

# Preventing Victimization in Moldova

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A nongovernmental organization works to prevent trafficking and protect potential victims in a country that has become one of the greatest sources of women trafficked to the brothels of Europe.

Moldova is at present one of the leading exporters of human beings to Western Europe. This phenomenon started growing in Moldova in 1994-1995, when a wave of illegal emigration began because of the economic crisis that beset the nation. Just as in other formerly communist states, the demise of the Soviet Union brought inflation, declines in production, increasing unemployment, and a reduction of expenditures for the social sphere.

All of these trends had a disastrous impact on migration for Moldova. Illegal emigration, sometimes considered the only solution against poverty, became a usual and tolerated phenomenon. According to a report by the United Nations Development Program for 2000, the number of Moldovan citizens who had left the country temporarily or permanently varied between 600,000 and 1,000,000. Because many of them are in an illegal status abroad, they can become victims to various criminal networks, including human traffickers.

We don't know the exact number of women who have left the country in search of a way to support themselves or their families. We do know that women represent 70 percent of the emigrants from Moldova. The average age of the women who have left is between 18 and 45. Many of them work in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Greece, and Portugal. Others have gone to the Middle East or Asia, but neither official nor unofficial sources can provide a precise figure on the number of our girls who end up in the brothels and casinos of Istanbul, Athens, or Kosovo.

Launched in February 2001, the Center for the Prevention of Trafficking in Women (CPTW),

located in our capital Chisinau, has been created as an answer to this growing problem. CPTW is a project administered by the Association of Women Lawyers, a local nongovernmental organization, and is implemented under the aegis of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Moldova. The main donors to this project are the U.S. State Department through the U.S. Embassy in Moldova and the Swedish organization World Childhood Foundation. They fund an annual budget of \$123,000, which allows us to support a nine-person staff involved in our programs.

In 2002, CPTW launched its first local branches in the districts of Ungheni and Balti. These border regions are identified as having a high risk of trafficking in human beings.

Our goal is simple. We want to keep Moldovan women and girls out of the brothels of the world. We're trying to do this through education, prevention, and prosecutorial efforts. We are working to create an efficient infrastructure for preventing and prosecuting trafficking in human beings. We hope to help strengthen the judicial system's capacity in order to work toward a goal of reducing human trafficking.

CPTW is engaged in informing vulnerable groups of teenagers about the risks and methods of human trafficking. In doing so, we also hope to develop among minors a stronger understanding of the rule of law and their rights under the law in order that they may be in a better position to protect themselves against trafficking.

Our informational and educational activities are not directed solely toward youth. We provide free assistance for anyone in need of information about human trafficking, and we are also working to improve the legal knowledge and practices among national law enforcement bodies in applying international and national anti-trafficking laws and norms.

CPTW is also working with law enforcement in the development of human trafficking prevention and prosecution programs. Civil society organizations are also involved helping to improve victims' access to justice and developing other counter-trafficking activities.

## U.S. Embassy Supports Counter Trafficking in Moldova

The Center for Prevention of Trafficking in Women (CPTW) has been a leader in the fight against trafficking in Moldova since February 2001. The center has helped hundreds of trafficking victims and potential victims.

The State Department, through the U.S. Embassy in Chisinau, started funding the center in February 2001 with a grant of \$60,000. In the first year, the CPTW focused its activity on prevention through an effective media campaign.

A second grant from the Department of State in March 2002 provided another \$76,000 to support direct assistance to potential or trafficked victims,

For the third year of activity, April 2003-April 2004, the Department of State contributes \$100,000 to fund the center.

U.S. Embassy, Chisinau

CPTW is laying the groundwork for the creation of a comprehensive anti-trafficking response by building an active database of multi-lateral agencies and their efforts to prevent human trafficking. The efforts catalogued in this database range from government, inter-governmental (IGO) and nongovernmental (NGO) responses to a catalog of CPTW's current materials, promotions, events, and partners. This data is readily available and is accessed via the CPTW website: [www.antitraffic.md](http://www.antitraffic.md) From this site, anyone interested in understanding or contributing to mechanisms to prevent human trafficking can access current information, materials, and partners. The local and national government, international community, nongovernmental community, general public, and potential victims all benefit from the construction of a free and central information clearinghouse.

With the use of a variety of media campaigns across Moldova, CPTW focuses attention on the problem of human trafficking and emphasizes the need for effective prevention and prosecution. Our award-winning weekly radio program, TV programs, newspaper articles, advertisements, and permanent billboards attract attention to the many dangers of human trafficking. Broadly distributed and free of charge, this information helps to nurture a heightened awareness about the personal and social risks human trafficking poses to all members of the population. Moldovan society as a whole is the target audience because the problem of human trafficking affects such a wide segment of the population.

Potential victims are targeted in a more specific way with provocative and discriminating information campaigns. During two years of its activity, CPTW has blanketed the country with more than 231 radio programs, nine television documentaries produced and broadcast through 15 national and local channels, 100 news articles, billboards, and editorials across Moldova's media spectrum.

Teenagers are most vulnerable to the false promises

“We want to keep  
Moldovan women and  
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—Costachi

of opportunity abroad made by potential traffickers. CPTW targets them with awareness campaigns introduced mainly in rural schools. CPTW has trained approximately 100 youth volunteers from all districts across Moldova to help implement these programs. The volunteers, supervised by members of the project team, conduct seminars aimed at

the prevention of human trafficking. Our purpose is not only to educate about the dangers of human trafficking, but also to help teens understand the law and make them capable to protect themselves against violation of their rights.

CPTW also identifies cases of abuse and violations of children's rights in order to provide social and legal assistance to children from abusive environments who are especially attractive potential victims to traffickers. CPTW has educated more than 7,000 teenagers through 400 seminars in all districts of Moldova. Using young adults to educate the children is proving very successful. By promoting a program about not only the physical and psychological dangers of human trafficking, but also the legal and social aspects of this phenomenon, the most vulnerable populations are informed about the full range of dangers associated with human trafficking.

Volunteers are also involved in the dissemination of informative materials. More than 100,000 copies of educational brochures and leaflets, newsletters, and magazines produced by the center during its two years of activity have been distributed in schools, transit stations, on streets, and to strategic partners.

CPTW supports and operates three telephone information hotlines in Chisinau, Ungheni, and Balti. The hotlines provide information on securing legal employment and migration, as well as how to receive CPTW's free social and legal assistance. The hotlines are direct links to people with immediate concerns and fears about human trafficking. They also can help potential victims at any stage in their decision to emigrate or with assistance upon return. Often the hotlines also are a vital link to people

with information about immediate trafficking activity. Finally, the hotlines can assist families and friends in their attempts to locate their loved ones who may have disappeared.

Since February 2001, CPTW's hotline operators have helped more than 3,000 persons. Analysis of these cases tells us that people from different social categories become victims of trafficking, but most of them come from poor families with living standards below the poverty line. These are people who have been victims of abuse in their living environment, who have undergone stress and moral traumas, some of them having been abandoned by their parents or by society. The lack of specialized social services for these categories of girls is a factor in their decision to leave the country.

As part of our stated goal to prevent and prosecute human trafficking, CPTW works with all areas of the national and international community to develop law enforcement training programs based on the latest information and techniques. CPTW regularly provides specialized training modules for police, border guards, prosecutors, judges, and other officials. CPTW has increased the professional awareness about anti-trafficking programs, services, and procedures to 250 officials. By training and educating the law enforcement and juridical officials and actors, prevention and prosecution of human trafficking receives much needed attention. These organizations can help promote a broader sense of security across society.

Additionally, CPTW works with returning and repatriated victims to secure proper documents and works with prosecutors who are handling their cases. Returning and repatriated victims can receive free assistance in navigating an often confusing and difficult process to gain new documents and identity papers. CPTW has assisted 140 victims of trafficking with new documents and identity papers.

In April 2003, CPTW started to represent victims of trafficking, including minors, in civil lawsuits and criminal trials. Professional lawyers represent victims in civil lawsuits—such as divorce, property loss, and restoration of maternal rights—by representing their interests in a court of law and in other relevant domains. In criminal trials, CPTW is advocating for the legal interests of victims and

injured parties, including minors (with their appointed social assistant), for the entire length of the criminal process.

Based on experience gained during the process of representation of victims in trials, CPTW lawyers are working on development and expansion of national standards of protection and security of injured parties, victims, and witnesses during the course of the criminal trial. As part of this effort, we will be pushing for the development of national standards for victim and witness protection during human trafficking trials, and the establishment of temporary shelters for vulnerable parties until verdicts are delivered or judicial action is otherwise completed.

In order to ensure the success of the project and the efficiency of its activities, CPTW needs to have good communications with all actors involved in counter-trafficking. CPTW has memorandums of understanding with the most active institutions, such as the national Service of Migration, Department of Social Assistance of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Division for Combating the Organized Crime of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Department of Youth and Sport from the Ministry of Education, Department of Information Technologies, Border Police Control, Council of Ungheni district, and the International Organization for Migration. In addition, CPTW established fruitful collaboration with representatives of law enforcement institutions, local NGOs working in the field, and national and local media companies.

The CPTW has significant expertise implementing preventive measures against trafficking in women and children. The results achieved by CPTW during its first two years of activity prove that this independent entity has the capacity to manage and implement activities in prevention, victims' rehabilitation, and prosecution of cases of trafficking. By consolidating and expanding the current prevention, prosecution, and rehabilitation components of CPTW's work, vulnerable groups, women, and children are empowered to gain the knowledge they lack to prevent exploitation by traffickers and live in a secure environment.

*The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Government.*