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PROSTITUTION IN BULGARIA

Threats
to Human
Security



Citizens' Network for Human Security (cn4hs)

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Prostitution in Bulgaria: Threats to Human Security

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PROSTITUTION IN BULGARIA: THREATS TO HUMAN SECURITY

Bulgarian

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Summary in English

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From January 2015 to June 2016 the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) carried out for the second time research on the existing threats to human security in Bulgaria. The effort was part of a four-year regional project in five Balkans countries and Turkey, supported by Directorate General Enlargement of the European Commission (see more here: <http://cn4hs.org/>). Human security is a concept of security which focuses on the human aspect of the problem – the threats to the individual and his/her way of life, rather than on the traditional, state-centric aspect of security (national security).

The present study comprises two parts: a novel, qualitative research component on prostitution and the sexual services market in Bulgaria and the existing threats to human security of the people involved in it, focusing among other things on the changes that have occurred after a similar such study conducted in 2010; and a quantitative research component on the impact which the so-called controlled vote phenomenon in Bulgaria has on human security, building upon a qualitative study on the issue which IRIS's team implemented in the first phase of the current project (2014).

The research on prostitution and the sexual services market in Bulgaria from a human security perspective was led by **Stoycho P.**

Stoychev, non-resident expert with IRIS and associate professor of political science at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. It offers a profound look into the essence of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, organised crime and the place of Bulgaria in the global and European dynamics of these phenomena through the prism of human security. More specifically, the study analyses the state of the sexual services market in Bulgaria and the threats to the individual security of those involved in it in the beginning of 2016 and the change in the intensity of these threats as compared to 2010.

The methodology combines several analytical approaches: semi-structured interviews with female prostitutes, clients, pimps, traffickers of girls and former employees of the Ministry of the Interior; an analysis of the internet sites, offering paid sexual services; and an analysis of the motives behind court rulings and sentences linked to prostitution and sexual exploitation.

Conclusions of the study and recommendations

The evidence from the study shows that the major forms of violence perpetrated in the sexual services market happened before 2010. Over the last few years this business has grown less violent. This can be explained by three key factors:

1. For economic and cultural-behavioural reasons, an increasing number of women choose to sell sexual services voluntarily, which leads to rarer occurrence of forcible or violent solicitation;
2. The fall of labour restrictions for Bulgarian nationals in several Western European EU member states in January 2014 legalised the status of those offering sexual services there and reduced the ability of pimps and criminal networks to manipulate them. This is a clear example how increased EU integration contributes to the mitigation of human security risks in certain spheres of social life and the economy.
3. The specialised police actions against sexual services clubs owned by organised crime and the comparatively expedient trials against indicted pimps raise the relative risks for organisers, making them seek the voluntary acquiescence of the women offering those services.

As a result, the **human security risks for the involved are generally on the decline** and their condition is improved. Violence is not missing entirely. It persists especially in the lowest segment of the market (the street) and when solicitation of adolescents is concerned. Pimping continues to exist, allowing a large group of perpetrators to accrue wealth on the back of the prostituting women. Bulgaria leads the list of countries exporting women offering sexual services to Western Europe. This migration towards countries with a regulated market signifies that the Bulgarian market needs regulation too.

Without entering the debate on legalisation, the present study concludes that some regulation would be useful. It can take several forms:

1. Introduction of regulation of indoors prostitution and prohibition of practicing outdoors. Thus the lowest-segment prostitution, where human security risks are the highest, will be restricted.
2. More resources for fighting pimps so that provision of sexual services becomes a truly free, personal choice of the women practicing it. It must be clear that solicitation using emotional attachment can hardly be precluded through legal regulation, but the active persecution of pimps will have an impeding effect.
3. Regulation should not focus on the fiscal aspects of the market. Its goal should be upholding the human security of those providing and using sexual services, not collecting patent or value-added tax on the activities.
4. On cabinet level, measures should be devised for reintegration into the labour market of those prostituting. Creating alternatives and providing exit options will reduce the risks.

The above measures, however, should be thought out and applied very carefully and after a detailed impact assessment. At the present moment, the market has attained by itself a balance in which the risks are minimised, and inadequate regulation would be counterproductive. In devising these measures priority should be given to human life and enhancing its security, because this business is above all about people and their physical, emotional and social well-being.