

**The Child Labor Situation:
An Analysis Focusing on Iasi and Vaslui, Romania**

Prepared for WV Romania
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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT	6
CHILD LABOR IN ROMANIA	8
ROMANIAN PROGRAMS TO COMBAT CHILD LABOR	9
ROMANIAN CHILD LABOR ANALYSIS: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	15
METHODOLOGY	15
RESULTS:	20
SCHOOL ANALYSIS	20
ACCEPTABLE VERSUS UNACCEPTABLE CHORES FOR CHILDREN	23
COMMUNITY LEADERS INTERACTION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY	27
THE MEANINGS AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD LABOR	29
CHILD LABOR VISIBILITY	33
CHILDREN GOING TO OTHER COMMUNITIES TO WORK	37
REPORTING OF CHILD LABOR CASES	38
USAGE OF THE CHILD LABOR FACT SHEET	42
STEPS TAKEN WHEN A CASE IS REPORTED TO THE DGASPCs	43
LOCAL INITIATIVES FOR RAISING AWARENESS AND PREVENTION	43
INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD OF REPORTING	45
KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD PROTECTION LAWS AND PROGRAMS	46
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STOPPING CHILD LABOR/BEGGING?	49
POSSIBLE ACTIONS TO STOP CHILD LABOR	50
HOW THE SCHOOL SYSTEM PLAYS A PART	51
HOW PARENTS/DUTY-BEARERS PLAY A PART	53
HOW COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS/LEADERS PLAY A PART	53
CHANGES IN CHILD LABOR	54
IS THERE MORE WORK NEEDED TO COMBAT CHILD LABOR?	55
OBSTACLES TO REDUCING CHILD LABOR	56
CONCLUSIONS	58
RECOMMENDATIONS	62

Executive Summary

World Vision International (WVI) is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families, and communities regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender, to overcome poverty and injustice. WVI is both local and global, working at the grassroots level in over 100 countries all around the world. In addition to working with disadvantaged and disaster-stricken communities around the globe, World Vision (WV) seeks to inform and educate the public about its work and invite them to participate in it.

In keeping with WVI's position, WV Romania is working to prevent vulnerability and to protect the most at-risk children by working with their families and communities in 7 counties – Iasi, Vaslui, Cluj, Craiova, Constanta, Dolj, Ialomita – and in Sector 5 of Bucharest. One of the least visible groups of vulnerable children are those who drop out of school and become laborers.

Given WV's position, a partnership agreement was signed between World Vision's Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office and George Mason University to study the reality of child labor in Romania, in an attempt to identify whether there is a "cause-effect" relationship between child labor and (predisposition to) human trafficking in Romania. The research was guided by the hypothesis that ***there are local-level mechanisms that can be used to monitor and prevent child labor/child trafficking if there is appropriate knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon in all contexts where WV is operational.***

Official data on child trafficking in Romania (the only information available to document child labor) shows that in the first quarter of 2010 there were 126 minors identified as victims of trafficking, of which 99 were girls and 27 were boys.¹ Child trafficking increased by 50% compared to the same period in 2009.² Internal child trafficking involved over 75% of these victims, with 94 of them being trafficked for sexual exploitation and 32 trafficked for labor or forced begging.³ Further, national statistics show an increase in the percentage of children dropping out of school after the 5th grade. Boys

are dropping out of school more often than girls. In the 2008-2009 school year the dropout rate of children in rural areas increased from 2.3% to 2.5%.⁴

The research was conducted over a period of two months, from May 23, 2011 to July 29, 2011, in Iasi and Vaslui, Romania. The research findings are based on interviews with 145 students between the ages of 10-14 in 15 focus groups, 37 individual student interviews with students between the ages of 15-17, and individual interviews with 17 teachers, 25 parents/duty-bearers, 5 mayors, 6 social assistants, 5 nurses/doctors, 4 police officials, and 7 priests. The information gathered from interviews and focus groups with children, parents/duty-bearers, and community stakeholders was complemented during discussions with representatives from Save the Children, Social Alternatives Association, the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP), and the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) in Iasi and Vaslui.

Through this research, the following conclusions were found:

- Child labor in rural areas is a real phenomenon. It is intrinsically related to mentality and poverty. It is very well known in Non Governmental Organization (NGO) circles, but it is often associated with one of childhood's normal stages in which the child must learn how to work and deal with life.
- Further, child labor needs a clear, definable/workable definition within the legislative framework. Currently, the definitions that exist are vague and open to interpretations. Clearly, many children are working harder than is age appropriate, but by definition, it is usually not considered child labor.
- Statistics, alone, are not significant to demonstrate that child labor is a phenomenon in Romania. However, the work children interviewees and their peers are engaged in and the social acceptance of child labor in rural areas must also be taken into account.

- The lack of reporting of these cases helps to perpetuate this phenomenon. It is evident that there is a disconnect between those that witness such cases and the community leaders. Most respondents reported that when they see children working harder than they feel is age appropriate, they prefer not to interfere in the private family matters of their friends and neighbors for fear of reprisals. Therefore, community leaders do not realize that their community has a child labor problem because the situations are not reported.
- In Iasi and Vaslui County, the child labor situation is not noticeably different in communities where WV works as compared to where WV does not work. However, child labor education, concerning laws and programs, across rural communities in Iasi and Vaslui County does show marked differences. Awareness of child labor laws and programs in WV communities among children and parents is noticeable. Further, the vast majority of students and parents where WV does not work are not aware of child protection laws, rights, and activities to promote them.

International Context

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 200 million children worldwide are involved in labor.⁵ Child labor not only is damaging to children's mental, physical, and emotional development; it also prevents children from acquiring education for the future, thereby perpetuating poverty through a loss of competitiveness. Children work for several reasons; some work for family survival, others work because of inadequate family income or a lack of educational opportunities.

UNICEF defines child labor as work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of the child and on the type of work.⁶ According to this definition, domestic work, such as household chores and taking care of siblings, becomes child labor when a child between the ages of 10-14 spends more than 28 hours per week working domestically. In addition, the UN Minimum Age Convention states that the minimum age to work shall not be less than the age of compulsory education and shall not be less than 14.⁷ Further, Article 3 of UN Convention #182 partly defines the worst forms of child labor as "forced or compulsory labor, and work, which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children."⁸

Of those involved in child labor, 2.5 million children are in developed economies while 2.4 million are in transition economies.⁹ Further, 127.3 million are in Asia and the Pacific, 17.4 million are in Latin America and the Caribbean, 48 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 13.4 million are in the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁰ In terms of children per population, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest incidence in employment, while Asia shows lower participation rates, but hosts the largest number of children in employment.¹¹ Progress to reduce the number of children working remains slowest in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Data collected in Romania in 2001 of a sample of 150 street children working more than eight hours per day showed that 44% begged, most had contracted a disease, 93% dropped out of school,

34% were illiterate, and 49% had been beaten by family members.¹² This translates to significant vulnerability to being exploited and/or trafficked. The typical trafficked child is between 14 and 17 years of age, from a family with socio-economic problems, low levels of education, and harbors a false perception of life abroad.¹³ Trafficking in persons is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receiving with the intention to exploit. Efforts to reduce the numbers of child laborers and child trafficking victims are directly related to successfully placing them in schools.

Child labor creates numerous problems. Children involved in labor have greater difficulty attending school. A research sample of 60 developing countries indicates that children in employment face an attendance gap of at least 10% in 30 of the countries surveyed, including Romania.¹⁴ Further, children engaged in labor are more socially vulnerable. As a result of their compromised education, they are more susceptible to economic fluctuations because of their work in the informal economy. Additionally, child laborers are more likely to suffer from health hazards, specifically ergonomic factors associated with heavy lifting as well as lung problems resulting from working in mines and construction. Statistics show that for every 100 working children in the developing world, between 12 and 25 percent suffer work-related injuries.¹⁵

On a positive note, the incidence of child labor declined between 2004 and 2008, falling worldwide from 14.2% to 13.6%. While labor by children between 5 and 14 years of age declined by 17 million (a 10% change), labor by children between 15 and 17 years of age increased from 52 to 62 million (a 20% change). Boys remained the most active group of child laborers at 54% while girls worked at a rate of 46%. Overall, 60% were engaged in agriculture, 26% in services, and 7% in industry, respectfully. Unpaid child family workers accounted for 68%, while paid employment for children accounted for 21%, and 5% of children were found to be self-employed.¹⁶

Recognizing the critical global problem of child labor, the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) was created in 1992.¹⁷ IPEC currently operates in 88 countries, including Romania.

Child Labor in Romania

Situated at the crossroads of central and southeastern Europe, Romania is a source, origin, and transit country for trafficking in persons, including child trafficking. Street children (run-away children from child protection residential institutions or from dispersed, poor families, spending most of their time on the street) and children leaving residential care facilities are the most vulnerable to trafficking.¹⁸ In 1989, the communist regime collapsed and was replaced by democracy and a market economy. The rapid change caused significant economic, political, and social upheaval. As a result, unemployment increased and living standards were forced ever lower, often below the poverty line. To survive, many Romanians began to migrate to other countries within Europe, sometimes leaving their children in the custody of government institutions, but mostly with extended family or friends. An estimated 1.87% of all Romanian children were living in residential institutions or foster care in 2004.¹⁹ Until recently, the Romanian government did not consistently collect data on the number of working children or the conditions in which they labored.

Romania has a population of approximately 21.67 million people.²⁰ Children comprise 18% of the total population, of which 65% live in urban areas.²¹ Poverty accounts for 44% of the population and is most likely to affect ethnic minorities, such as the Roma.²² For example, 80% of Roma children live in poverty and 43% live in severe poverty.²³ While the national employment rate is 62%, it is 47% for the Roma.²⁴ Overall, the percentage of children engaged in economic activities is between 2.1% and 3.7% of the child population with 90% of these working children living in rural areas.²⁵

Since 2001, Romania has enacted numerous legal reforms and legislative measures to combat child labor. Chief among these legislative measures is Romania Law no. 272/2004, which states that,

“The child has the right to be protected against exploitation and cannot be forced to perform any work with a potential risk and which is likely to compromise the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”²⁶

Further, Romania has ratified various international conventions related to child labor, such as the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138 in 1975, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182 in 2000.²⁷

Romanian Programs to Combat Child Labor

In 2000, the IPEC launched the National Program for the Prevention and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor to help the Romanian government develop a national policy and plan of action on child labor, rehabilitate a select number of street children, and improve the quality of educational and protective services for street children and their families.²⁸ Unfortunately, child labor laws kept changing, so necessary financial resources were not properly allocated to this program. Further, there was a lack of support and involvement from the national media. Despite these impediments, the program was able to build alliances among concerned government and civil society institutions paving the way for the development of a sub-regional trafficking program.

The Trafficking Phase I program ran from 2003 to 2007 and was funded by the United States (US) Department of Labor. This project was initiated to ameliorate some of the factors that lead to child labor and child trafficking such as a paucity of job opportunities for adults, living below the poverty line, a weak-to-non-existent social safety net, and an alarming trend of parents sending their children to other cities to work in an effort to increase the family income.²⁹ Program goals included advocacy activities designed to bring legislation and procedures in Romania in line with international commitments, promote young adult employment, facilitate long-term reintegration of child victims of trafficking into mainstream society, and establish a sub-regional information exchange network. As a direct result of this project, legislative measures for preventing and combating child labor and trafficking

were put in place, a national plan of action for the elimination of child labor was approved by the government in 2004, and a law on the promotion and protection of child rights was adopted by parliament in 2005.

The Trafficking Phase II program ran from 2006-2009. Its aim was to promote greater involvement of employers in the prevention, identification, rehabilitation, and tracking of child labor.³⁰ Further, the program sought to increase efforts toward mainstreaming the elimination of the worst forms of child labor into national policies and legislation. As a direct result, significant knowledge sharing and mainstreaming of child labor issues into the agendas of local governments and other agencies was accomplished. Lastly, 400 children were withdrawn from child labor and 600 were prevented from entering child labor through this program.

The Worst Forms of Child Labor Project ran from 2003-2008 and was funded by the German government. Its aim was to assist the Romanian government, NGOs, workers' and employers' organizations to gain the necessary skills required to implement policies and programs to prevent the worst forms of child labor, to protect and withdraw children from child labor or children at risk, and to rehabilitate and reintegrate children into society.³¹ As a direct result of this program, over 1,250 children were withdrawn from work or prevented from working through education or training opportunities. Further, the capacity of key institutions to deal with child labor issues was enhanced through training. Finally, national authorities, the media, and NGOs were mobilized to address child labor and the amount of national and local resources allocated to the prevention of child labor was increased.

Finally, the National Committee on the Prevention of Child Labor was established in 2002 under the coordination of the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights to oversee all activities related to children and provide strategic direction to both international and local initiatives on children's

well being.³² In 2008, they recorded 925 child labor cases.³³ Of the 925, 627 children were successfully withdrawn from child labor.

World Vision Programs

WV Romania runs two programs to aid in the reduction of child labor. The first program is The Educational Community Center which offers counseling and support to those at risk of abandoning their children.³⁴ Through this program, professionals and community members receive training on working with families to raise awareness about child abandonment and neglect. The project will impact an estimated 300 community members in the Aghires community.

WV's second program, the Feed the Child's Soul and Body Project, partners with local leaders, parents, and professionals in Iasi to prevent abusive labor practices.³⁵ The project focuses on raising awareness about child labor and child trafficking with the goal of producing a manual of best practices in the prevention of child labor to share with others.

Civil Society and NGO Participation

Within Romania, there are numerous NGOs established and operating that are highly successful in developing projects and programs that deal with child labor. Some of the NGOs most notable for their work on child labor include Save the Children, The International Foundation for Child and Family, The Centre Partnership for Equality, and the Social Alternatives Association.

Save the Children has a center in Bucharest and 12 counties throughout Romania.³⁶ They serve over 2,288 children each year. They were responsible for launching the campaign for ratification of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182.

The International Foundation for Child and Family developed and implemented a project from 2003 to 2004 called "Combating Trafficking in Children" with funds from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).³⁷

The Centre Partnership for Equality organized an international conference called “Knowledge Sharing on Preventing and Combating Child Labor, Including Trafficking in Children, in South-East European Countries” in Bucharest in 2006.³⁸

Finally, the Social Alternatives Association, based in Iasi, is especially active in child protection in the justice system, including trafficking.³⁹ They established a regional coalition against trafficking in human beings. Further, they implemented a project for children left home alone by parents that were working abroad between 2006 and 2009 with assistance from the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Global Best Practices

The Women’s Consortium of Ukraine is a good starting point for policy consultations.⁴⁰ It identifies high-risk zones and facilitates interactive discussions on the worst forms of child labor. This is a best practice because it is broad, equitable, inexpensive, and involves democratic consultation of all stakeholders.

The Child Labor Unit in Albania and the National Center for Child Abuse Prevention in the Republic of Moldova both have set best practices in multi-sector cooperation, in which an eclectic mix of stakeholders facilitates a coordinated multi-sector approach.⁴¹ Further, this was the first time key stakeholders in the region committed themselves to eliminating child labor by signing partnership agreements.

Moreover, the Independent Trade Union of Albanian Education and the Trade Union Federation of Education and Science of Albania work together to reinforce national efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor.⁴² Albania has proven that when trade unions work together, child labor cannot flourish. Further, they defend their member interests and improve their working conditions, thus improving their socio-economic condition of the populous.

Since 2005, Save the Children has strengthened partnerships between employers and NGOs to mobilize community resources in Romania. Save the Children launched the CORA fundraising campaign, raising over \$16,300 to help cover the costs of school and social reintegration of at least 100 working street children.⁴³ This was the first time that a supermarket had partnered with an NGO and an international organization in Romania to raise awareness of a social issue and to generate project resources. Furthermore, the ProWOMAN Foundation in Romania works closely with children from marginalized communities to identify children at risk of trafficking and other worst forms of child labor.⁴⁴ Finally, the transfer of experience in Romania from an NGO to the local authorities was a best practice with the School Inspectorate of Bucharest in Partnership with Save the Children. The goal and success of the program was to make the local authorities, the public, and the media more aware of the issue of child labor by empowering children to advocate for their rights and make their voices heard.⁴⁵

The International Center for the Protection and Promotion on Women's Rights "La Strada" has a best practice of capacity building in Moldova. La Strada has successfully equipped 35 social workers and psychologists from public institutions and NGOs with the understanding, knowledge, and skills necessary to provide counseling and referral services to child victims of trafficking and the worst forms of child labor.⁴⁶

From 1997-2004, the ILO implemented a project to eliminate child labor in Sialkot, Pakistan. This project had support from several donors, as well as the US Department of Labor, UNICEF, and the International Federation of Football Associations. The project aimed to assist local companies in preventing child labor in the manufacturing and assembling of footballs, identify and remove children from manufacturing and assembling footballs, and influence community and family attitudes to child labor.⁴⁷

The Sugar Association's charitable foundation, FUNDAZUCAR, was instrumental in withdrawing 394 children from work in the sugarcane industry and preventing 985 from entering the industry in San

Miguel and Uzultan, Ecuador.⁴⁸ They gather data, provide educational centers offering remedial support in core subjects and recreation aimed at building self-esteem, raise awareness for parents and local actors in order to increase consciousness and commitment to the reduction of child labor, and identify child laborers and mechanisms to ensure that sugarcane production is child-labor free.⁴⁹

National Policy Options

The ILO states that,

There is no single policy that by itself will end the worst forms of child labour. However, evidence has shown that targeted action that simultaneously addresses the implementation and enforcement of legislation, the provision and accessibility of public services (including free, quality compulsory education, training and non-discriminatory social protection services), and the functioning of labour markets, yields high returns in the fight against child labour, including its worst forms.⁵⁰

In order for a change to occur with regard to child labor, countries need to work on improving their national child labor policy frameworks and policy coordination should be strengthened. The following policy priorities should guide government actions: National legislation and enforcement, education and training, social protection, and labor market policy.⁵¹

National legislation and enforcement entails developing and implementing national action plans to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Further, appropriate sanctions against perpetrators must be enforced. The education system needs strengthening and highlighted as an example of a viable alternative to working. Therefore, it is necessary to lower barriers to entry such as reducing costs, extending access, and improving the overall quality of education. Countries need to implement a social safety net to protect families in instances of hardship in order for them to avoid sending their children to work. Offering access to social services and combating discrimination that leads to child labor will further help society, as well as, assisting victims of child labor to prevent their return to child labor. Finally, improved labor market policy, such as the creation of employment programs designed to promote decent and productive work are necessary for the populous to better facilitate the school to work transition.

Romanian Child Labor Analysis: Goals and Objectives

WV Romania commissioned a study on child labor in Romania and its implications on children's access to education and the human trafficking phenomenon. The primary purpose of the research was to document WV Romania's intervention in the education sector, its community development programs, and the advocacy efforts that are still needed to promote children's right to education. Finally, the research addressed the risks and implications of child labor in Romanian communities.

The research helped identify whether there is a cause-effect relationship between child labor and the predisposition to human trafficking. This will help WV Romania to further draft a local strategy that includes more prevention and advocacy initiatives at the community level.

Methodology

The research was conducted over a period of two months, from May 23, 2011 to July 29, 2011, in the following Romanian counties: Iasi and Vaslui. Iasi County was selected because it is the Area Development Program (ADP) that WV Romania had been active in the longest and is planning to transition this fall. WV wanted to contrast Iasi County with Vaslui County, their newest ADP and the poorest county in the European Union (EU). Communities were chosen over others because WV had contacts in those communities and as such, it was easier to gain interview access.

The following methodology to collect data was implemented: formal and informal interviews and focus groups with children, stakeholders (this group includes community leaders, teachers, leaders of relevant NGOs, etc.), duty-bearers (including those raising children that are not their own, ie: foster children), and parents, observations of children at school, and background research of current reports on child labor. Two communities with WV programming were identified for each study in Iasi County, and Vaslui County. In Iasi County, the identified communities were Ceplenita and Vladeni. In Vaslui, the identified communities were Osesti and Dumesti. Additionally, one community without a WV presence was identified for each study in Iasi County and Vaslui County. In Iasi County, the identified community

was Scanteia and Rebricea was chosen for Vaslui. In addition, two schools in Iasi City were selected for observation/inclusion to compare the situation in rural Iasi from urban Iasi because it is widely thought that children are subject to different types of labor in urban settings versus rural settings. The object was to see if the research supported this hypothesis.

The following section outlines in detail this research plan.

Hypothesis

The research was guided by the hypothesis that ***there are local-level mechanisms that can be used to monitor and prevent child labor/child trafficking if there is appropriate knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon in all contexts where WV is operational.***⁵²

Interviews

Interviews focused on the qualitative measures of child labor and the mechanisms in place to prevent child labor. In order to obtain a significant sample size, the researchers conducted individual interviews and focus groups in eight communities in Iasi and Vaslui.

In each community, two focus groups of 8-10 students each were conducted for two age groups of children 10-12 years and 13-14 years old respectively. These focus groups were intended to make the children comfortable while segmenting the population sample according to those predisposed to different types of child labor. In addition, the focus groups had an even gender composition. Further, in each community, the researchers conducted six individual interviews with children between the ages of 15-17. Finally, to gain each community's perspective on child labor, the researchers conducted interviews with four parents/duty-bearers, two teachers, and one doctor, mayor, social assistant, priest, and police officer. In total, the researchers interviewed 145 students in 15 focus groups between the ages of 10-14. Further, 37 individual interviews with students between the ages of 15-17 were conducted, as well as, interviews with 17 teachers, 25 parents/duty-bearers, 5 mayors, 6 social assistants, 5 nurses/doctors, 4 police officials, and 7 priests.

Half of the parents/duty-bearers interviewed in rural Iasi where WV works and Rebricea, Vaslui, graduated high school, paving the way for their children to follow in their footsteps. In Scanteia, Iasi, 75% of parents/duty-bearers interviewed have at least a high school diploma. In Vaslui, where WV works, only one parent/duty-bearer graduated high school, but 57% completed the 10th or 11th grade.

Lastly, the researchers interviewed representatives from Save the Children, Social Alternatives Association, the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP), and the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) in Iasi and Vaslui. These experts were interviewed to lend credence to the community's view on child labor, as well as, the national phenomenon.

Both interviews and focus groups lasted for no more than an hour each. The interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed by two WV Romania-appointed translators, allowing for the researchers to concentrate on the interviewee's answers, thereby facilitating honest answers and insightful data through the free flow of questions and answers. The researchers and the translators followed WV Romania guidelines in order to ensure the interviewee's privacy and safety.

Prior to asking the questions, the WV Romania-appointed researcher introduced himself and explained the reason for the interview, the confidentiality policy, and ensured that the interviews and focus groups would remain anonymous throughout the research project.

Group specific interview guides were developed and translated into Romanian prior to starting the interviews. Questions for the children's interviews and focus groups related to their schooling, activities outside of school, home life, work situation, perception of the future, thoughts on child labor, and their perception of community leaders. Questions for the parents/duty bearer's interviews related to their schooling, their children's schooling, their children's work situation and perception of child labor, and their perception of community leaders. Questions for stakeholders and NGOs dealt with how their organization plays a part in combating child labor, their view of the education system, their view of household chores and child labor, and child protection laws and reporting. The background of the

interviewee determined which questions were asked, as not all pertained to their situation or experience. The researchers used the questions as guidelines, but added additional questions as necessary throughout the interview.

Background Research

Along with the interviews, the lead researcher relied on a desk review of readily available background documents that provided crucial information on the current global child labor situation, as well as child labor in Romania, to provide an initial starting point and inform the methodology. Further, these documents delve into the role of the Romanian government and local NGOs in combating child labor.¹

Limitations and Considerations

Several limitations are apparent to the researchers. The first limitation was the language barrier for the lead researcher. The lead researcher was limited because she does not speak Romanian and was not able to experience the interviewee's answers first hand. As such, interviews were comprehensively, quickly, and professionally translated post discussion.

The second limitation is the relevance of the sample size. Vaslui is not only the poorest county in Romania, but it is the poorest county in the EU. Further, the vast majority of interviewees came from rural areas. Although two schools in Iasi City were included in the sample, WV has still not reached the most vulnerable children in urban settings. These children include those that might not attend school, child beggars, etc. Additionally, due to the availability of the interviewees and time constraints, the researchers were only able to interview in eight communities. Further, due to the country police reorganization, they were not able to interview police officers in Scanteia and Ceplenita. In addition, the doctor was not available in Scanteia and the priest was too new to the commune in Rebricea to give a representative interview. Lastly, all of the parent interviewees were women, except for two men in Scanteia.

¹ These documents are listed in the Works Cited section.

The researchers conducted three focus groups in Dumesti, Vaslui, one with 14-15 year olds, instead of individual student interviews because the 15-17 year old students were studying in Iasi at the time and were unavailable. In addition, there were not enough students available in Rebricea, Vaslui for two focus groups. Thus, a mixed focus group with students between the ages of 10-14 was conducted. The researchers could not interview parents/duty-bearers in Iasi City, because they were unavailable. Finally, the researchers did not interview a doctor, mayor, social assistant, or police officer in Iasi because it was deemed that they do not deal with the same problems as in the countryside and would not provide significant data.

Lastly, some interviewees were not as open as the researchers would have liked, providing only minimal answers because of their fear of repercussions or shyness. For example, the doctor that the researchers had wanted to interview in Rebricea, Vaslui did not want to be interviewed once she saw the recorder. Instead, she asked that WV provide her with the written questions and she would e-mail her answers to WV. As of yet, WV has not received her answers. Anonymity was key to ensuring that the interviewees felt safe and comfortable expressing their views. Additionally, some interviewees did not fully understand the reason for the interview or misinterpreted the questions and gave inappropriate answers. For example, the interview with the priest in Scanteia had to be discarded because it was about how children lack discipline instead of the child labor situation in the commune.

The last limitation includes the biases of the researchers. The researchers strove to be a neutral third party representative, gathering perspectives of the children relating to child labor. The researchers sought to gain the trust of the interviewees in order to get truthful answers as well as to allow the interviewees to provide information about their feelings and knowledge.

RESULTS:

School Analysis

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Generally, both in the rural areas of Iasi and Vaslui and also in Iasi City, students have a good opinion about their teachers and believe that the education system is preparing them for the future. While all students interviewed in rural Iasi and Iasi City shared this opinion, 13% of the students interviewed in rural Vaslui (all from the 10-12 year old focus group) considered that the education system is not preparing them well for the future. It is worth mentioning that students interviewed in Iasi City also expressed the need for more practical teachings.

“Practicality is like the house foundation: without this foundation, we aren’t able to build the house.” (13-14 year old student, Iasi City-urban area)

On average, the time spent daily by children for completing their homework is 2.1 hours in rural Iasi, 2.4 hours in rural Vaslui, and 1.6 hours in Iasi City.

PARENT/DUTY-BEARER PERSPECTIVE

While the majority of parents/duty-bearers in rural Vaslui and Iasi where WV works agree that the education system prepares their children well for the future, 75% of parents/duty-bearers interviewed in Scanteia (where WV is not present) considered that the education system is inadequate to properly prepare their children for the future. One parent thinks the teachers go through the syllabus too quickly, causing children to struggle to keep up. Another parent thinks education focuses on information and not practical subjects for professional development, causing children to know a little about everything, without knowing anything.

“The system gives my children too much freedom and no longer educates them to become good members of society.” (parent, Iasi County-rural area)

One parent in rural Iasi stated that she wanted her children “to go to school anywhere else but in the countryside” because the education that the children receive is poor. Further, parents/duty-

bearers feel the system is inadequate and thinks teachers at their children's school are not interested in giving the children an education. One parent in Vaslui stated that the system cannot prepare the children for the future because the situation is hard.

"There are no longer primary schools in my area. Now the children must travel a long distance to arrive at school every morning on bad roads. Because of this, my children skip school due to poor weather conditions." (parent, Vaslui County-rural area)

Of the parents/duty-bearers interviewed, only one parent in rural Iasi, where WV works, told us her children had abandoned school at 13 and 15 years old to work. The rest of the school age children are enrolled in their local school.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

Teachers in all areas generally stated that they see more bad parts of the education system than good parts. Chief among these negative aspects is an over loaded school syllabus that pressures teachers and students to cover too much material in a short time period. Those in rural areas state other negative aspects ranging from not enough current textbooks or teaching aids, too much teacher flux, untrained teachers in technology, a constantly changing education system, and unequipped buildings that do not suit the needs of the teachers or students.

"Student's poverty status and lack of post school job prospects prohibits them from applying themselves in school." (teachers, Vaslui County-rural area)

Teachers interviewed in rural areas stated positive aspects of the education system included free school up to a certain age. The program, *Cornul si laptele* (Elementary School Milk Program) provides children with milk and a snack everyday, as well as a free pack of school supplies for low-income children. In Iasi City, teachers mentioned access to information and extracurricular activities as positive aspects for the students.

School Absenteeism Rate

The vast majority of teachers in rural Iasi did not report an increase in absences between March and June when farming activities take precedence. To illustrate, one teacher reported fewer absentees

in the present generation than in the past. The teachers further reported that there are isolated cases of children who miss school to watch younger siblings while their parents farm or go to work in the City.

“The absenteeism rate is 3-4 students in each class during this time.” (teachers, Iasi County-rural area)

By contrast, in Vaslui, teachers noted several absences, especially for the older children in the spring and autumn because they are working in agriculture or as shepherds. The teachers also noted that their students work as journeymen or miss classes to watch their siblings while their parents work. Further, some students do not even come to school to take their final exams.

“Up to 10% of my students are absent in the spring to go work or to take care of their siblings.” (priest, Vaslui County-rural area)

Clearly, there is enough evidence to support the assertion that there is school absenteeism due to children’s involvement in different forms of labor. Despite these observations from school officials, they feel that prolonged absenteeism is rare. Many students and parents responded that it is out of the question for children to miss school, citing the importance of an education.

“It is uncommon for children to miss school because if they do, their families will not receive the child benefit. Students are only allowed 10 absences before the government discontinues the benefit.” (teachers, Iasi and Vaslui Counties-rural area)

Activities Outside of School

Typically, children in urban areas have greater spare time options with a larger emphasis on quality childhood activities than children in rural areas. Overall, children where WV works have greater access to extra curricular activities, are familiar with WV, and have participated in WV activities in the past. Students in urban Iasi, rural Iasi where WV works, and Osesti, Vaslui, where WV works, are involved in extracurricular activities such as language classes, sports, theater, and dance classes. The 13-14 year old students said they participate in a program to fight against drugs and violence, and to help orphaned children. The vast majority of the children engaged in the above activities come from urban Iasi.

To contrast, students in Iasi where WV does not work, as well as the vast majority of students in Vaslui, do not have extracurricular activities. Further, all rural children interviewed stipulated that in the summer they help their families with agriculture and fieldwork. These options lead to a difference in development opportunities for urban students as compared to rural students. This is especially important when it is noted that the usual school program ranges from 4 hours in primary school to 7 hours for the 11-14 year old children in addition to the 1.6-2.4 hours each night spent on completing their homework.

Generally, children in rural Iasi and Vaslui where WV works are familiar with WV and have participated in WV projects in the past. The vast majority of the children that have participated come from rural Iasi. The 15-17 year old students have participated in a volunteer capacity to lead activities with children about children's rights and drug prevention. In addition, younger children have participated in activities led by Save the Children and WV to discuss children's rights. These activities have taught the children vital information on rights, drug prevention, and responsibility. Many children stated that they would like to continue their participation in activities that focus on ending child trafficking and fostering children's rights when their current activities end.

Acceptable versus Unacceptable Chores for Children

All interviewees stated that the following chores are acceptable for children to perform if they are under 14 years of age: washing and folding their clothes, washing the dishes, shopping, working in the kitchen, watering the flowers in the garden, feeding the animals, cleaning the house, weeding the vegetables in the garden, and bringing water from the well.

"For my 10 year old child, school work is enough." (parent, Vaslui County-rural area)

Interviewees stated that the following chores are unacceptable for children to perform if they are under 14 years of age: agricultural work, using kitchen appliances for young children (under 10 years old), taking care of siblings while parents work abroad, working during the day in the village,

construction, and chopping wood. Further, several interviewees agreed that children should not be asked to work while their parents spend the day at the local tavern.

Household Chores

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

The vast majority of students interviewed in rural Iasi and Vaslui, help their family with household chores and do not consider it to be a form of work, nor do they want or expect payment for their help. Further, none of the student respondents from either Iasi or Vaslui has ever missed school to engage in household chores.

These chores are synonymous with countryside living. Children help in the garden, the kitchen, with the washing, general house cleaning, agriculture, and field related work, just to name a few responsibilities. Their housework can take anywhere from 30 minutes two days a week, to seven hours everyday (1% of the interviewee population). Children spend an average of 2.5 hours per day in rural Iasi compared with 3.1 hours per day in Vaslui helping their parents complete household chores. Further, in Scanteia, Iasi, where WV does not work, 25% of students 10-12 years old consider household chores to be a form of work. By contrast, 50% of the students in the 15-17 year old category in Rebricea, Vaslui, where WV does not work, consider household chores to be a form of work.

As a contrast to both rural Iasi and Vaslui, chores in the city consist of cleaning the house and helping in the kitchen. The vast majority of the students we interviewed help their families with household chores without being asked. Many only need to help their families with chores 2-4 days per week. On average, children spend 1.8 hours per day helping with chores.

The vast majority of the students interviewed from all areas said they do not get paid for completing household chores. The rest in the rural areas do not get paid specifically for completing chores, but their parents give them money when they go out with friends and for special items. However, in Iasi City, a few get paid specifically for completing their chores. The consensus among

those from all areas that do not get paid is that they do not want to be paid because helping with household chores is their contribution to their family. They see it as normal, a pleasure, and not an obligation. Further, helping with household chores will help them in the future when they have a family of their own.

PARENT/DUTY-BEARER PERSPECTIVE

Additionally, 96% of the parent/duty-bearer interviewees said their children do some type of household chore each day without payment. However, in many cases, parents/duty-bearers reward their children for their help with little treats or pocket money when available. Further, the vast majority of interviewees from all backgrounds do not think helping with household chores constitutes work because they employ life training, responsibilities, and are not hard work for their age group. The consensus is that chores become work with the greater difficulty of the chore. Parents/duty-bearers recognize that there are children that are very miserable, but say it is not their children.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

A teacher interviewee in rural Iasi commented that he has observed amongst the children in his class that those who do certain chores that are age-appropriate do better in the practical ability classes or in technological education classes. For example, they can easily make certain objects or toys because they have specific work abilities that are developed, whereas students that are not involved in any household activities have difficulty coping with average class tasks. He states, however, that these chores must not go beyond a certain level of difficulty.

Taking Care of Siblings

Generally, the vast majority of student interviewees in rural areas admitted to taking care of younger siblings an average of 2-5 hours per day when their parents/duty-bearers are busy working. Further, the vast majority has not missed school to do so. Only 5% of student interviewees have missed school 1-4 times per month to take care of siblings. The greatest absences come from Vaslui. In Iasi City, 57% of respondents take care of their younger siblings, but do not miss school. Overall, of the

parents/duty-bearers interviewed, they stated that their oldest children take care of their younger siblings, but have never missed school for that reason. Teachers in Scanteia, Iasi said this happens about once per month, but it is not a common phenomenon.

By contrast, of the student interviewees that have siblings in Vaslui, where WV works, 20% do not take care of them. Of the parents/duty-bearers interviewed, one parent leaves her youngest son alone when she has a lot of work to do. However, during the spring, her older children skip classes to take turns watching their youngest sibling. In Rebricea, Vaslui, all of the student interviewees that have younger siblings take care of them except for one who does not have time because of school work.

Working Children

The vast majority of respondents aged 15-17 do not have and are not looking for jobs. Further, they do not know anyone with real part-time jobs. However, student interviewees mentioned children in Vaslui that harvest fruit at the orchard for 20-30 Lei per day, sometimes missing school for this activity. A mayor and police officer stated that children do not miss school for these activities. Neither authority believes the children receive payment for their work.

The general trend among students that help their neighbors with chores do not qualify what they do as work. In addition, they have never missed school for these activities and when helping neighbors, they often reap benefits. To illustrate, students in Scanteia, Iasi, commented that they frequently help a neighbor with chores and in exchange, she lets them swim in her pool. This work is only for an hour or two per day and is not hard work. Another respondent said that sometimes his neighbors ask him to do easy chores and they pay him 10 Lei per day. However, one student stated that he has younger friends that work in the field every day after school.

By contrast, 20% of the respondents in rural Iasi, where WV works, are currently looking for summer jobs, but have so far been unsuccessful. They are looking for work in Iasi City because their

family's financial situation is precarious and they want to help. One student in Iasi City has a colleague who is a promoter for a company. This colleague gets paid and never misses school for work.

Parents/duty-bearers, teachers, and priests interviewed in all areas, stated that their kids do not have jobs outside of school. Teachers in Iasi City said they know of their kids having summer jobs at local stores.

"As long as he's in my house, he will study." (parent, Iasi County-rural area)

A mayor in rural Iasi noted that companies currently do not employ children because the work legislation is very rigorous. Companies cannot afford to pay the income taxes or to have work accidents and risk the authorities finding out about their hiring practices. Lastly, a police officer in rural Vaslui said that everyone works, but it depends on the definition.

Community Leaders Interaction with Young People in the Community

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Largely, students in all areas feel teachers and priests communicate well with them because they are more open-minded. The major exception is in Iasi City. Half of the students interviewed think communication between them and the community leaders is good. The rest only communicate with their teachers. In all areas, community leaders go to the school to get the students involved in local activities and give them practical advice. One student mentioned that he did not realize the community leaders collaborated at all until he was involved in an activity with all of them. Compared to teachers and priests, students in rural Iasi, where WV works, agree that the police and the mayor do not communicate with them. It is their opinion that these leaders do not have time for the children. Further, they feel that the police and the mayor do not use an informal language that they can understand. Students in all areas feel leaders rarely communicate with them and thus, should communicate more. However, when leaders do communicate, it is positive and well received. A mayor

in Vaslui expressed his opinion that with the help of WV, authorities are starting to communicate better with the students.

“The students do not need more communication from leaders because they all have their individual jobs to do.” (10-12 year old student, Iasi County-rural area)

In Scanteia, Iasi, students and community leaders feel authorities communicate well with students.

In Vaslui, where WV works, the students thought the authorities communicate well with them, showing them respect, informing them of problems, and giving advice. There is a dialog between the mayor and his villagers. To differentiate, in Rebricea, Vaslui, where WV does not work, the 10-14 year old students say the authorities occasionally communicate with the students, specifically when there is a problem. However, the parents/duty-bearers usually are the ones to communicate with the authorities. The 15-17 year olds say they communicate to a certain extent, but in a rigid and strict manner.

“There are no visible results of the authority’s communication with the children.” (parents, Vaslui County-rural area)

PARENT/DUTY-BEARER PERSPECTIVE

The vast majority of the parents/duty-bearers in both rural Iasi and Vaslui agree that the authorities communicate well with the children and when there is a problem, they intervene to try and solve it. However, one parent in rural Iasi voiced her opinion that the authorities do not interact with the children because of time constraints. Further, one parent in Vaslui expressed her concern that communication between authorities and children is poor.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

Teacher interviewees feel that the relationship between local authorities and children is fruitful because they each contribute to the betterment of the students, coming to school to participate in various activities with the children. Overall, the social assistants agree, but feel the law restricts them from communicating more and doing more practical activities. However, one social assistant in rural Iasi

disagreed, citing that communication does not really exist because of the bureaucracy and volume of everyday work.

DIRECTORATE FOR CHILD PROTECTION PERSPECTIVE

DGASPC-Vaslui says parents/duty-bearers, children, and community stakeholders usually do not think that the authorities are helpful or able to offer them support, and feels the problem is one without many solutions. DGASPC-Iasi feels that authorities collaborate very well amongst themselves but not well with the youth. If the case is not extraordinary, they do not get involved.

The Meanings and Understanding of Child Labor

Social Alternatives asserts that child labor is a real phenomenon. It is all about mentality. This phenomenon is very well known in the NGO circles, but people associate it with one of childhood's normal stages in which the child must learn how to work and deal with life.

“There are three categories of people: those who don't notice the phenomenon, those who notice and react, and those who notice and don't care. The last category is the most popular.” (Social Alternatives)

Unfortunately, the definition of child labor can be interpreted and debated, leading to confusion and lax regulations. Child labor means many things to many people. A mayor in rural Iasi summed the problem up best by saying that “it is difficult to define because it depends on each person's understanding.” One official definition of child labor as defined by the DGASPC-Vaslui says:

Child labor represents the submission of a child to physical labor, which surpasses the level of physical endurance, limiting the bio-psycho-socio-educational development of the child, including the altering of his/her health, the deprivation of education, and the inclusion in groups that do not have a positive educational purpose.

The community's view of child labor is the same and equally expressed by all students, parents/duty-bearers, and community leaders. Once engaged in child labor, children are no longer taken care of. Further, they are deprived of their rights. In general, the interviewee consensus further defined child labor as familiar exploitation, using the children for doing hard work without proper payment, often by force or violence, and replacing their free time with work. A teacher in Vaslui said

that for him, the difference between child labor and “accepted” child labor is when the children do work only for their parents benefit and do not see the fruits of their labor. He feels it is a detriment to use children for farming activities, when they should spend their time acquiring knowledge. The DGASPC-lasi further elaborated, commenting that begging children are also included in the definition of exploitation through labor and that when children are exploited through labor, they have certain mental and physical disabilities because they cannot develop normally.

In Vaslui, where WV works, 43% of the parents/duty-bearers interviewed did not know how to define child labor.

“I’m not saying that children shouldn’t have certain skills for certain chores which are normal in everybody’s life. But they shouldn’t be forced to develop them at an early age.” (parent, Ceplenita commune-lasi County-rural area)

Lastly, a parent, expressing the majority opinion of the Ceplenita commune adult interviewees, said that “we have always worked and no one died of too much work yet.” A teacher interviewee agreed and felt that work develops the thinking and is an “educational monument” because it is the only thing that separates people from other creatures. The priest agreed that work was a type of training, especially if children abandon school after the 10th grade.

A mayor in Vaslui summed up the community feeling:

“I wouldn’t call it child labor... we have cases, it is true; people exploit children. But poverty affects many people here. When children reach the age of 7-8 years, parents send them to take the animals to pasture, when they reach 12 years old, they are taken to hoe or do farm chores, all because of the poverty.” (mayor, Vaslui County-rural area)

A police officer in Vaslui noted that 14 years old is the age of criminal liability in Romania. Thus, those over 14 are no longer considered victims for the purposes of child labor. Further, according to the police officer, there is no legal stipulation regarding child labor as a criminal offense.

The Signs and Effects of Child Labor

Parents/duty-bearers, teachers, community stakeholders/leaders, and NGOs state that when a child is too tired to work, their education is interrupted, or they lack spare time, the limit has been reached between normal chores and child labor. They further state that most community members are not aware of this limit. Several parents/duty-bearers agree that when children spend too much time in the pasture with the animals, they are exploited.

A parent in Scanteia, Iasi summed up the situation by saying, "They are absent; they have walked out from the category of children and entered into another one, the ones who work." The representative from ANITP stated that, "If parents don't let their children go to school, but asks them to work instead, child labor could be considered human trafficking." The DGASPC-Iasi commented that in rural areas, exploited children initially are absent from school before fully abandoning. Teachers paying attention to school abandonment, can easily identify these children by the way they look and act.

"The symptomatic pattern is clear and physically we look at the development of the spine. There is a delay in their mental development or in their language, poor communication abilities, and relationship skills. These would be the first symptoms we see in children who are being exploited through labor."
(doctor, Vaslui County-rural area)

The Community's View on Child Labor/Begging

In rural Iasi, interviewees stated that most community members are against child labor and would not do such a thing. Despite this feeling, the general consensus among all interviewees is that it is normal for children to work. This calls into question the community's definition of child labor.

"People's mentality implemented either by religion, culture, or common sense, keeps them from doing such things." (social assistant, Iasi County-rural area)

However, the doctors commented that community members are not aware they are exploiting their children. For example, two families went to the doctors to try to get a medical exemption so that their children can do fieldwork. Both were denied such an exemption.

The police officer in rural Iasi summed it up best by saying:

“Maybe they don’t accept this phenomenon, but everyone accepts it silently. They say that the child is able to work and that they are hardworking but none of them thinks of the fact that they no longer have a childhood.”

Despite the community’s perception, the mayor in Ceplenita, Iasi, stated that the Department of Social Services started to have an impact in 1996-1997 through laws protecting the family, the children, and elderly people. The social assistant says that more cases have been reported to her because of this.

Taking into consideration the place where interviewees live, it is considered normal for children to work, especially since their parents had done the same. One must support and care for their families. However, sometimes it is a blurry line. Not all parents are aware of the limit between normal household chores and child labor, and do not consider it exploitation. From this point of view, there is a lot of work to do with the community, as far as their education is concerned. It is usually harder for low-functioning families to understand that by not allowing a child to go to school they are ruining his/her future and that it is a big long term loss for the children involved. It means denying the child a part of their lives.

“The community does not know what child labor is, apart from what is reported in the mass media.”
(doctor, Vaslui County-rural area)

The Iasi diocese priest commented that some people do not encourage begging because they will not give money unless they know what it will go towards, some give and do not care where it goes, and others are led by the Christian feeling to help those less fortunate than oneself. Moreover, many community members are aware that if they stop giving to beggars who are truly in need, the children would be in worse trouble. For example, most beggars lack education and the necessary identification to enter a rehabilitation program. Thus, their lives are very difficult.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS PERSPECTIVE

ANITP argues that from a legal point of view, this phenomenon is well perceived by the people. According to the representative, parents often sell their children because of lack of funds. There are

cases in which children from Moldavia were forced by their parents to go to the south of the country to work. The consequences for the parents were the termination of their parental rights.

Child Labor Visibility

All interviewees agree that there are indications of child labor when there is poverty in the community and problems at home. Children that are sent to work outside the home do so because the family lacks proper food and clothing. The perception of child labor is a question of the community's mentality and each respondent's definition of child labor. For children interviewees, children working too hard for their age defined the consensus of the meaning of child labor.

"Child labor does not exist because it is normal for children to help their parents." (social assistants, Iasi and Vaslui Counties-rural area)

Further, it is evident that there are mixed opinions on the visibility of child labor, even amongst members of the same community. For example, parent/duty-bearer respondents in rural Iasi where WV works agreed that child labor is not very visible because parents say they do not participate in it. On the other hand, one parent says it is very visible and that she has many neighbors who exploit their children. Professionals within these communities share similar mixed opinions. Some name examples of exploited children within their community, while others feel it does not exist. However, the vast majority of interviewees recalled the sensational media story of the boy who was sold to work on a pig farm and was electrocuted while climbing an electricity pole.

"I know a case in which both parents drink and they send their child to work in agriculture for someone who has a farm. The parents take his money. Further, he does not go to school any longer. There are other cases of children who are sent to work as shepherd helpers. They quit school because they have to be there from morning until evening. In the winter, they stay there." (parent, Iasi County-rural area)

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

In all communities, children interviewees knew children working within their communities. Further, all interviewees are aware of children working in outside communities as well. In rural Iasi where WV works (Ceplenita and Vladeni), 67% of children in the 10-12 year old focus group know

children working in their community compared with 30% in rural Iasi where WV does not work (Scanteia), 45% in Vaslui where WV works (Osesti and Dumesti), and 60% in Vaslui where WV does not work (Rebricea). By contrast, 100% of the students in the 13-14 year old focus group in Vaslui where WV works know children within their community that are working. In other areas, only 1-2 students in this group know children working in their community. Regarding the 15-17 year old interviewees, 1-2 students interviewed in rural Iasi know students that are working. By contrast, 80% of students interviewed in Vaslui know children working in their community. As anticipated, children in Iasi City do not know any children in their community that are working too hard for their age. However, they all agree that they have seen such cases in the countryside, as well as Roma begging on City streets.

Some of the students the children interviewees talked about are enrolled in school, while others are not. Those that are enrolled in school, frequently miss classes to work. Further, a handful of these cases involve children living with extended family members. Occasionally the cases described involve payment, all involve poverty, and many involve familiar alcoholism and abuse. Typically these children must work the land, do household chores, look after siblings, work in the village, and take care of animals.

“I know a boy that does not come to school because he takes care of his little brothers. He goes in the woods to bring firewood, helps their parents in agriculture, and feeds the animals. Some of his brothers go to kindergarten, but he does not come to school because he has to work.” (10-12 year old interviewee, Vaslui County-rural area)

One 15-17 year old interviewee gave a telling elusive answer:

“It sometimes happens with children who are poorer... I don’t know... I’m not sure, I can’t say. It doesn’t happen too often here. They are not put to work very often. No. . . there aren’t such cases.” (15-17 year old interviewee, Iasi County-rural area)

Another 15-17 year old interviewee stated that:

“There are cases of child labor in the village, but maybe the children do it voluntarily.” (15-17 year old interviewee, Iasi County-rural area)

PARENT/DUTY-BEARER PERSPECTIVE

Regarding the question of mentality, the overall opinion within all communities among those interviewed is the belief and knowledge that child labor occurs, but not in their own community. Cases that do occur are generally isolated and not overly severe, as opposed to incidents that happen in outside communities. The work children do in their communities is considered normal childhood work. Among parents interviewed in Vaslui, the majority recognizes that many children in Vaslui work very hard, especially within the Roma community.

Scanteia, Iasi, is the exception to the opinion that child labor occurs, but elsewhere. Three of the four parents/duty-bearers interviewed said there are cases of child labor in their community. The parents are aware of such cases because their children have told them about conversations with other children.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

Further, community members feel the work children do is age appropriate and when children are asked, they believe they are helping their families. To illustrate, all interviewees in Rebricea, Vaslui, with the exception of the mayor, commented that they did not know any cases of child labor in their community, but knew that there were communities where children work too hard for their age and miss school. Professionals from all backgrounds commented that students may miss some classes to help their parents, but do not abandon school.

“15-20% of my students miss class in the spring to work the land or watch their siblings.” (priest, Iasi County-rural area)

Teachers noted that children wake up early to take their animals to pasture and arrive at school very tired. They do not have the energy to participate. When asked why children decided to work, the teacher responded:

“The family environment, the fact that he is forced to do it by his parents, although I don’t know whether “forced” is the right word. Maybe they come from a big family and I suppose that, in order to be able to support themselves, they have to appeal to their children for work.” (Vaslui County-rural area)

Teachers in all areas stated they notice signs of working children when they have large numbers of absences. Despite parental/duty-bearer accounts of child labor in Scanteia, Iasi, the social assistant and the vice mayor said there are not cases of child labor or exploited children in their community. If there are isolated cases, it is difficult to identify them.

The priest in Iasi City, representing the entire diocese, noted that the most common form of child labor in Iasi City consist of child beggars, often making hundreds of Lei per day depending on the time of year. Through his work at the diocese, he has seen and visited these children. The representative stated that they chose this “independent” life because they were beaten and exploited at home. Additionally, most of these kids that he sees are living on the streets, joining gangs, and engaging in addictive substances. He further commented that he frequently sees children working at the fruit market, instead of their parents.

NGOs AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS PERSPECTIVE

Social Alternatives says that for them, child labor is visible because they look for it. When they first investigate a community, they already have in mind the image of the child that spends more hours on the field than in school. They go to schools and see very few children in classes. Then they see them in the woods or on the field, especially in autumn. The representative further elaborated to say that human trafficking cases are very rare.

Save the Children says that child labor is visible because they work with homeless children that beg on the streets and sell flowers. Save the Children is unable to determine if they do this work on their own or if their parents send them. Their parents are very poor. The children are aware of the family’s financial situation and know they need money.

ANITP stated that they do not receive reports of child labor cases for either Iasi or Vaslui County. However, if they did see such cases, they would report it to the Directorate for Investigating Organized

Crime. The Directorate would investigate the case and then it could be reported to the Child Protection Service.

DGASPC-Iasi reported that children are occasionally injured while working in inappropriate activities for their age. Most of the cases are in agriculture when children work in orchards. They fall from trees. Further, there have been cases of children struck by lightning, as well as hoeing, shovel, and mowing accidents. The most serious injury is the risk of permanent mental and physical delays.

All interviewees agreed parents/duty-bearers that should be advised about their children's rights from local authorities or Child Protection Services if it is discovered that their children are working too hard for their age. The representative from GDSACP-Vaslui suggested that those suspecting child labor should report it to any local institution that can take a stand, such as the doctor, the school, the police or the mayoralty, which are obliged to take notice and inform GDSACP about it in order for an intervention to take place.

Children Going to Other Communities to Work

Most of the parents/duty-bearers interviewed in all areas are not aware of children going to other communities for work. Every year, there are a few isolated cases of children leaving their community to work as shepherds or in agriculture, as noted by parents/duty-bearers and community leaders. Usually, these children are between the ages of 13-17 and have abandoned school. For example, one teacher stipulated that in 2004-2005:

“so-called company owners would come to recruit children. They would ask directly about children who came from poor families and they would go straight to the parents and arrange a deal with them. The parents were happy because the children were earning some money. Now people are more aware of the danger, back then it was a real phenomenon. Companies came to Moldavia because they knew that they could find poor families with many children.” (teacher, Iasi County-rural area)

There have been instances of children from neighboring villages, who are day laborers, going to other communities to work the land or work in the vineyard. However, this is a rarity because rural areas are more isolated and work is harder to find. One teacher out of four responded that he/she

knows 6-7 children who were sent to other communities to work picking grapes or as a shepherd. Generally they are from disorganized or single parent families. The interviewee estimated that the children make 30 Lei per day. These children were registered for school, but no longer attend.

According to the vast majority of interviewees in all areas, a non-local child coming into their community to work or beg would raise suspicions because people gossip and everyone would know. However, a priest in Vaslui disagreed, stating that a non-local child coming to work as a day laborer would not raise suspicions because people are grateful for the help.

NGOs AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS PERSPECTIVE

Save the Children representatives stated that they had a handful of cases in which children were left in a neighboring village to beg. However, they have not had this situation reported to them in the last two years. DGASPC-Vaslui and Iasi occasionally have cases of national internal trafficking with the intention to exploit through labor, in which the employers come to the north of the country from the south to recruit their workforce. The parents sign a contract with the employers in exchange for farm animals or small amounts of money. Usually, the contract does not have any legal power. The employers own sheepfolds or agricultural farms. For them, the contract is a way of justifying that they did not take the child from the family by force and that the child was allowed to go by his parents. The employer views this form as an understanding that prevents any legal repercussions.

According to DGASPC representatives, they are made aware of this type of contract borrowing when a tragic incident occurs. The children receive very small sums of money for their work. In addition, older siblings that have abandoned school often take their younger siblings with them to the south to work in agriculture. Further, according to DGASPC, neighbors in the south do not report these incidents because they are complicit in their actions.

Reporting of Child Labor Cases

Overall, parents/duty-bearers, community stakeholders/leaders, and professionals agree that child labor cases are very rarely reported, but they know children that are very miserable. All, but one,

of the parent/duty-bearer interviewees state that they have never reported it. However, most state that they have witnessed it. One parent/duty-bearer out of 25 interviewed reported a case in which she took in an impoverished family that was not providing for their children. She reported it to the social assistant. Unfortunately, the social assistant would not intervene because she was concerned that the family would harm her if she took action against them. One out of eight parents/duty-bearers in Vaslui admitted that she wants to report her neighbor who drinks, smokes, and makes their children do their work. Yet, she has never reported this case. Another parent in Vaslui admitted that she would not report the situation because at one point she was in the same situation.

Further, teachers stated that child labor is not reported because they only have isolated cases. To illustrate, in Iasi City, teachers have never reported cases of their Roma children's seasonal absences. Almost all professionals and community leaders state that if they observed a case of child labor, they would talk to the parents or family members involved to try to invoke a change. Further, almost all professionals and community leaders state that they would not report the case to local authorities before or after talking to the respective families. A priest, representing the Iasi diocese informed WV that him and his colleagues went to the local police to report incidents of child begging, but were told that it was better for them not to get involved, for their own safety. The priest in Vaslui summed up the situation perfectly:

"These cases are not reported very often. As long as the parents have a difficult financial condition, as long as there are the so-called owners who look for day laborers and offer money, these cases will not be reported."

The reasoning behind the lack of reporting in Scanteia, Iasi, resonates with all interviewed communities. Three of the four parents/duty-bearers interviewed said they would not report it because it is not their concern and they cannot meddle in another's family. One parent said she reported a case once, but most cases like these are not reported because the children are educated to work. Further, teachers in Scanteia have never heard of reported cases, but estimate the reporting rate is less than 1%.

The social assistant and the vice mayor confirmed that such cases are not reported. In Vaslui, one parent expressed the view of many in saying:

“I wouldn’t report it... When I ask my children to work, I am aware of the fact that I must not make them work very hard.”

Contrary to the opinions of their colleagues, the social assistant and the mayor in Osesti, Vaslui believe that when cases are ascertained they are reported. The social assistant knows two concrete cases of child exploitation in Rebricea and has spoken to the parents and did a visit report in one case. She stated cases are not reported because the community accepts them as part of the normal childhood experience. The mayor further stated that there are families with problems and they intervene every time it is necessary. The doctors stated that they do not have any knowledge of such cases being reported. There were one or two isolated cases and the doctors went to the respective family to make them aware of the problem. The police officer has not had any cases of child labor reported to him but said that they would take legal action if they were reported. From his experience, less than 10% of cases are reported to local authorities.

“People don’t really take measures here... Although people see them working hard, they don’t think too much about it.” (teacher, Vaslui County-rural area)

NGOs AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS PERSPECTIVE

Social Alternatives estimates that approximately 10% of child labor cases are reported to them. Only the very severe cases, cases in which the child was injured, are reported. Additionally, these cases do not get reported to the media. The representative from Social Alternatives further estimated that 50% of these cases could be solved if they were reported. They have come across cases in which children were beaten, and when they investigated the case they realized that the child was also working and missing from school. However, these cases are not reported to them as child labor cases. Further, Social Alternatives does not have a database of child labor cases. Thus, they only know of them when they are in a community exercising a campaign.

No one has ever reported such a case to Save the Children. However, when cases are reported, they call the authorities if they are severe. If they are not severe, they try to talk with the children's parents to convince them to change. Further, he said that people do not report such cases, but that it is left up to the NGOs to report when they are discovered.

DGASPC-Vaslui said that until a few years ago child labor was not a phenomenon that people disapproved of. However, they have organized informative campaigns, which clearly laid out the legislative framework that punishes child labor and what it actually represents. As a result, there have been frequent reports over the last two years when compared to previous years. However, some of them are confirmed while others are not. The representative elaborated to say that many times the local authority sees these cases, but does not take notice. When these cases come to the DGASPC, they go to the local authority and inform them. There, they are told that they knew about them. Still, the reporting percentage remains low. For example, this year they have had six complaints of child labor. By the end of the year, they usually have no more than 15-20 reported cases. ANITP agreed that these cases are not reported very often.

DGASPC-Iasi noted that most cases reported to them are reported as cases of neglect, not child labor. According to the representative, this is because there is no such thing as pure exploitation through labor within the legislative framework. Most of the times, they receive complaints of neglect and discover afterwards that the children are deprived of education, not given proper medication, exhibiting mental delays, or they are not fed or properly cleaned. Afterwards, when they start to investigate, they discover that these children are also exploited through work. Thus, most of the complaints are about child neglect, but about 70% also imply child labor. They have received 103 complaints of child neglect through March. The cause for school abandonment is labor: the children work either within the household or during the day for the neighbors.

Usage of the Child Labor Fact Sheet

(FIȘA PENTRU SEMNALAREA CAZURILOR DE EXPLOATARE A COPILULUI PRIN MUNCĂ)

The above-mentioned fact sheet is a required reporting tool for all authorities, created by the Romanian government, to report child labor cases. Throughout every interviewed area, the fact sheet is seemingly not used to report child labor, except by the DGASPC, because it is not perceived as a successful tool. In addition, cases of child labor are perceived as child neglect, which is not covered by the above form. Further, the local authorities in most areas note that they do not have the fact sheet and have also not seen it. Those that have the document have not used it. To illustrate, one social assistant in rural Iasi thinks they have the form, but she has not seen it. Thus, she has not used it. Police officers in all areas agree that it would be effective if it were anonymous. Unfortunately, the protocol for using the fact sheet is generally not implemented. Social assistants in Vaslui said they do not have the fact sheet, but have seen it on the Internet.

Social Alternatives says it is a good tool but possibly too large for social assistants to deal with. Save the Children does not know if they have used the form, but they have reported a few cases to the child protection office. Further, the representative said that child labor is more complicated than expression on the form will allow.

DGASPC is the only interviewed authority that uses the above-required tool to report child labor cases. The representative from DGASPC-Vaslui stated that there is a standardized social worker report for these cases. According to DGASPC, the above tool is not always implemented at the level of the local authorities because it is not perceived as a specific tool which can offer more concrete details on the exploitation. That is why the employees from the mayoralty treat the matter as another form of risk for children. Thus, NGOs do not succeed in working with these tools at the level of the mayoralties. However, according to the representative, there has to be a certain form of monitoring. If DGASPC notices that there is a risk of child labor, the local authority has the responsibility to monitor the case. Usually, DGASPC prefers to monitor the case themselves for a period of three months, to give an

example to the local authorities of what the monitoring implies and to then let them continue the process that DGASPC has started.

DGASPC-Iasi, reported that the local authority, which files the complaint, should use the form, but often does not. The form was simplified since its initial release, but there are very few mayoralties that use it, especially since most cases are reported as child neglect. When the DGASPC receives these cases, they take the initial report and fill out the form.

ANITP has never heard about the document.

Steps Taken When a Case is Reported to the DGASPCs

When the complaint is registered with the DGASPC-Vaslui, representatives with the agency discuss the complaint with the Department of Social Services, within the mayorality, because the matter falls under the mayorality's jurisdiction on the basis of Order no. 286 and other laws regarding child protection. Then, they go with the local authority to evaluate the circumstances and question whether the child is in a major risk situation. They intervene with the local authority if DGASPC and the Department of Social Services determine that there is a case of child labor. To intervene, they appeal to the police. On the basis of a government decision in 2009, the police can now deal with parents who exploit their children through labor.

DGASPC-Iasi receives both written and telephone complaints. Cases of exploitation, neglect, abuse or human trafficking are sent directly to their office. If the case is very serious, they go into the community within 24 hours to investigate. If immediate intervention is not needed, they analyze the situation and possibly intervene.

Local Initiatives for Raising Awareness and Prevention

The NGO, Social Alternatives says they can get involved in reducing child labor through discussions with the local authorities, mainly with the police, when they have projects that deal with these kinds of situations within the communities. They have very good relations with the police,

building activities that involve them, and sponsoring activities initiated by them. They succeed in achieving buy in for problems, but the mayoralty lacks resources. The financial situation of the community is relevant for whether the social assistants can do their job. They believe that further partnership is possible. Unfortunately, because of budgetary reasons, there are very few social assistants working in the communities. In the countryside, the situation is more complicated because there are significantly more communities.

Social Alternatives launched initiatives that include a series of projects and partnerships with the ILO concerning child labor. These included projects designed for children who were exploited, centers in which these children were helped to keep up their school performances. Further, these campaigns must be continued in order to change mentalities and for parents to realize how important education is for their children.

In 2003, Save the Children gathered many NGOs and local institutions together in order to launch media campaigns, to target groups in both rural and urban communities. As a result of these campaigns, people became more cognizant of the problem. The representative further elaborated that the activities that existed are no longer put into practice because they do not have the financial resources. Thus, they need help from the state.

The DGASPC-Vaslui had a workshop on the topic of child labor to discuss the problem and find solutions. Both the local authorities and other institutions from the County were invited. Further, they launched informative campaigns in schools and certain communities and created leaflets to inform the populous about child labor. Further, DGASPC- Vaslui, collaborates with the Territorial Labor Inspectorate, the Public Health Directorate and other organizations that are in the position to offer support to exploited children. The Territorial Labor Inspectorate helps DGASPC obtain a restraint as far as the employer is concerned. The Public Health Directorate helps DGASPC in cases that deal with the

child's health status. Further, this team of professionals is functional and meets regularly to discuss certain situations and try to find alternatives to help exploited children.

The DGASPC-Iasi said they have held numerous programs in collaboration with Save the Children and WV. Further, the county is amongst the first in Romania to have the local inter-sectorial team for prevention and combating child labor. In this team, there are representatives from the Territorial Labor Inspectorate, the School Inspection Service, among others. They also collaborate with Save the Children and the Social Alternatives Association.

Lastly, ANITP initiated anti-trafficking campaigns with other NGOs from Romania and abroad. These campaigns were designed to reach children and other frequent victims of abuse who depend on the abused person's service.

Increasing the Likelihood of Reporting

The likelihood of increasing the reporting of child labor cases within a given community is very low for several reasons. Chief among these is that community members from all backgrounds do not want to get involved in personal situations of fellow community members. They do not feel comfortable engaging in actions that will most likely get their neighbors or themselves in trouble. Further, most community members do not feel as though they have enough information to act. Finally, The consensus is that no matter how bad the children's life is at home, they will be worse off if taken away from their families, a likely result of reporting.

For example, in the rural areas, parents/duty-bearers, professionals, and community leaders noted that the community should get more involved, but they agreed that typically they see things and never say anything. Fear of repercussions from the respective family is enough to maintain community silence because they do not trust the local authorities to uphold their confidence. Further, they do not feel comfortable going to another parent and explaining to them how they should raise their children. It

is apparent that the situations are well known, but no one wants to get involved. A priest in Vaslui felt the solution is not to report the cases. Instead, the solution is:

“For parents to face the risks and change their conception in order to support their children without asking them to work.”

To propel the community to increase its reporting of child labor cases, each community needs a strongly enforced and discussed confidential policy among community leaders. Further, community members need to feel as though they will be listened to and educated to understand how the consequences of child labor will affect the children. DGASPC-Iasi suggested that increased authority vigilance would boost reporting and decrease child labor.

Moreover, for children to feel safe self-reporting their child labor case or that of their peers, they need to feel that they can trust their community leaders.

“In many cases, the abuse is so intense that the child does not see or conceive a way out of it. They think it is their destiny.” (priest, Iasi City-urban area)

Furthermore, the priest suggested creating a reporting campaign, where community members can call a hotline to anonymously report cases of child labor/begging. In addition, he further recommended following up on the hotline campaign with another campaign designed to publicize successfully solved cases to convince community members that authorities are taking action.

Lastly, Save the Children states that anti-child labor legislation exists, but they do not have specific material resources to alleviate the problem. However, the media could increase reporting by writing stories about solved cases to raise the public’s awareness about the problem and hopefully increase reporting.

Knowledge of Child Protection Laws and Programs

Most children seem to be informed about child protection laws and some even participated in programs organized by WV or Save the Children to promote them. Typically, children learn about these laws through projects in school, brochures, and lectures. Though they have a good working knowledge

of such laws, many children feel there should be more activities dealing with child protection and that the laws should be better known to the public. The vast majority of students and community members that participated in child protection promotion activities are in rural areas in Iasi County. Parents noted that those that need the activities the most, are often those that do not attend. Overall, community leaders are divided on whether or not the laws are helpful for their community.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Students in the 10-12 year old focus group and the 15-17 year old interviewees in rural Iasi, where WV works, commented that WV organized some projects to educate students about human trafficking and to advise them that children must not be abused. By contrast, The 13-14 year old students did not participate in any child protection activities.

“In my opinion, the laws are not entirely respected. They have been broken many times. From what I’ve seen in my community, there have been a few programs, which concentrated on children’s rights, but I have not seen a lot of parents who respect these laws.” (15-17 year old, Iasi County-rural area)

Students of all ages are aware that all children, irrespective of their nationality, race or sex, have the right to live, to be equal, to freedom of opinion, to freedom of thought, to have the right to information, to be protected against violence, to health care and to have a decent life. Further, one must not exploit children, have them do work that they cannot do, or send them to beg. A 15-17 year old interviewee in Iasi City expressed their opinion that the government might be depriving children of the right to have a decent life. They have also heard that parents who beat and mistreat their children are punished. One student discussed his experience with child protection coming to his school to investigate such a situation and taking the children.

PARENT/DUTY-BEARER PERSPECTIVE

The majority of parents/duty-bearers interviewed in rural Iasi where WV works, stated that they participated in parent education activities run by WV and Save the Children. They feel the activities are helpful for those that attend and respect the law. Further, they are aware that the law protects children

and that they have rights. Children have also informed their parents that they talked about their rights at school.

Outside of television and newspapers, the vast majority of interviewed parents/duty-bearers in Vaslui have not heard about child protection laws or programs about them in their community. Most parents say there are no activities about child protection in their community.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

A police officer in Iasi County stated that Romania has the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, which should protect children against being forced to work or against physical or mental suffering. However, the act is not always followed.

The mayor in Rebricea, Vaslui feels that most of the laws are respected and that the community is lucky to have partnerships with WV and Pro Friendship Foundation. Further, for short periods of time, UNICEF has organized activities to record and monitor the problems the children had in the commune.

A priest in Vaslui County also does not feel like the laws are well known in the community, but he feels that the situation is more about the parent's conscience than the country's legislation. The general feeling among those that know the laws is that they are respected in the community. According to the mayor, they impact the society we live in, "What we raise today is what we will find tomorrow." A society develops depending on its education and security. Thus, it would be in the detriment of the society for the laws not to have impact.

Teachers in rural Iasi, where WV works, recall activities organized by UNICEF, WV, the Local Council, and Save the Children. Further, since the UN adopted the convention on the rights of the children, more attention has been given to the subject both in schools and elsewhere and to the process of informing the children about their rights. As a direct result of these projects, teachers have seen the parents' attitude toward children change, as well as their view on the importance of education.

Several community leaders in many communities are familiar with Law 272/2004, which provides an explanation of child rights, stating that parents should not beat the children or get violent. Community leaders are divided on whether the law is helpful. For example, a mayor in Vaslui thinks the laws are helpful in combating child labor. However, he feels they do not come to finality because prosecuting such cases take substantial effort and time. Moreover, several stakeholders feel that their community does not have sufficient resources and financial support to implement such laws. Further, they feel that the laws are not always respected. Though these laws are discussed in school meetings with parents, community leaders do not think these laws necessarily have any impact on child labor cases and that they are too lax.

Who is Responsible for Stopping Child Labor/Begging?

Parent/duty-bearer interviewees agree that they are the ones responsible for stopping child labor because they choose whether or not to use their children for inappropriate work. Secondly, they agree that the social assistant is responsible because they check on the living situation of every child.

As evidenced by the interview with a priest in Vaslui, community leaders are responsible for stopping child labor too. The priest mentioned that in his sermons, he talks to parishioners about what labor actually means and how they should teach their children to work. He explains that they cannot exhaust their children by asking them to work too hard for their age and that they should ask the young to do easy chores.

Moreover, the priest in Iasi City suggested that the police are responsible for stopping child begging because they choose whether or not to act violently toward the offender. When they are violent against the children, community members take notice and are encouraged to support the children through financial contributions without realizing the consequences of supporting the beggar lifestyle. These consequences include addictive behaviors and perpetuating exploitation. Instead, community members feel they are taking a stance against an inappropriate acting police force.

Finally, the DGASPC-lasi felt strongly that all community leaders were responsible for stopping child labor. This is achievable by paying more attention to changes in the child's behavior. In addition, officials need to inform parents that they can be held criminally liable for their actions toward their children.

Possible Actions to Stop Child Labor

Many interviewees were in agreement that the root causes of child labor: poverty and symptomatic alcoholism must be addressed prior to tackling child labor. Combating the root causes will pave the way to address the core issue of child labor. Possible actions to deal with child labor include: informative campaigns and meetings with parents, children, and community leaders/authorities, continued and strengthened NGO collaboration, increasing the child allotment, strengthening and improving child labor legislation, periodic home visits to troubled families, paying attention to unjustified school absences, and ensuring continuity within the education system.

Parents/duty-bearers, teachers, community leaders, local authorities, and NGOs interviewed voiced their opinions that there should be informative campaigns and meetings with the parents/duty-bearers to change people's mentality about how they treat their children and to make the issue public. DGASPC-lasi feels that informative campaigns need to reach beyond traditional movies and leaflets to properly discuss the core issue. Further, parent counseling is a good start toward addressing child labor because the better they are informed, the more likely parents will work toward its prevention. However, all interviewees recognize that changing one's mentality is very difficult. Other meetings should be held with the children in their schools to educate them on their rights and how to recognize a child labor situation. Conquering taboo topics such as these allow children and parents to talk frankly about them. Lastly, informative campaigns should be held with community leaders and local authorities to teach the populous how to recognize a child labor situation, remove its taboo, and hopefully increase its reporting.

According to Social Alternatives, there are no long-term activities initiated by NGOs that are continued by the local authorities. What NGOs could do is to show the authorities their results, give them examples of successfully solved child labor cases, identify the issue's main key points and let them ask for services as needed. Teachers in rural Iasi mentioned that the collaboration with Save the Children helps to stop child labor because children that have participated in their activities are better informed and more careful.

Parents/duty-bearers in Vaslui suggested that increasing the child allotment could keep children in school. This goes toward addressing the main root cause of child labor: poverty. The financial support they receive from the mayoralty has recently been reduced. Therefore, for some families, it makes more economic sense for their children to work, than to attend school.

It is evident that solutions to child labor start at the top, with the government. Thus, a clear and rigid legislative framework is necessary. Further, local governments need to strive to make sure that the legislation is properly enacted with appropriate repercussions for violators. In addition, whenever possible, the social assistants should conduct periodic home visits with troubled families. The school system can help track and report these families by paying close attention to unjustified absences.

DGASPC-Vaslui says that what is needed is an education system that could ensure continuity. In rural areas, children finish a certain educational program and then they cannot go on because the parents cannot afford to send them to another locality to study or they cannot afford to send all their children to continue school. Thus, they only send one child while the others stay at home because they have to help with the welfare of the family

How the School System Plays a Part

In all communities, the school is supposed to educate the children and be a safe place where they are looked after and cared for. There is a noticeable difference between communities where WV is

present, especially in rural areas, as evidenced through better school involvement in the lives of its children.

School participation in rural Iasi where WV works highlights this difference. There, the schools educate the children about their rights and organize informative sessions with parents to inform them about children's rights, as they did in collaboration with WV. They helped the community form a cohesive unit. Teachers encourage complete participation to ensure that those that need the information most will participate. Further, teachers encourage all parents to send their children to school. The time children spend at school helps them disconnect from work at home and feel better about themselves.

Parents/duty-bearers and teachers in Scanteia, Iasi, agree that when a child abandons school, teachers should go to the parents and ask them to come to school. One teacher noted that he/she observes cases of unexplained absences, while another stated that he/she sends other school children to the missing child's house to shame parents into sending their children back to school.

"They send them addresses and the social worker interferes, but most of the times, nothing changes because teachers cannot force parents."
(parent, Iasi County-rural area)

Parents/duty-bearers and teachers from Vaslui, where WV works, also agreed that the school plays a very important part in combating child labor. The school organized meetings with parents advising them to let the children study, especially those who are in the 8th grade. The school helps the children because as the teachers say, "to know is to be strong." In the cases where children are missing school because they are working, the parents/duty-bearers were given notice and asked to send their children to school.

Parents/duty-bearers in Rebricea, Vaslui said that the school should do more activities to educate students and parents about this topic. Teachers expressed their opinion that they need to get close to the children, so that the children will feel comfortable confiding in them.

Teachers in Iasi City said the school used to have activities that involved parents. However, parents that ask their children to work never take part in such activities. Teachers tried to convince them, but were unable to change their minds.

How Parents/Duty-bearers Play a Part

Parents/duty-bearers in rural Iasi and Vaslui agree that unfortunately, they play a part in child exploitation because they are usually the ones asking their children to do activities unbecoming of a child. They think the children must work because they, the parents, should not be the only ones working. Further, the parents/duty-bearers worked when they were children. In addition, the interviewees agreed that those who are alcoholics prefer to drink and let their children do their work. Further, the parents/duty-bearers are the ones who provide basic education while the children are still at home and as such, they should encourage their child to do what they can, according to their strength and to continue their education. Parents/duty-bearers felt that those that do not exploit their children should talk to those that do to bring about a change.

How Community Stakeholders/Leaders Play a Part

According to the legislative framework, “The staff of the public or private institutions who come into contact with the child through the nature of their profession and have suspicions concerning a potential case of child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment, must urgently notify the general department for social security and child protection.”⁵³ Usually, this condition is not met. In practice, professionals talk to the families of the children and hope that a discussion will change their ways. This is evident in conversations with health care professionals. They talk with the parents/dutybearers, to try to bring about change, but without reporting the cases. One police officer in Dumesti, Vaslui, summed up the situation perfectly, explaining how they conduct informal sanctions, while reasoning with the families.

“On one side, we sanction the family but on the other side, we communicate with them.”

The social assistant is a professional and also a community leader. The role of the social assistant is to stop these cases from happening and to investigate them when they do. Further, the social assistants in Vaslui, where WV works, discuss school abandonment and child labor at the Consultative Community Council because the headmasters, the teachers, the police chief, the doctors, and all of the local authority officials are part of this council. At these meetings, they discuss community problems. Further, their role is to find a way to make the family sensible as far as the children's basic needs are concerned and to take appropriate measures in extreme cases when the situation does not change in the respective family, if they are not receptive.

The mayor's duty is to bring the law into operation, to provide the other community leaders with the necessary information and take necessary legal action. However, the mayors stated that they do not have an appropriate law to apply to child labor situations. According to one mayor in Iasi County, they have been struggling since 1997 to combat child labor. However, they have been dealing with the same things: they go and face these families, yet the families threaten them and reproach them for having taken their children away.

As part of their job, the priests are supposed to visit each parishioner's house five times per year. They go to every house, no matter how good or bad they are. Thus, they can come into contact with these problems much better. They try to explain the negative effects that this phenomenon has upon families and children to the parents/duty-bearers. Though, they acknowledge that they cannot force the families to do what they say because in the end, it is their choice.

Changes in Child Labor

Overall, community members have not noticed a change in child labor through the years. Further, many do not feel a change is possible. It was noted that since the 1989 revolution, in the rural areas, families have been given bigger parcels of land. Therefore, everyone in the family must work the

land. Though machines have replaced some land work, the work amount remains the same because the land size has increased. Further, many children now go abroad with their parents to work.

According to teachers in Vaslui, where WV works, the community knows that there are anti-child labor laws, but family members do not react to them. Lastly, the social assistant said that the children are less absent from school after the police officer talks to them.

Teachers in Rebricea, Vaslui, said that they have not seen a change in child labor because there have always been poor families. In these families, children work as much as their parents. The general feeling in rural areas is that,

“These kinds of things [real child labor] have always existed and they will still exist as long as parents need their help because we don’t have the methods to improve the situation.”
(teacher, Vaslui County-rural area)

Teachers in Iasi City said that though they have not noticed a change in labor, they feel the legislation is more severe and there are more projects initiated by NGOs to address this issue.

DGASPC-Iasi said that cases of child labor in agriculture are more numerous than in the past. However, they are not reported because the degree of poverty has worsened and the more poverty grows, the more the number of exploited and neglected children grows as well. Further, before joining the EU, Romania had many reported cases of external human trafficking, which is always done with the purpose of exploitation. Since, joining the EU, the number of cases has most definitely risen because one can go abroad much more easily. However, these cases are not reported because they are no longer seen as foreigners and thus, it is not considered external trafficking.

Is There More Work Needed to Combat Child Labor?

The general opinion, both in rural Iasi and Vaslui where WV works and does not work is that it is obvious that more work is needed to alleviate child labor. From all of the places considered, only a couple of people expressed a different opinion: the priest in Ceplenita, Iasi and the vice mayor in Scanteia, Iasi.

The priest felt that more work is not needed because he does two sermons on the topic of child labor and he feels it is enough because his parishioners are very receptive. The vice mayor in Scanteia, Iasi, did not give a reason for why he felt that no additional work was needed.

Further, the social assistant in Scanteia thinks more work is needed, but it should be to combat the poverty in the community because that will help alleviate the root cause of the child labor problem. The social assistant in Rebricea, Vaslui suggests making a supervision center where impoverished children can go to do their homework, play, and get a meal.

Obstacles to Reducing Child Labor

According to the vast majority of interviewees, poverty and lack of education are the main obstacles to reducing child labor. There is a close connection between poverty and education: when there isn't education there is poverty and where there is poverty there is the lack of education. Poverty stops parents/duty-bearers from sending children to school, so that they can help their family by working and because they cannot afford to purchase the items necessary for their children to attend school. These parents/duty-bearers think that the best solution for their families is for their children to work. Thus, they ask their children start working at an early age, with some children starting to work at approximately 10 years old. Many things are expensive and money is tight for these families. Further, if parents had good jobs and were paid properly, their children would no longer be asked to work. This repetitive cycle perpetuates the poverty problem because children cannot decide their future since they are no longer in school, leading to a future of few employment opportunities and a lifetime of poverty. On the other hand, children who have trouble learning prefer to work rather than to study. Lastly, poverty perpetuates alcoholism, which increases the likelihood of child labor, according to several interviewees. These impoverished parents do not have any other source of income, so it is difficult to stop them from using their children to work.

Moreover, the lack of education perpetuates the cycle of child labor and child begging when people do not know the difference between helping and hurting those in need. For example, when cases are not reported to the authorities and community members give money and assistance to the families of the child laborers/child beggars, they are helping to keep the families in their dire situations because they are not encouraged to change. Concurrently, their actions are seen as not having a consequence.

Perhaps the most important obstacle to overcome is the lack of reporting surrounding child labor cases. Those that witness child labor do not inform the authorities because parents, professionals, and community leaders alike do not feel comfortable discussing this topic openly. Professionals and local authorities perpetuate the problem by discussing the situation with the families involved, yet failing to take further action.

Communication with families is also an important barrier to overcome. It is hard to convince parents to come to school to talk with the teachers, especially those with alcohol addictions. Community leaders and professionals, such as the priests and the social assistants also have trouble discussing child labor and missed schooling with the families involved.

The level of awareness and education represents another challenge. Families need better education on what is appropriate work for their children because they do not fully understand the scope and breadth of using their children for labor. They do not consider that what they ask their children to do is a form of exploitation. NGOs with roots in the local communities, such as WV and Save the Children, are in the best position to provide this education.

Lack of interest and involvement on behalf of the local authorities is also an important barrier. ANITP representatives expressed the opinion that the local authorities are not sufficiently interested in solving this matter. They further believe that the laws are poor and inadequate to deal with the situation. However, the laws are just one part of the problem. Another issue, in their opinion, is that

the laws are not properly applied. As such, the representative believes such cases of child abuse are rarely punished.

The workload of the local police officers is large and concurrently represents an impediment to investigating and solving child labor cases. For example, due to recent police force reorganization, there are two employees for several communities and it is difficult for them to be aware of all child labor incidents.

Conclusions

LACK OF AWARENESS AND CONCRETE CHILD LABOR DEFINITIONS RESTRICT IDENTIFICATION

In order to be properly identified, child labor needs a clear, workable definition. Currently, the definitions that exist are vague and open to interpretations, which is part of the problem.

UNICEF defines child labor as work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of the child and on the type of work.⁵⁴ According to this definition, domestic work, such as household chores and taking care of siblings, becomes child labor when a child between the ages of 10-14 spends more than 28 hours per week working domestically. Working over 28 hours per week is considered harmful to the child and should be eliminated. Further, Article 3 of UN Convention #182 partly defines the worst forms of child labor as “forced or compulsory labor, and work, which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.”⁵⁵ In practice, this definition is vague and hard to determine what constitutes forced labor that is likely to harm the children. Lastly, in keeping with the Parliament of Romania Law no. 272/2004, “The child has the right to be protected against exploitation and cannot be forced to perform any work with a potential risk and which is likely to compromise the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”⁵⁶

Due to vague child labor definitions, those that are in the best position to report child labor, such as community members, authorities, and professionals cannot properly recognize or define an exploited child because the practical limits are not clearly established. Though, child labor as an offense,

is clearly stipulated in the Romanian legislation, those such as police officers and mayors whose job it is to enforce such laws, are often unaware of their existence.

In practice, the terms: difficult, forced, harmful, compulsory, usual household chores, deprivation of the educational program, inappropriate climatic conditions, and child labor are all open to interpretation. It quickly becomes obvious that drawing a clear line is not possible. Of the students interviewed, in rural Iasi where WV works, one out of twenty 10-12 year old children work over 28 hours per week completing domestic work. In rural Iasi where WV does not work, one out of ten 10-12 year olds work over 28 hours per week completing domestic work one out of eight 13-14 year old children work exactly 28 hours per week. In Vaslui, where WV works, one out of twenty 13-14 year olds work over 28 hours per week completing domestic work and two 13-14 year olds work exactly 28 hours per week. In Vaslui, where WV does not work and Iasi City, no children work over 28 hours per week completing domestic work.

The above findings, signifying child labor as a result of domestic work, alone, are not statistically significant to constitute a child labor phenomenon. This can partially be attributed to a sampling bias, in which those most likely engaged in child labor were not interviewed. However, the work the children interviewees are engaged in must also be taken into account. Students, parents, and community leaders state that the children are engaging in usual household chores. As one can see from the above analysis, for countryside children, these chores often blur the fine line between acceptable and unacceptable chores. None of the students or parents that were interviewed stated that they or their children were engaging in what they had defined as unacceptable chores. However, the vast majority of students, parents, and community leaders know at least one child that is engaging in unacceptable chores for their families. In almost all of these known cases, the children are missing school to engage in such chores or to watch their siblings while their parents engage in work. For these children, it is considered normal to help with any household chores that their families ask of them despite the hours

or activities involved. Though, by definition and general consensus, these chores may be considered work; very few children, parents, or community leaders perceive them as such. Further, they do not think that child labor exists because their children and neighboring children are engaging in household chores, which, for them, are not considered labor.

RURAL COMMUNITIES TEND TO EXPERIENCE HIGHER RATES OF CHILD LABOR

The situation is not noticeably different in communities where WV works as compared to where WV does not work. However, it is noticeably different when comparing rural Iasi and Vaslui. Children, parents, and community leaders appear to know far more children in Vaslui that they consider to be working too hard for their age, than in rural Iasi. Additionally, children appear to know far more cases of children that they deem to be working too hard for their age than their parents or other community members. Part of the reason reverts back to how the community views child labor and what their definition is of work that is inappropriate for their children's age.

Another noticeable difference is seen in the education that the children and parents have received regarding child labor laws and programs. In rural Iasi, Iasi City, and Vaslui, where WV works, students and parents are aware of child protection laws and rights. In rural Iasi and Vaslui, where WV works, most students and parents have participated in activities run by Save the Children and/or WV. Where WV does not work and Iasi City, a few students have participated in activities run by Save the Children and WV.

Further, the vast majority of students and parents where WV does not work are not aware of child protection laws and rights and activities to promote them. This is especially true in Vaslui. One parent commented that she is grateful for WV because they help children and have given them a chance to see the world outside the boundaries of their village that they would not be able to experience on their own. Many of the children in communities where WV works are aware of this help.

CULTURAL MORES AND ATTITUDES PREVENT AND/OR RESTRICT REPORTING OF CHILD LABOR

In short, a phenomenon exists in the countryside, though it may be difficult to extract. Clearly, children are working too hard for their age, but by definition, it is usually not considered child labor. Instead, it is often reported as child neglect. The lack of reporting and the failure to properly report these cases helps to perpetuate this phenomenon. Students, parents/duty-bearers, and teachers are usually aware that these cases exist in their community. Children are typically the first to know of such cases because they go to school with the exploited. These children inform their parents/duty-bearers and teachers, who also recognize the problem because of seasonal absences. However, most community leaders are not aware that these cases exist in their community.

It is evident that there is a disconnect between those that witness such cases and the community leaders. As stated above, most interviewees do not consider what they deem as usual household chores to be child labor or a form of exploitation. Thus, when they see children working too hard, they consider them to be engaging in usual household chores and do not report the incidents. They all recognize who they should report the incidents to, but few actually report them.

Additionally, most interviewees prefer not to interfere in the private family matters of their friends and neighbors for fear of reprisals. Those that would like to report such incidents opt instead for speaking one on one with the families involved. Often, this solution does not solve the problem because there is no higher intervention within the community and the families continue with their business as usual. Finally, if no one reports these cases, community leaders will have no direct knowledge that this problem exists and will not ask for help in combating it from local NGOs. This is evidenced in the rarity of the use of the child labor fact sheet, which is a required reporting tool, created by the government. Since cases are usually not reported, the vast majority of community leaders does not have the document and has never seen it.

POVERTY IS SEEN AS THE PRIMARY ROOT CAUSE OF FORCED CHILD LABOR

The repeated theme from all interviewees within the analysis is one of poverty. Interviewees feel that if poverty were not so heightened and prevalent in rural communities, families would not need to require their children to work. Thus, the issue of child labor may not exist at all.

Parents working abroad further exacerbate the phenomenon. WV has noted a few such children in every community that was visited for this research. Social Alternatives stated that they have taken part in a partnership with UNICEF concerning children whose parents are working abroad. The European Parliament who recommended that the European countries be aware of the child labor phenomenon analyzed the study. In 2008, there were 350,000 children in this situation in Romania, more than 100,000, had both parents living and working abroad, with relatives taking care of the children. According to Social Alternatives, “the reward for this relative was the work the child did.” This work has often taken them from school.

The DGASPC-Vaslui concluded their interview with WV in saying:

“We are convinced that there are more such cases, but if the economic factor in these families does not change and if we do not have an ideology more appropriate to the year in which we live, we cannot talk about eradication methods or about more successfully solved cases.”

Recommendations

In an effort to curb child labor or overworked children, action needs to take place within Romania. First of all, Romania needs to ensure **access** to free basic education for all children. According to the law, this condition is met. The country is doing well by offering free basic education, free school supplies for low-income families, and a free school snack program. They are also doing well by offering parents a child allowance incentive to send their kids to school. However, they need to improve where access is concerned. According to parent/duty-bearer interviewees, child attendance declines in the winter when the roads get bad because the bus cannot get to the children. School continues to remain an important foundation in a child’s life because it provides children with prospects for a brighter future

and a possible escape from problems at home. In the cases where the families are very poor, a mayor in Vaslui wants to make a social house, an after-school program where the children can study and receive a meal. They are now analyzing the situation in more detail and hope to implement this project.

NGOs and the Romanian government need to work harder at providing information to the local communities about child rights, child labor, and exploitation. Further, they should promote anonymous reporting amongst community members and especially children. Anonymous reporting will include listening to children and community members that need to self report their own circumstance of child labor or that of their peers/neighbors. Community members need to feel that their reports will remain confidential and that suitable officials will look into their reports in a timely manner and take appropriate action.

Moreover, the government should work with local NGOs to organize information and counseling campaigns with parents, students, and community leaders concerning children's rights and what exploitation through work means. The more informed the community, the more likely that a change will happen, as is evidenced from Ceplenita, Iasi, where WV has worked for the past 14 years. In addition, there should be enhanced prevention mechanisms. There are a few NGOs who deal with child protection, but they cannot prevent, intervene, and monitor all child labor cases.

Further, Romania needs better child protection legislation, implementation, and infrastructure to ensure proper execution that encourages community members to report infractions and has legal ramifications for offending families. DGASPC-Iasi stated that law no. 272/2004 stipulates begging as a criminal offence and every criminal offence must be outlined in the Penal Code. However, according to the representative, begging is not specifically mentioned and neither is child labor. It does not specify how the employer is held responsible from the legislative point of view. The laws need to be clear, concrete and coercive. Employers are normally given a fine. However, ramifications for complicit families cannot be financial because the majority of these families are already struggling to make ends

meet and an added fine would make the situation harder and further perpetuate the problem.

However, in order to create better legislation, the government needs to clearly define what child labor means and what is acceptable and unacceptable. Furthermore, these laws should be made visible through various promotion activities that engage the community. Finally, local authorities need the capacity, tools, and willingness to implement the laws.

Lastly, as stressed by all interviewees, poverty is the underlying cause of child labor. Further, it is also partly the underlying cause of alcoholism. In addition, alcoholism is partly the underlying cause of poverty. Therefore, communities need services and activities geared toward curbing poverty. It may be a long way forward, but the best way for the government to start would be with the social services agencies to initiate programs to help financially struggling families, to enhance already existing programs, and to increase access to programs that already exist. Moreover, counseling is in order to help these families overcome their situation. The children are reliant on their parents/duty-bearers for support. When families steal their children's childhood by making them grow up before their time, society as a whole suffers and prolongs a turnaround.

¹ World Vision. Terms of Reference

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

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