



Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Catalina Rata and I am here representing eLiberare. eLiberare is a Romanian women led organization focused on preventing human trafficking & sexual exploitation. Our goal is to give people tools to prevent human trafficking in their own communities, and we focus on five priorities: prevention education, capacity building, external assistance, strategic advocacy and awareness events. eLiberare is also the organization chairing the platform of 23 specialized CSOs in Romania, ProTECT.

While the recommendations made during the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review were rather general, having to do with putting in the best efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking, I would like to highlight three more specific topics that are vital in the field that we work in: **addressing the culture of impunity, timely detection mechanisms and the enhanced protection of victims rights.**

First, a recommendation made during the previous cycle has to do with addressing the culture of impunity: as human trafficking is one of the gravest forms of human rights abuses, we still see situations in which traffickers receive suspended sentences, cases of human trafficking not resulting in a sentence because the statute of limitations runs out before a legal conclusion is passed, or sentences that do not even add up to the number of years that traffickers exploited their victims. All these things make human trafficking a very profitable business, hence working against progress in this field, and the defense of human rights at large. We salute the recent legislative initiatives that were passed, allowing for a longer statute of limitations for trafficking cases. However child sexual abuse material creation is still not included, due to its classification as a crime against public order, as opposed to a crime of sexual violence against children.

Our recommendations are to establish judicial practices that do not default to suspended sentences or to canceling sentences altogether because of the statute of limitations running out, to institute appropriate punishment that no longer makes human trafficking a low risk, high return business, and to properly classify child sexual abuse material creation as a crime of sexual violence against children.

The second theme I want to address is that of timely detection mechanisms, including resourcing victims and potential victims with a reporting mechanism under the form of a 24/7 hotline. We salute the passing of the new National Referral and Identification Mechanism that represents a huge leap forward in detecting and protecting victims of human trafficking in Romania.

We now need to move forward with the development of the administrative policies and procedures that will:



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- allow for clear referral pathways for all state stakeholders who now have clear proactive identification attributions;
 - establish a clear procedure to ensure the social path to victim identification: the steps through which specialized civil society actors can confer the statute of formal identification;
 - institute a 24/7 hotline to replace the current helpline staffed with a live operator only from Monday through Friday from 8:00 to 16:00;
 - confer specialized CSOs a valid and equal seat at the table when it comes to the taskforce working on the issue. The taskforce was instituted through a governmental decision (No. 1064 from 02.10.2021), but that only allows CSOs to be permanent guests, versus voting members.

In summary, our recommendations for improving early detection are to develop and implement clear procedures that enable proactive and early identification, including a 24/7 helpline and to offer CSOs an equal seat at the decisional table.

Lastly, the topic of strengthening victims' rights is always an essential one and it goes hand in hand with the previous one. We **MUST** identify more victims and we **MUST** ensure that the ones we have identified have the appropriate services available in order to avoid re-trafficking and in order offer them a true shot at reintegration. Assistance of victims is still almost single handedly offered by civil society organizations. The needs of trafficking victims require specialized services and responses, hence including them among other types of social services beneficiaries may not respond to their specific needs. Traffickers do not traffick populations, but individuals, hence thinking that a one-size fits all service will meet the needs of all beneficiaries is not only wrong, but can lead to a new traumatic episode and re-trafficking for the most vulnerable.

Our recommendation is to secure the right of the victim to non-punishment, and to ensure access to long term counseling services, specialized shelters and individualized care.

Just to summarize, the Romanian civil society would like to see:

- Improved judiciary practices that address the culture of impunity;
- clear procedures that enable proactive and early identification, including a 24/7 helpline. CSOs need to be treated as equal partners, enabled with the right mechanism to formally identify victims and with an equal seat at the decisional table;
- The right of victims of trafficking to non-punishment secured, and access to specialized services and appropriate, individualized care and reintegration opportunities made a priority.

Thank you for your attention!