

WFWP Vienna, Austria: Gender, Drug Trafficking, Crime - The Role Of The Family

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According to the last report on Cocaine Insights, developed by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the fragmentation of the criminal landscapes in Colombia has generated the formation of new networks and new dynamics that involve the European continent. In particular, some Albanian-speaking groups and other criminal groups in Western Balkans are now capable of procuring a large amount of cocaine directly from the sources, namely without intermediaries. This assigned them incredible power. Another significant change involving Europe is the shift of the entry points northwards, especially with the ports of Antwerp, Hamburg and Rotterdam, which established themselves as the most important hubs in Europe for drug trafficking in terms of receiving tons of cocaine per year.

The report highlights another important phenomenon associated with the rise of the cocaine trade in Europe: an increase in violence, comprehending episodes of assassinations, shootings, bombings, arsons, kidnappings, torture and intimidation.

Enhancing security in Europe necessitates the implementation of interventions at the source. In the short and medium-term, it is important to tackle the recruitment procedures. Enforcement of the rule of law and the cooperation across governments in information exchange and techniques to discover the roots of cocaine and target the traffickers effectively in source, transit and destination countries, is important as well.

However, in the long-term, it is necessary to address the local and social contingencies that encourage people to enter trafficking activities, by investing in developing and educational programs, as high rates of unemployment, low level of education, lack of welfare services or shortages of facilities to protect victims of violence.

Moreover, despite the lack of sufficient in-depth research and data on the gender aspects of drug trafficking, there is evidence of a direct correlation between organized crime and violence against women and LGBT communities. Women and men access organized crime for different reasons: women are more likely to join criminal activities to escape poverty or to seek protection from abusive partners or members of the family. Similar conditions are true for LGBT people. In general, evidence suggests that chaotic family life and exposure to drug abuse are influential factors. However, although being part of a criminal network might guarantee vulnerable categories some kind of protection, even once they join criminal groups, these people are victims of forms of violence.

Women that join criminal networks are mostly employed in the recruitment process and transport. Nonetheless, sex and drug trafficking are interlinked. Many women, who trafficked drugs, are then exploited in sex trafficking. When women are caught, are often victims of sexual abuse by other criminals behind bars. Another reason why these two activities are related is that large-scale organized crime benefits from an increase in circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs). It is known that high numbers of circulations of weapons are associated with high numbers of domestic violence and gender-based violence.



In conclusion, apart from increasing coordination across governments and international organizations to detect and arrest the perpetrators of trafficking and violence, it is essential to address the roots that push people to enter criminal networks, both in European countries and source countries. The international and local communities should implement school- and family-based approaches, considering that education and violence and instability within the families are the main reasons behind the choice of many young people to turn to illegal activities and perpetuate violent practices.

An insufficient family support system can increase the possibility of children developing factors of instability and violence. Family skills training programs should target the relation of violence and criminality. They should promote positive family attitudes, like cohesion, expressiveness and communication, and healthy relationships at the community level that prevent substance abuse and other risky behaviors. The programs should target mostly families in low and middle-income countries, as parenting has proved to be more effective in situations in which parents themselves are facing poverty and difficult living conditions.

UNODC can play a pivotal role in encouraging governments of member states in adopting and localizing these programs and assisting them in building capacity and infrastructures. UNODC can also adopt pre- and post- measurements instruments to monitor the results of the programs over time.