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Child Trafficking: Responses and Challenges at Local Level

The City of Vienna takes measures for the protection of trafficked children

Trafficking in children is a worldwide phenomenon that affects every country including Austria. In the past few years, in Vienna alone, more than 1,300 children have been picked up by the police, youth welfare institutions and private organisations. Most of these children come from Eastern European countries such as Romania and Bulgaria. They are trafficked to Vienna and are forced to steal, beg or even become victims of child prostitution.

It was for the first time in 1998 that the authorities picked up minor foreigners in Vienna who claimed to have no accommodation. In the beginning only about 30 children were picked up but the number increased rapidly in the following years. In the beginning the staff of the crisis centres operated by the youth welfare office took care of these children.

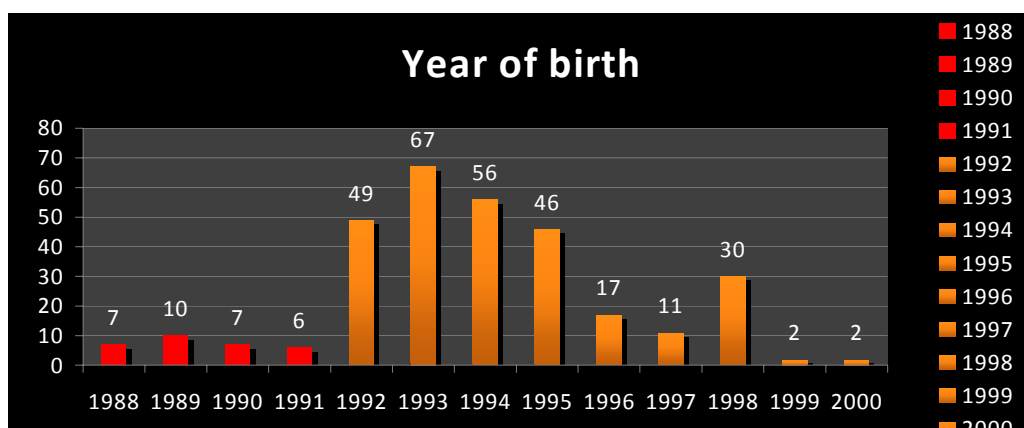
The City of Vienna realised very early on that they had to create a special shelter for the children and for this purpose established a new institution in 2003. "Drehscheibe", the centre for victims of child trafficking, takes care of unaccompanied minor foreigners. The aim was not only to take care of these children but also to cooperate with the countries of origin such as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary, Georgia and China to find long-term solutions. A know-how transfer, where social workers from Vienna hold training courses for the staff in the countries of origin, is vital to guarantee the best possible care and help for the children. Vienna also supports the construction of crisis centres.

These long-term measures of "Drehscheibe" provide the children with the possibility of a safe return to their home countries.

In addition to these social measures, the City of Vienna has adopted an amendment to the Vienna Provincial Security Act that prohibits begging with children.

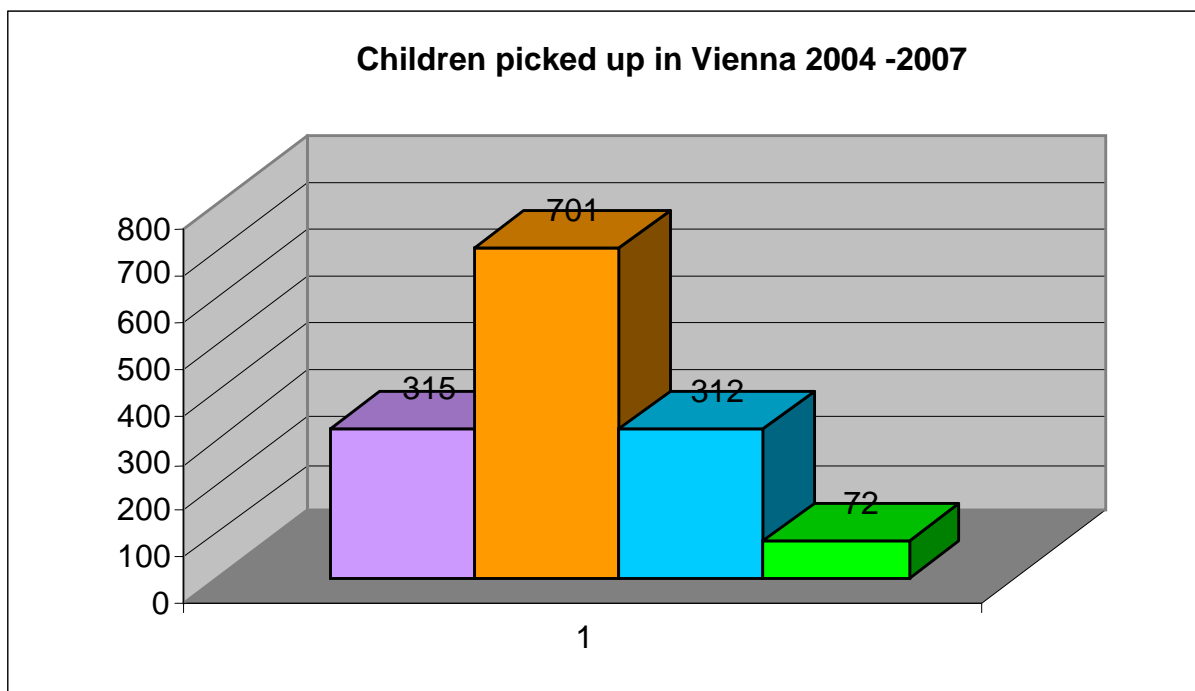
Age of trafficked children

This chart of 2006 clearly shows that people smugglers primarily choose minors who cannot be held criminally responsible. Most of the children who are exploited are between 11 and 14 years old.



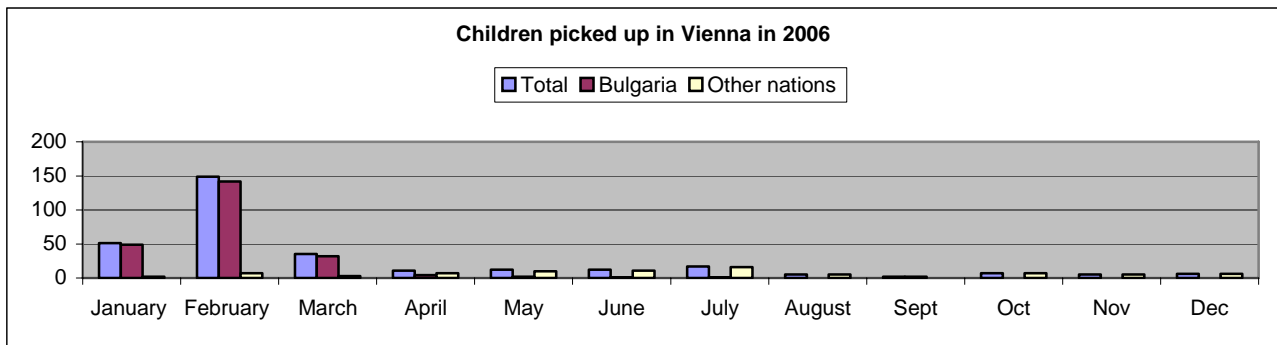
Unaccompanied minors who were picked up in Vienna

This chart shows that the number of children who were picked up decreased with the increase of measures taken in the countries of origin.



Nationalities of the children (2006)

This chart, for example, shows the good results in the intense cooperation with Bulgarian authorities that was initiated in April 2006. The number of Bulgarian children who were picked up in Vienna dropped by nearly 97% from April 2006.



“Drehscheibe” crisis centre for victims of child trafficking

offers

- temporary placement for victims of child trafficking
- places for a maximum of 16 children

staff: 4 educational social workers and 1 social worker

Tasks of “Drehscheibe”

- admission of all unaccompanied minor foreigners who were picked up in Vienna
- health care
- psychological support (stabilisation after traumatic experiences)
- collection of all available facts
- examination of these facts
- registration of the offences and finding out if a safe return is possible
- contact with the embassies
- verifying names and dates of birth
- obtaining replacement travel documents from the consulates
- initiating and arranging a safe return to the home country (with IOM and other organisations)

Measures

- As a result of our close cooperation with Bulgaria and Romania, the authorities of these two countries have come to realise the importance of the creation of crisis centres and of providing special care for the children and their families by trained social workers.
- In Romania, a total of 14 crisis centres with the respective infrastructure have been created in different parts of the country.
- In Bulgaria, three crisis centres started their work in 2007. They are situated in Pasardjik in the south of the country, in Balvan in the north and in Dragoman near the Bulgarian-Serbian border. A new 'incoming centre' is to open in the capital city of Sofia this year.
- Social workers from Slovakia are in constant contact with our experts in Vienna to guarantee the successful reintegration of the children back home. We have also established a similar cooperation with Hungary.

Preparatory work

- sensitising the public authorities in the countries of origin to the problems of children who have become victims of human trafficking and violence
- cooperation between the welfare authorities, the police and courts in Vienna and the diplomatic representations and authorities in the countries of origin
- lobbying by means of public relations and aiming to sensitise the population for a better understanding of the victims
- making contact with the responsible persons in the agencies abroad
- raising awareness of the problems in the agencies abroad
- raising awareness of the problems in the Austrian authorities
- The facts as told by the children are carefully registered (alias names). After consulting the "Drehscheibe" staff via telephone the embassy contacts the girls and boys and requests information about their origin and intention of staying. Afterwards the police in the country of origin investigates the correct facts and forwards them to

the police in Vienna. It often becomes evident that the children are already known in various other cities under different names.

What are the prerequisites for a safe return?

- creating a situation in partnership amongst the countries of origin
- transfer of knowledge by first hand trainings and seminars (two-way invitations)
- direct public relations (contact persons responsible for various situations and problems)
- monitoring destinations of a child for six months, in case of witness protection for 12 months

Steps taken for the protection of children

When children are picked up and brought to the “Drehscheibe” crisis centre, the close contact with the embassies of their countries of origin helps to determine the identity of the children and the adults in a prompt and unbureaucratic manner. This approach also guarantees that adults, who accompany the children and could be people smugglers, cannot pretend to be the children’s parents.

When an unaccompanied minor foreigner is picked up in Vienna, the following steps are taken for the protection of the children, which have been agreed upon with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia:

1. The child is taken to the “Drehscheibe” crisis centre where educational social workers take care of her or him around the clock. The social workers very carefully work out what the children need and provide them with medical care, nutritious food, new clothes, and psychological care.
2. Children are not separated from their parents! When parents (even if they were imprisoned) come to pick up their children, staff of the “Drehscheibe” crisis centre talk to the parents and provide them with detailed information in the presence of a member of their country’s embassy. They explain that children need to live in a healthy environment that is appropriate for them and that they need to go to school to give them a perspective for the future because they would otherwise never get out of the vicious circle of poverty and social isolation.

3. Once the identity of unaccompanied Hungarian and Slovak children has been determined they are immediately picked up by social workers from their home countries and are brought to their parents. This type of complete care facilitates the immediate inclusion of the children and their families in appropriate aid projects in their home countries. There is only one difference to the approach that is applied for children from Romania and Bulgaria: Romanian and Bulgarian children are directly taken to a crisis centre in their home countries by the staff of "Drehscheibe". The crisis centres in Romania and Bulgaria have been set up in line with the "Drehscheibe" crisis centre in Vienna whose staff also holds trainings for the Romanian and Bulgarian staff on a regular basis.
4. If the identity of the children cannot be determined they remain in the care of the "Drehscheibe" crisis centre where educational social workers take care of them around the clock. At the same time the staff of "Drehscheibe" and of the country's embassy try to determine the children's true identity.
5. The staff of the embassies determine whether the children were abducted or "rented out" by the parents.
6. As soon as the identity of the children has been determined replacement travel documents are issued within 10 hours.
7. This facilitates a safe return of the children to a crisis centre in their home countries within 48 hours. The children are accompanied by an educational social worker of "Drehscheibe". The staff of the crisis centres in the countries of origin take care of the children around the clock, and their parents can come and pick them up. Over a period of six months the crisis centres in the countries of origin have to submit reports about the living conditions and overall situation of every child who has returned.
8. The social authorities of the countries of origin immediately address the case of the family and try to determine whether they are in need of assistance and how that country's ministry of social affairs can support them efficiently. Regular checks are made on the parents of the affected children by their country's social workers and the police in order to prevent further abuse.

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