

Case Studies

These case studies narrate true stories of children involved in the worst forms of child labour in Central and Eastern Europe. These are unfortunately not isolated cases. They are based on direct interviews with the children. Names were changed for obvious protection reasons.

Ilir washes cars instead of being in school

- Altin trafficked to Greece for street vending
- Sokol joins a school after having been trafficked
- Cveti exploited for illicit activities
- Ali is involved in hazardous works on a dumpsite
- Ioana trafficked to Ukraine for street vending
- Vitaly trafficked to Poland for construction and agricultural work
- Andrei works in the construction industry

Ilir washes cars instead of being in school

Ilir is 12 years old. He works in a carwash on the outskirts of Tirana. He needs to wake up early in the morning and walk for one hour and a half to his workplace. A neighbour who knows the owners of the carwash found this job for him. Ilir's parents are very grateful to their son's employer, because they are very poor. Ilir has an older brother who works with his father in a construction business. He has two sisters too, but he would not like for them to work, because work is not for girls. Ilir is working since one year and his employer is not very happy since Ilir had to miss work a couple of times because he got a cold from drinking cold water. When Ilir is absent from work or works less, his employer pays him less. He becomes very depressed in these cases because they have to eat less at home. His mother does not say anything; she is concerned about his health, whereas his father believes that work does him good and makes him stronger. What he likes most about his work is the luxurious cars; he would love to have such a car when he grows up.

Altin trafficked to Greece for street vending

Altin was born and raised in Korça, Albania. He is ten years old and lives with his single mother, his 12 year-old stepsister and two younger stepbrothers, aged respectively six and one and a half. The family is among the poorest in the area of Korça, and faces deep economic and social hardship. His mother is unemployed. Although Altin has been trafficked four times to Greece, he thinks this is quite normal. Most of his peers are trapped in the same cycle. "You don't earn much money here," Altin says. While in Albania, he spends most of his time begging out on the streets. He has never attended school.

Altin usually crosses over the mountains to get to Greece. He says that other children are normally part of the group. The trip is tiresome and long, and the children have to escape police surveillance. Generally they are met by a stranger, who takes them to a house where other children live. During his stays in Greece, Altin begged and worked as a street vendor from sunrise to sunset. He was also used for illicit activities like stealing. "We had better food than in Albania and were better dressed", he says. Although he was obliged to give part of his earnings to the trafficker, he was able to hide some extra 'profits' by burying them in a park. Altin admits the children were treated badly. They were beaten with a belt, taken to hot showers, or burned with cigarettes. He was not supposed to meet anyone else during his stay in Greece. The group would change locations every month so that they could not be traced. Altin says he has been apprehended by the police and was imprisoned for one month in Greece.

Sokol joins a school after having been trafficked

Sokol is not the only child trafficked in his family. He lives in Albania. His older stepsister went to Greece, together with him, with the complicity of their mother who got paid by the traffickers. The traffickers were in fact her neighbours. One time, she even made a deal with traffickers to give birth to her child in Greece, and give it away for illegal adoption. When he returned to Albania, Sokol was approached by a local NGO in Korça called Help for Children (HFC). HFC wanted him to start attending school so he could meet other children. They did not force him to join but he came by himself. At first, he caused some trouble in the class by getting into fights. His teachers also complained he avoided answering questions. However, once his teacher and social assistant was able to bond with him, and once he learnt to relate positively to his peers and family, he drastically changed. He has become friendlier; he demonstrates a strong sense of humour, sings beautifully, and succeeds in class. He wants to be a driver, when he grows up.

Cveti exploited for illicit activities

Cveti is a 12 years old Roma girl. She has been registered in the database of the Local Commission to Combat Juvenile Delinquency. She resides with her family – parents and 4 sisters aged between 4 to 10 and a brother of 13 – in a small town near Sofia, Bulgaria. Every morning she travels with her mother and sisters to Sofia to ‘work’ for the family. Cveti and her sisters have never attended school and have been engaged in pick-pocketing from a very early age. Her brother goes to school and the parents are determined to see him completing his secondary education. Cveti usually “works” in the busy trams and shops. When she gets caught her parents succeed to find ways to release her. She feels secure and is eager to earn as much as possible, as some of the money goes to the family and some are saved her future wedding. Her marriage is planned by her father for the next year.

Ali is involved in hazardous works on a dumpsite

Ali is 13 years old and he works in a dumpsite in Pristina (Kosovo) with his father and two brothers (16 and 19 years old) every day from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m. This work is the only income of his 10 members’ family. He is attending the 6th grade of compulsory school. “I am trying hard to keep up with the school”, he says. “I work here till after lunch and then I run to clean up and go to school. The classes start at 3:20 p.m. and most of the times I miss the first courses. I am exhausted during the classes and my friends tease me quite often. They do not want to stay or sit next to me although I clean myself before I go to school. I try to do the homework at night, after school, but I hardly manage. Every day is almost the same...” said Ali; and he cried.

Ioana trafficked to Ukraine for street vending

Ioana is a Moldovan girl. She was trafficked. At the age of 15, Ioana refused to stay with her family. Her parents were alcohol addicts and she felt her life in the family was unbearable. She decided to move to her grandparents. While shopping at the Chisinau market, Ioana met a woman from the neighboring village. She discussed with her the bad relations she had with her parents. The lady convinced the girl to leave with her for Ukraine, for work. Ioana accepted. She crossed the border with a birth certificate that belonged to the trafficker’s daughter. For seven months, in the coldest period of the year, Ioana was selling goods at a market in Ukraine. She was given for this job winter clothes and food. Police found her and brought her home. Ioana stated to the Police however that she felt better with the trafficker than with her own mother. She has been leaving since in a shelter / home.

Vitaly trafficked to Poland for construction and agricultural work

Vitaly comes from a poor single-parent family. His father left when Vitaly was four and he has since lived with his mother and sister. Vitaly often had to help his mother by doing small jobs, like polishing furniture produced in the furniture shop in their village. They even talked about the possibility of Vitaly and his sister living in a boarding school, where at least they would be guaranteed food and clothes. Vitaly worked hard to avoid it.

He gathered forest berries and mushrooms and sold them. Friends sometimes invited him to help out at a construction site for a small payment.

One day, his friends got a job building a barn in Poland. They asked Vitaly to join them. It was difficult to refuse. His mother was happy that he would be working productively, even though it meant he would miss school. Since they had no money for travel or documents, the family was obliged to borrow. There were no formal written agreements for the work, but the boys were promised \$500 when the work was completed.

The boys went together to Przemyśl where they were met by their master and taken to his farm. When the work was done, the boys asked for payment and the master asked the boys to leave the youngest, Vitaly, to look after his livestock. Vitaly did not want to because not only had he not been paid for his first job, he was also afraid to stay alone. He did not know the language and was frightened of what might happen. He thought he might be reported to the police. And he knew the master had a gun. For his services, the master provided the boy with food and accommodation.

The situation would have continued if Vitaly's mother had not intervened. She learned from fellow-villagers that the boys had returned without Vitaly. When she asked them, they gave her different explanations. She warned them that, if they did not return Vitaly, she would go to the militia and report the killing of her son. The oldest boy, who had received money to 'sell' Vitaly, disappeared. Two others went off to fetch Vitaly. After a time they came back together.

Andrei works in the construction industry

Andrei is a 15 years old boy. He has been working to support his family since he was 11. After her divorce, his mother got married again. Andrei has now two step-brothers. His mother does not have a job and is not looking for one because she believes that nobody will hire her at her age. His step father works as an unqualified worker in a construction site and the money he raises is not enough for supporting the family.

Andrei wakes up every morning at 6 a.m. and goes with his step-father to the construction site. There, he makes bricks, loads/unloads all kind of materials or plaster walls until five o'clock in the evening. His back is hurting, but he is proud to earn money to help his family. Sometimes he is injured: "I just loaded the trunk of a car with iron. That's how I hit my head. I lifted a piece of iron and a boy did not hold it properly, it fell back and hit me". Andrei uses the money for buying food and clothes, but one can notice that his own clothes and footwear are worn out. He says he does not get along with his step father, who drinks very often and quarrels with the other members of the family: "I am tired of quarrels, what do you think I am? I've just want to go to sleep when I arrive home. Sometimes I feel like going out and never coming home".

Although he is 15 years, he is in the 3rd grade. After working hours, Andrei is going to school (evening classes). He is aware of how important school is for his future and, even if he misses the spare time activities in order to go to work, he never misses school. In the last three months, Andrei went to a Youth Club. He is part of a drama group and enjoys very much each moment. He is dreaming to become an actor when he grows up.