, police officers, doctors, and village inhabitants, who after long discussions and workshops developed the 'Village Strategic Development' plan. According to this plan, preventing and combating domestic violence and human trafficking are priority actions for Cobalea village. Subsequently, the Organizational Committee developed a project proposal, presenting the rationale for the need to open a centre for children and youth. UNDP and UNFPA supported the initiative, offering financial assistance of 132,960 MDL (about 12,000 USD).

Besides the establishment of the centre, part of the money (39,960 MDL) will be invested in creating and equipping a separate office for the social assistant within the premises of the mayoralty. Currently, the social assistant shares the same office with two other persons and sometimes she has to go outside to talk about more delicate topics or private matters of the village inhabitants.

"I am very glad that I will finally get my own office, telephone, PC. There will be even a meeting room where meetings with the families from the village will be organized in order to promote non-violence, inform people how to avoid the risks related to migration and human trafficking. I understand very well that it is difficult to change some deeply rooted attitudes and behaviours, but, gradually, I am sure that we will succeed in changing things for the better", says Nina Iatco, the social assistant in Cobalea¹.

¹ NOTE: In all, 25 villages and 5 towns in the Anenii Noi, Rezina, Soldanesti, Vulcanesti, and Grigoriopol districts will benefit from financial support for implementing the initiatives related to preventing and combating human trafficking and domestic violence, and provision of assistance to victims and potential victims.