



# PRESS RELEASE

## Young Bulgarian woman champions Roma cause to prevent human trafficking and child abandonment

Mirianka, a beautiful 22-year-old Bulgarian, is rejecting wealth and a high-flying career in order to take action against the desperate poverty that ensnares thousands of Roma people behind the scenes in her country. 20 years after the end of communism and three years into its EU membership, poverty is still rife in Bulgaria and Mirianka is one of a small but significant group of young people working to stop the suffering that is hidden from the outside world.

Mirianka works for The Trussell Trust, a UK charity working to empower Bulgarians to help break the cycle of poverty. Not of Roma origin herself, Mirianka chose to leave a well-paid job to champion the cause of a very marginalised and poverty stricken people group, she writes:

*'Most people do not see the Roma poverty that exists behind the scenes in Bulgaria. It disgusts me that young people leave state care having had a childhood I can't even imagine and then are forced into crime and prostitution in order to survive. I hate it that so many have not received the love and care that I did and have had no opportunities to reach their potential. I can't just stand by and watch, Bulgarians need to act. That's why I do what I do.'*

84% of Bulgaria's 700,000 Roma people live in poverty with little access to education, healthcare and employment. Every year 10,000 Bulgarian girls and women are sex trafficked to countries, including the UK, and countless others are forced into prostitution simply in order to survive; the majority of these are Roma. Bulgaria has the highest number of abandoned children in Europe, 80% are Roma. Conditions in state care are often appalling and many young people leaving these institutions fall victim to human traffickers or turn to crime and prostitution because they have no idea about life outside an institution.

Mirianka helps to run The Trussell Trust's House of Opportunity project, a two year residential training programme for young people leaving orphanages at 18. It provides vulnerable young people with a safe, loving home, employment opportunities and life skills training. Mirianka and this new generation of young people wanting to see change in their country are the hope for Bulgaria's future.

Ends.

## Notes to the editor:

- Mirianka's interest in fighting poverty developed when she volunteered as a translator for The Trussell Trust, a UK based charity working in Bulgaria. She took the role as a way of improving her English but was profoundly moved by the conditions she saw. Once her eyes had been opened to the suffering of people on her doorstep she could not walk away. Despite excelling at school and being expected to study abroad and become a successful businesswoman, Mirianka decided to do a part-time degree to enable her to keep working for The Trussell Trust. After graduating she gained a job at a marketing company but after 6 months she missed her work with the poor so much that she gave up a good salary to work for The Trussell Trust again.
- Following BBC 4's 'Bulgaria's Abandoned Children' documentaries there was an international outcry at conditions in Bulgarian orphanages, Mirianka and her colleagues prove that there is hope for the Bulgarians to change their society if they are given access to the resources they need. Mirianka, her manager Teodora, 33 and colleague Any, 19, are three inspirational women.
- Roma gypsies are the most marginalised people group in Europe. Many Roma parents cannot afford to look after their children and believe it is better to put them into state care rather than attempt to raise them in such extreme poverty. Sadly, conditions in state care are often horrendous and options for those leaving institutions are few, leading many to fall into crime and prostitution or become victims of human trafficking.
- A UN report shows that Bulgaria's Roma live in conditions similar to those of sub-Saharan Africa.
- The Trussell Trust is working to raise funds in the UK to help Mirianka, her boss Teodora and colleague Any, 19, to continue their work on the ground in Bulgaria. The Trussell Trust hopes to launch a further 50 Houses of Opportunity by 2015. For more on this visit:  
<http://www.trusselltrust.org/content/statecareleavers/statecareleavers.htm>
- Mirianka speaks fluent English; her manager Tedi's English is also good.
- For more on conditions in state care in Bulgaria you may be interested in <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00n92rf> ; this also shows the potential to rehabilitate young people who have suffered great neglect when they are given the care, attention and opportunities that they need to build better futures.
- The Trussell Trust is a UK based Christian charity working to provide hope and practical help to marginalised people in the UK and Bulgaria.

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