

# **Positive findings: Girl group method efficient as a tool for prevention of trafficking**

**The Girl Group method is a successful strategy, leading to fewer girls being lured into trafficking, and group meetings serve as an alternative education environment increasing awareness of the underlying causes of trafficking. These are conclusions from a Bachelor thesis about girl group activities in Vilnius Lithuania, completed by Jone Sestakauskaite, student of European studies in Malmö, Sweden.**

“Perhaps many young women don’t think about their future, about themselves /.../ Like I know one girl /.../ she doesn’t give a damn about herself. But perhaps by coming here she could change it all, change herself”, says Agne during her interview (2009). Agne is one of the members of the Girl Group at the Center for women and children Nendre in Lithuania, which has been chosen as an object for a case study by a student from the Programme on European studies at Malmö University in Sweden, Jone Sestakauskaite. The goal of the study was to investigate the relevance and the effectiveness of social empowerment through the Nordic Girl Group method, a prevention tool targeting young socially marginalized women most at risk of becoming trafficked. The results of her research are presented in the Bachelor thesis called "Gender equality as trafficking prevention?".

The author of the thesis has carried out her research in the form of participatory observation and interviews with the personnel at Nendre as well as the members of the Girl Group. The findings of the research point out that the Girl Group method is a very successful strategy, leading to fewer girls being lured into trafficking. Meanwhile, the group meetings serve as an alternative education environment increasing awareness of the underlying causes of trafficking, such as the presence of social inequality, the existence of a ‘gender contract’ that places women in an inferior position towards men, and the importance of knowledge and education to get away from this vicious circle. According to the assessment by the personnel and the girls themselves, the Girl Group meetings function as a source of useful information and a forum for exchanging their views, recounting their life issues and providing support to each other.

The Nordic Girl Group method aims to highlight important everyday questions and bring up to the surface such issues as gender and power inequalities prevailing in the society. Another goal is to strengthen female participants' self-confidence and self-consciousness by giving them an opportunity to discover positive things about themselves and develop their own personality. The participants of the groups gather on a regular basis in their small group, where a safe environment is created, and can together with their educated trainers discuss matters important to them in everyday life. The Girl Group method has been applied at the Center for women and children Nendre since 2004 and involves young girls who run the risk of becoming part of trafficking networks due to the fact that they come from incomplete or disharmonious families.

A report of the UNODC (2006) points out Central and South Eastern Europe as a region of origin for 90 percent of the European trafficking for the goal of sexual exploitation. Lithuania

is ranked as 'very high' in the citation index as a country of origin, also serving as transit and destination country for human trafficking. Data collected by Interpol indicates that between 1,500 and 2,000 Lithuanian women are annually trafficked abroad for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Most often people become victims of trafficking due to poverty, loss of faith in the future and social exclusion. It is noted in the thesis that welfare and poverty problems are the consequences of economical restrictions, but also, as mentioned throughout the analysis, to a large extent the result of the social and political discrimination against the risk group.

In her concluding reflections the researcher remarks that in order for such NGOs as Nendre to be effective and relevant, the society around it also needs to open up for a change, likewise the families which form girls' domestic environment. To be able to achieve societal and political harmonization concerning the risk group, equality needs to be encouraged not only among the excluded groups, but to the same extent, by the social mainstream. Besides, Boy Groups would be much needed to balance the weak gender awareness among both sides of the risk group. Prevention aimed mainly at women isolates the problem, instead of opening for a mutual dialogue.

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16.9.2009