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Listening to Victims

Experiences of identification, return
and assistance in South-Eastern Europe

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and assistance in South-Eastern Europe

Written by:

Rebecca Surtees
NEXUS Institute to Combat Human Trafficking
Vienna, Austria

Research team:

Marija Babovic, Genta Bibo, Milica Djordjević, Viorelia Rusu,
Rebecca Surtees and Diana Tudorache

ICMPD team:

Sonja Busch, Mariyana Radeva, Danijela Srbić and Elisa Trossero

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International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

Gonzagagasse 1, 5th floor

Vienna, Austria

A-1010

www.icmpd.org

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Foreword

In recent years combating trafficking in human beings has consistently been on the agenda of national administrations and international actors. A number of studies have attempted to map out the dimensions of the problem as an aspect of organized crime or irregular migration and a number of programmes have been designed to address the needs of the victims of this crime. Yet, most implemented policies and practices as well as the more theoretical studies merely discuss the current status of national and international legislation, address the need for capacity building of a specific target group or concentrate on preventive measures such as awareness raising. The study *“Listening to Victims: Experiences of identification, return and assistance in South-Eastern Europe”* offers a different take on the issue of trafficking. By listening to the victims themselves, by acknowledging and putting forward their “self-articulated needs,” the study attempts to show the different dilemmas facing trafficking victims. It demonstrates that one general solution is not possible and selective and targeted interventions on different levels are necessary instead.

The study reflects the dynamic situation in the anti-trafficking field in South-Eastern Europe. It attempts to outline the ambiguity and complexity that surround the issue of trafficking in human beings, in order to pre-

empt one-track solutions and policy measures. The study does not contain a catalogue of recommendations but provides food for thought for all actors involved. By describing the involvement of different governmental and non-governmental institutions and organisations in the process of identification, assistance and referral of victims of trafficking, the study hints at possible adjustments and improvements in the role of each anti-trafficking actor. It is through the voices of the victims themselves that helpful suggestions for state and non-state actors are articulated. This is particularly the case in the area of rehabilitation and reintegration after an eventual return to the country of origin, which opens a broad spectrum of possibilities for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

This study is part of the *Programme to Support the Development of Transnational Referral Mechanisms (TRM) for Trafficked Persons in South-Eastern Europe* implemented by ICMPD and is financially supported by USAID. Building upon the national referral mechanisms for victims of trafficking, which already exist or are being developed in a number of countries in the region, the TRM programme seeks to elaborate transnational standard operating procedures and guidelines for the referral of victims of trafficking.

The findings of this report serve as a basis for the development of “*Guidelines for the Transnational Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking*”. By incorporating good practices from South-East European countries and linking these to the experiences of destination countries, the Guidelines create a template for a comprehensive response addressing the needs of trafficking victims.

We trust that this report will be a useful tool in understanding the needs of trafficking victims and designing effective anti-trafficking policies. The study shows how important it is to link the topic of trafficking in human beings with discourses in other relevant fields such as labour migration, labour exploitation, integration, and domestic violence. Thus it calls for targeted interventions, which take place at different levels and strengthen the cooperation between all national and international actors involved.



Gottfried Zürcher
ICMPD Director General

Acknowledgements

This study is part of a larger USAID-funded and ICMPD-managed programme on transnational referral mechanisms (TRM) for trafficked persons in South-Eastern Europe (SEE). I would like to begin by thanking USAID for their funding of this research component, which focuses on victim's self-articulated needs and concerns in the identification, return and assistance process. I would also like to thank ICMPD for initiating and supporting this assessment in its efforts to identify the issues raised by trafficked persons themselves as a first step in developing solutions.

Many people contributed to this research. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the many trafficked persons who generously gave their valuable time to be interviewed for the study. Their personal experiences of identification, return and assistance form the foundation of this report and were essential in understanding the situation in the region and toward developing recommendations. For their willingness, openness and courage in discussing very difficult and personal issues, I extend my sincere thanks.

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Rebecca Surtees

Researcher
NEXUS Institute to Combat Human Trafficking
Vienna, Austria

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Executive Summary

While a number of studies and documents have examined the identification, return and assistance process for trafficked persons, the focus has been primarily on the legal and administrative frameworks in which identification, return and assistance take place. These include principles and guidelines in the identification and assistance process, the legislative framework and studies of the assistance framework, including good practices. Far less common have been studies of how victims themselves have perceived and experienced their post-trafficking life and how they value and evaluate this intervention and assistance. This report maps — from the victim’s perspective — the full trajectory of intervention by anti-trafficking actors — from identification, through return and referral and during various phases of assistance and protection. While anti-trafficking interventions are clearly vital in the recovery of trafficked persons, victims reported both positive and negative experiences in these various stages, information which is vital for on-going efforts in transnational referral and assistance systems for trafficked persons.

This study is not an evaluation report. It does not seek to evaluate or assess the anti-trafficking work of any country, programme or organisation and it recognises the important work being undertaken by anti-trafficking

actors at all stages of intervention. Rather, the study is a consideration of how the existing identification, referral and assistance framework is understood, perceived and experienced by the victims interviewed. These victims were a diverse group, trafficked to, through and from South-Eastern Europe (SEE) as well as to a myriad of destinations. Their trafficking and identification and assistance experiences were equally diverse. It is hoped that by listening to victims and presenting their self articulated needs and wants, it will be possible to assist and support the many organisations and actors seeking to address trafficking in SEE as well as further afield.

In terms of the identification phase, victims were identified by a wide range of anti-trafficking actors (law enforcement, outreach workers, embassy staff, NGOs, IOs, social workers, clients and victims themselves) as well as people and professionals not generally involved in identification, like transportation personnel, private citizens and religious organisations. At the same time, there were many instances of missed identification opportunities. For many victims the identification experience was a stressful one and informed by many different emotions and reactions. Victims reported both positive and negative responses to various identifying personnel as well as at different stages of the identification process. It was not uncommon, for example, for victims to feel both relief at having been identified and fear and suspicion toward the identifying actor. It was also not uncommon for negative feelings (fear and suspicion) to give way to those of relief once the victim felt safe and came to trust the identifying persons. In addition to how victims felt, they also related problems and issues that they faced in the process of identification, both at home and abroad. These issues centred around victim's access to full and comprehensible information about their situation and options at identification; the sometimes limited identification skills of some counter-trafficking actors; experiences of both sensitive and insensitive treatment at identification; some experiences of interrogation and detention rather than identification as trafficked persons; some instances of corruption amongst identifying actors; some cases of mistreatment and negligence; issues related to linguistics barriers in the identification process; that identification took place in inconducive settings for some victims; that many victims did not know who to turn to ask for help; and issues related to trafficking victims who did not wish to be identified.

The return process — when handled correctly — involves a number of steps designed to ensure the safe and dignified return of each individual victim. Ideally the return should involve the preparation of documents; making

travel arrangements; informing trafficked persons about the steps in the return process and assistance options at home; a risk assessment (for transit and in the country of origin); communication and coordination between origin and transit/destination countries; supported transportation and travel process (including accompanied return as needed and assistance in transit); reception and referral upon arrival; and transportation within the home country. An unsafe return procedure poses risks for victims which may, in extreme cases, even result in (re)trafficking. The trafficked persons interviewed for this study returned home in a number of different ways — some assisted but many others unassisted. In talking about their return, victims reported myriad of emotions and reactions. Many of these feelings were negative — fear, anxiety, disappointment, stress and frustration, nervousness and confusion — and resulted not only from the return process itself but also from how it was handled. At the same time, victims also reported more positive emotions related to their return, including excitement and relief as well as feelings of safety and reassurance. In addition, as was the case in the identification stage, many victims grappled with simultaneous and often contradictory emotions. For example, many victims were happy and relieved about the return process. They were relieved to be out of the reach of their traffickers, happy to be leaving the country of their exploitation, excited to see their families and happy to be going home. However, it was also not uncommon that this happiness was coupled with negative emotions, like fear of meeting their trafficker or nervousness about what awaited them at home. The return and referral process involves a number of steps to ensure the safe and dignified return of trafficked persons. Where these steps were not undertaken fully, appropriately or sensitively, victims faced problems in the return and referral process. A range of issues were faced by trafficked persons, issues which arose pre-departure, in transit and/or upon their arrival home. The issues that victims related referred to a general lack of access to full and comprehensible information about the return and referral process; that the transportation process sometimes appeared to mimic the transportation they had undergone while trafficked; the importance for victims of non-identifying and assisted returns; problems faced while in transit such as interrogation and poor treatment by authorities; delays in their returns to their home countries; issues surrounding adequate and appropriate risk assessments and security considerations; and their experiences of reception and referral in their home country.

Affording adequate and appropriate assistance and protection to trafficked persons is vital in their immediate stabilisation and toward their

longer-term recovery and re/integration into society. Assistance and protection is offered in countries of transit, destination and origin and the research considered interventions available to victims in all of these locations. Trafficked persons were interviewed at various stages of assistance — in the initial emergency response as well as over the course of assistance and through longer-term, reintegration. In spite of differences between trafficking victims themselves and their experiences, some consistent themes and issues emerged when speaking to victims about how they saw, understood and experienced assistance and protection. Trafficked persons interviewed described negative emotions — from fear to shock and confusion, from suspicion to stress and shame. Importantly, they also spoke about how, in this stage of their post-trafficking life, they had positive feelings, most commonly feelings of comfort and safety, a sense of belonging, not feeling alone, relief and gratitude. In many cases, victims reported more negative feelings at initial stages of assistance when they felt less confident and comfortable in assistance but transitioned over time to more positive feelings once trust and confidence had been established. Issues highlighted by victims about the assistance and protection phase were myriad and diverse, touching on a wide range of related issues. These included problems encountered due to cultural and linguistic barriers between beneficiaries as well as between beneficiaries and staff; some of the concerns and feelings victims had about existing rules and restrictions in assistance programmes; the importance of accessible, adequate and comprehensible information about assistance options both abroad and at home; the necessity of victim involvement in the decision-making process; victim's access (and sometimes lack of access) to justice in the context of their trafficking experience; the problems of stigma and discrimination which many victims faced following their trafficking experience; issues surrounding the security and safety needs of victims; the difficulties and complexity of balancing issues of victim autonomy and dependency in the provision of services; concerns about privacy and confidentiality for trafficking victims; how to accommodate the specialised assistance needs of a diverse pool of trafficked persons; situations in which conditions were attached to the provision of assistance; the general lack of state assistance in the region; the complexity of the reintegration process; and how best to ensure professional capacity and quality of care.

While at each stage, there were specific issues and concerns identified by trafficking victims, there were nonetheless some overarching themes with

relevance throughout the full process of identification, return/referral and assistance. These included:

- *Access to information:* Victims need and want more information about their options and the process to be followed, information which is specific, accessible, comprehensible, age appropriate, language specific and culturally appropriate. Time was of importance in the provision of information — that information was given at the appropriate time, provided more than once and that victims were given time to process the information and make decisions accordingly. Being involved in decision-making rather than being passive recipients of information was also central in terms of this information flow.
- *Mistreatment and problematic interactions:* Some victims reported incidences of negligence, insensitivity or discrimination, while others related cases of mistreatment. That cases of abuse of victims while in care were reported is particularly concerning. Poor treatment (even when unintentional) negatively impacts already traumatised and exploited persons, including in terms of their willingness to accept the support of assisting persons. Mechanisms for accountability are essential in anti-trafficking work, including monitoring and evaluating activities and procedures for complaint.
- *Issues of safety and security:* Safety and security procedures were handled unevenly and varied substantially between organisations, institutions and countries. Not only were risk assessments generally limited but security was not always assessed on a case-by-case basis throughout a victim's post trafficking life. At the same time, some victims were subjected to heavy security restrictions and concerns about safety and security, were not always balanced against the importance of a normal life and longer term recovery.
- *Linguistic and cultural barriers:* At all stages of the process, victims faced communication barriers — both linguistic and cultural — which served as an impediment to building trust, feeling safe and providing quality interventions. Bridging these gaps — through translation, multi-lingual staff, cultural mediators, etc. — can assist at all stages of the process, although each 'solution' also has limitations (i.e. cost, accessibility, training), which require careful consideration.

- *Models of intervention and quality care:* The type and quality of interventions — from identification to assistance — were remarkably uneven not only between countries but also within countries. In addition, programme models and philosophies differ substantially from organisation to organisation. Victims themselves questioned some of the models of care being used (i.e. closed vs. open shelters, residential vs. non-residential programmes) as well as the rules and restrictions employed within many programmes. Tied intimately to this issue is the overall lack of monitoring and evaluating of these models of care and professional interventions. Victim inputs, feedback and evaluation of interventions are also important in the development, tailoring and implementation of programmes and policy response.
- *Need for more state supported intervention and assistance:* Many victims faced problems in accessing even the most basic services and receiving even minimal support. While some victims reported state actors working hard to provide options and support for them, they were often constrained by the limited resources of the state. Further, accessing services were often complicated by bureaucratic procedures and many victims faced significant obstacles in negotiating these procedures, which, in a number of cases, resulted in not receiving the necessary assistance.
- *Engagement of victims in the design and implementation of interventions:* Victims often have a clear idea of their needs and how processes and procedures can be improved to better meet their needs. Engaging victims in a discussion of their needs as well as seeking their inputs in terms of the design and implementation of interventions can serve to ensure that interventions — whether from a legal or social service perspective — are victim-centred and grounded in the lived realities of the persons they are intended to support and assist. Systems of intervention and assistance which are designed, implemented and adjusted in a participatory manner are more effective, efficient and ultimately humanistic. In addition, engaging with victims in this way must be an on-going process.
- *Gaps in the process:* There remain some noteworthy gaps and issues in identification, return and assistance process for trafficked persons. These include the sometimes inadequate identification skills of identifying actors and missed identification opportunities; that victims con-

tinued to be detained/arrested and interrogated; the continuation of unassisted returns; the delayed return of foreign trafficking victims; victim's limited access to justice and their lack of satisfaction with the criminal and judicial process; the conditionality of some assistance; not knowing where to turn for help; and the complexity of the reintegration process. While these points do not exhaust the full range of gaps and issues, they highlight what, for victims, were some of their more pressing concerns and afford us a starting point for considering improvements in the process of transnational referral.

- *Importance of individual case-by-case approach:* There is a need for flexibility and creativity in responding not only to different identification and assistance needs but also to different profiles of victims. Considering each case as unique and responding on an individual case-by-case basis is needed to accommodate this diversity and complexity. Better understanding the less common forms of trafficking and, by implication, less recognised needs of victims, can play a role in equipping anti-trafficking actors. Equally important is that specialized assistance is available for more “difficult” cases, like victims with disabilities, behaviour disorders, addictions, specific health needs, victims with dependents; etc.
- *Sex and gender issues:* The issues of sex and gender need to be considered throughout the process — from identification, through return and during assistance. Both men and women are victims of trafficking and often have different trafficking experiences, needs and interests. Assumptions about sex and gender often inform how anti-trafficking measures are undertaken and offered. Far more attention is needed to how sex and gender inform not only how trafficking plays out but also what anti-trafficking interventions can appropriately and effectively support victims of both sexes.
- *Need for more victim-centred research, evaluation and programme design:* Trafficked persons are best positioned to identify and communicate their needs — what they need and what can be most helpful and important to them. Victim-centred research can provide invaluable information in the development of anti-trafficking interventions and ensure that the needs of victims are firmly situated at the centre of the discussion of anti-trafficking actors. It can also serve to potentially empower victims — to put their opinions on equal foot-

ing with those of professionals — which can play an important role in the recovery process.

Importantly, the intention of this report is to give voice and profile to the experiences and issues faced by the trafficked persons interviewed and to use these findings as a springboard for change. The study was premised on the need for more independent and research-based information about the identification, return and assistance processes for trafficked persons in SEE. As central was the need for a victim-centred evaluation of this process, with trafficked persons themselves articulating what, for them, have been positive and negative experiences as well as how their needs have (and have not) been met. Interviews yielded a wide range of issues raised by victims themselves along the trajectory of identification, return and assistance. Their first-hand accounts and observations tell us much about how anti-trafficking mechanisms and procedures are functioning and provide anti-trafficking actors with concrete inputs and suggestions which, it is hoped, will improve policies and practices. These comments and findings, therefore, are presented in the interest of improvements and continued commitment and it is hoped that these findings and observations will be read in the spirit in which they are intended.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ABA-CEELI	American Bar Association–Central European and Eurasian Legal Initiative
AI	Amnesty International
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
AT	Anti-trafficking
AVR	Assisted voluntary return
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CAFV	Counselling against Family Violence
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CPTW	Centre for the Prevention of Trafficking in Women
CRC	Convention on the rights of the child
CSW	Centres for social work
CT	Counter-trafficking
D&E	Different and Equal
EC	European Commission
ECPAT	End child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking of children
EU	European Union
FATW	Foundation against trafficking in women
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GAATW	Global alliance against trafficking in women
GCC	Gjirokastra Community Centre
GO	Governmental Organisation
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus

ICCO	Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFS	International Forum for Solidarity
IHRLG	International Human Rights Law Group
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IO	International Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISF	Interim Secure Facility
KBF	King Baudouin Foundation
KPS	Kosovo Police Service
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Policy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	National plan of action
NRC	National Reception Centre
NRM	National referral mechanisms
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
PVPT	Center to Protect Victims and Prevent Trafficking
QKPVT	Qendra kombetare pritesë e Viktimave të Trafikut
RCP	Regional Clearing Point
SEE	South-Eastern Europe
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SPTF	Stability Pact Task Force in Trafficking in Persons
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
THB	Trafficking in human beings
TIP	Trafficking in persons
TRM	Transnational referral mechanisms
TRP	Temporary residence permits
UAMs	Unaccompanied minors
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICRI	United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
UNOHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commission of Human Rights
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence against women
VoT	Victim of trafficking
WHO	World Health Organisation

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a regional study in SE Europe, which explored the current process of identification, return and assistance of victims of trafficking. The specific research objective was to clearly map how this process was currently taking place from, within and through SE Europe, including good practices and problems faced. As such, the full process of referral and assistance was considered — from identification (whether abroad or at home), return (both internal and international), referral (by GOs, NGO and/or IOs) and assistance and protection (both long and short term, at home and abroad, from GOs, NGOs and IOs). For this reason, the study has been undertaken in countries of origin, like Albania, Moldova and Romania, as well as countries, like BiH and Serbia, which are increasingly origin but also destination and transit points. While the study was conducted in these five countries, it refers to cases trafficked from or to each of the ten SEE countries — Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, the UN administered territory of Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia well as countries in the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, various countries in the EU and Turkey. Most importantly, the study takes as its primary lens the perspective of the trafficked women and men who have passed through

the various procedures. The approach, then, is to learn from those best positioned to teach about these experiences and issues. Far too seldom are victims given the opportunity to be listened to in the design and implementation of anti-trafficking programmes and policies. In so doing, there is also the potential to empower victims. As has been argued elsewhere,

a primary goal in the process of empowering... is to bring the marginalised voices to the centre, ensuring that all individuals are heard and respected. This is done by talking about the individual's experience in her family, community and world at large to understand the social, political and historical context of her experience (Blitz et al 2003: 160).

This research study is not an evaluation of any country, programme or organisation in SEE. Rather, it is a consideration of how the existing identification, referral and assistance framework is understood, perceived and experienced by the victims interviewed. It is hoped that by listening to victims and presenting their self-articulated needs and wants, it will be possible to assist the wide range of organisations and actors seeking to address trafficking in SEE as well as further afield.

The main body of the report is divided into three main sections — victim's experiences of 1) identification, 2) return and 3) assistance and protection. Each section considers how, in general terms, the process takes place, how victims felt about this stage of the process (both positive and negative) and what, for them, were the issues and obstacles that they faced at that stage. In interviews with victims, the focus was reoriented from what anti-trafficking actors do and intend to do and instead sought to shed light on how victims understood and experienced these interventions. That is, it is not only about what information and options were provided to victims, but about how individual victims understood these options and information. Similarly, the focus was not only on what support and assistance was provided, but on how victims perceived and experienced that support and assistance. The intention was to better understand both what victims found positive and also negative based on their direct experiences of anti-trafficking interventions, both at home and abroad. Observations and inputs are not equally relevant for all countries. For example, some of the issues below relate to specific types of programmes or interventions, which, while common in SEE, are not the only type of assistance available. Similarly, some observations are particularly relevant for countries of destination and may

not be equally applicable in countries of origin. That being said, many of the issues will resonate with a broad range of anti-trafficking actors from a wide range of contexts.

Anti-trafficking actors are clearly dedicated, committed and have strong capacity in the areas of identification, return and assistance and the importance and value of their work must not be underestimated. This was a clear message in interviews with victims — that these actors and services providers have been invaluable in their recovery and reintegration and that the various interventions were of vital importance in anti-trafficking efforts. As such, the intention is not to unduly criticise these committed, dedicated professionals or the anti-trafficking efforts being undertaken. Rather, the intention is to give voice and profile to the experiences and issues faced by the trafficked persons interviewed for this study and to use these findings as a springboard for change. These findings and comments are offered in the interest of improvements and continued commitment and it is hoped that these findings and observations will be read in the spirit in which they are intended.

The focus and point of origin of this study is the perspective of the women and men who use and move through this referral process and, by implication, are best positioned to comment on this process and to articulate possible alternatives. Victims themselves told us this, when asked about how they felt about participating in such a project:

This research is important, it is important that our opinion is taken into account.

I think the idea is good and such research should be done because only by speaking to the beneficiaries will service providers know what was good and what was bad... and it is important that beneficiaries can participate in such studies and that they are taken into account.

The beneficiaries should talk about the assistance they receive and describe how they feel.

It is good and important to listen to beneficiaries' problems in order to understand how to help them. This is a normal thing.

This was not stressful to me. I was pleased that my opinion counted for something, and I think that the information I provided will be

useful... Yes, this generally feels good, when your views are taken into consideration. This research will help us better understand our problems.

It is victims' assessment, perceptions and evaluation of this process which serves as the focus of the study and the foundation of the findings. And it is in response to their personal experiences and perceptions and also based on their own thoughts and suggestions that conclusions and recommendations are made.

2. Research framework

2.1. Project background and research objectives

In July 2006, ICMPD¹ commenced its regional USAID-funded programme to support the establishment of comprehensive, effective and institutionalised transnational referral mechanisms (TRM) for victims of trafficking in South-Eastern Europe (SEE). The programme — implemented in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the UN administered territory of Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM),² Moldova, Montenegro,

¹ The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is a Vienna-based inter-governmental organisation with United Nations observer status. Its purpose is to promote innovative, comprehensive and sustainable migration policies and to function as a service exchange mechanism for governments and organisations in Europe. ICMPD is active in various fields, including visa policy, border management, asylum and readmission issues, and has long standing experience in developing and implementing projects to combat trafficking in human beings. The ICMPD anti-trafficking programme aims at supporting countries on the national and regional level by providing comprehensive anti-trafficking responses in accordance with international and European standards and good practices. The programme contributes to institution and capacity-building efforts through training, technical assistance and expert support applying consistently a multi-disciplinary and participatory approach. Working closely with governments, international organisations and civil society groups ICMPD promotes a human rights-centred approach.

² Hereafter referred to interchangeably as Macedonia or FYROM.

Romania and Serbia — aims at developing trans-national referral mechanisms (TRM) for victims of trafficking in order to develop a proper case management system between countries of origin, transit and destination.

To ensure that the real life assistance and protection needs of trafficking victims are at the centre of the TRM programme, ICMPD commissioned the NEXUS Institute,³ to undertake an empirical study in five countries in SEE, countries of both origin and destination (Albania, BiH, Moldova, Romania and Serbia). This study focused on the identification, return and assistance experiences of persons trafficked from, within and through SEE. Findings and recommendations from this study will be used as the foundation and basis for the guidelines for transnational referral work in the region and, as such, will directly inform both the operational tools and steps foreseen in the course of the project.

The study was premised on the need for more independent and research-based information about the identification, return and assistance processes for trafficked persons. As central was the need for a victim-centred evaluation of this process, with trafficked persons themselves articulating what, for them, have been positive and negative experiences as well as how their needs have (and have not) been met. Trafficked persons were asked to discuss how they experienced the various interventions in their post trafficking lives — from identification, through return and during different stages of assistance and protection. Central, from the research perspective, was how they felt at different stages along this trajectory and how they assessed and valued this process. In essence, the organizing principle was how victims saw, understood and experienced these different stages.

³ NEXUS is a Vienna-based multi-disciplinary policy and research centre dedicated to conducting research and analysis to serve as the basis for better-informed and more effective counter-trafficking laws, policies and practices. NEXUS specializes in providing independent analysis based upon evidence-based research; objective assessment and constructive evaluation; technical advice; training and capacity-building support. The NEXUS Institute is a member of the OSCE Alliance Expert Coordination Group and its advisory board includes IOM, the OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, the Protection Project of Johns Hopkins University and the European Training Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. NEXUS brings to its research extensive anti-trafficking research experience from SE Europe as well as other regions and has produced a number of trafficking studies in SEE including on why trafficking victims decline assistance; child trafficking for labour and begging in SEE; victim assistance programmes in SEE; labour trafficking and anti-trafficking measures; traffickers profiles and behaviours; and child trafficking in Sierra Leone.

2.2. Existing knowledge and gaps

While a number of studies and documents have examined the identification, return and assistance process for trafficked persons, the focus has been primarily on the legal and administrative frameworks in which identification and assistance takes place. These include principles and guidelines in the identification and assistance process,⁴ the legislative framework (national and international)⁵ and studies of the assistance framework, including good practices.⁶ Far less common have been studies of how victims themselves have perceived and experienced their post-trafficking life and how they themselves value and evaluate interventions and assistance. That being said, some recent studies have sought to address this gap by taking, as their point of origin and primary focus, victim's opinions, perceptions and experiences of the assistance framework.

A Life of One's Own (2005) is a study of rehabilitation programmes in Serbia and Moldova and is premised on the need for more research based information on the contents and effects of rehabilitation on victims of trafficking (see Bjerkan 2005).

Leaving the past behind (2007) considers the reasons why some victims decline assistance through an empirical study of the issue in three countries in SEE — Albania, Serbia and Moldova. Reasons why some victims decline to enter the assistance framework include, but are not limited to, issues such as different forms of stigma associated both with trafficking and being assisted, gaps and problems in the assistance framework, a lack of trust in the system, limited understanding of the assistance framework, the desire to return home to their family or community, not needing assistance and not identifying as trafficking victims (see Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

⁴ Please see: Bump & Duncan 2003; EC 2005; EU 2005; EU 2004; EU 2002; FATW, GAATW and IHRLG 1999; GAATW 2000; ICMPD 2003a, 2003b, 2006; ILO 2006; IOM 2005b; Mitchels 2004; OSCE/ODIHR 2004; UNICEF 2005; UNOHCHR 2002.

⁵ ABA CEELI 2005; IOM 2005a; La Strada & OSCE 2006.

⁶ Andreani & Raviv 2004; Dottridge 2004 & 2006; Hunzinger & Sumner-Coffey 2003; ICCO 2004; Kvinna til Kvinna & Kvinnoforum 2003; Kvinnoforum 2003; La Strada Moldova 2005; Limanowska 2002 and 2003; Pearson 2002; Reiter 2005; Rosenberg 2006; Somach and Surtees 2005; Surtees 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Tdh & ARSIS 2006; Tdh 2005; Tozaj 2006; UNICEF 2004; UNICEF & STC 2004; van der Kleij 2003.

Agency or illness — trafficking victims' choices and behaviours (forthcoming 2008) considers assistance systems in SEE including the values and philosophies inherent in these programmes. Particular attention is paid to the use of rules and restrictions in some programmes for trafficking victims and the impact these may have on victims' recovery (see Brunovskis & Surtees forthcoming 2008).

Voices of victims (2004) is a pilot study of the experiences of young women in prostitution in the Netherlands. Ten young women were interviewed about their experiences of forced prostitution as well as their exposure to mental healthcare professionals, police and judicial actors (see ECPAT 2004).⁷

The courageous testimony (2006) discusses trafficked women's experiences in either agreeing or declining to testify, including what influenced their decisions, their subsequent assessment of the consequences of their decisions, and their experiences prior to, during, and after the trials (see Bjerkan & Dyrliid 2006a).

The silenced experience (2006) discusses some of the obstacles to dignified and smooth reintegration including the fear of stigma and prejudice. The article stresses the need to take these conditions into consideration when designing reintegration programmes and also argues that the wide variety of victim's individual histories, experiences and future prospects require diverse and flexible reintegration programmes (see Bjerkan & Dyrliid 2006b).

Stolen smiles (2006) is a study of the physical and psychological impact of trafficking on women and adolescents trafficked to Europe. The study, while largely quantitative, also provides qualitative information about victims assistance experiences as they relate to their physical and mental well-being and also highlights what are the short and longer-term needs of trafficked persons (see Zimmerman et al. 2006).

Similarly, a forthcoming regional study by Save the Children is being conducted in the frame of the Child Trafficking Response Programme in South-Eastern Europe. The study involves direct interactions with minors and seeks to answer the broad question of why children are trafficked from

⁷ Only available in Dutch.

a child's perspective. The study is being implemented in seven countries in SEE (see Save the Children Forthcoming 2007).

2.3. Research methodology and data collection

The study is based on fieldwork and interviews undertaken in SE Europe. Fieldwork was undertaken in traditional countries of origin (Albania, Moldova and Romania) as well as countries of transit and destination, which have also become countries of origin (BiH and Serbia). While trafficked persons were interviewed in five countries (namely Albania, BiH, Moldova, Romania and Serbia), it is important to note that their travel and/or exploitation experiences often involved the other five countries in the SEE region — Bulgaria, Croatia, the UN administered territory of Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro — as well as countries further afield, like countries in the Middle East, Russia and the former Soviet States, various countries in the EU and Turkey. Some victims originated from one of the SEE countries, others were trafficked to or through SEE and still others were identified and/or assisted there. Importantly, the findings are reflective of issues in this wide range of countries both within and beyond SEE and are not exclusive to the countries where research was conducted. Victim's comments and observations refer to the full trajectory of anti-trafficking intervention — in countries of origin, transit and destination — and to a wide range of interlocutors — state, NGOs and IOs. As such, it is important to emphasise that the findings should not be read as specific to the countries where the research was undertaken. As importantly, the findings are not reflective of any one organisation or institution but are general patterns documented in multiple cases and contexts.

Semi-structured interviews with trafficked persons were conducted at various stages of their post-trafficking life. A semi-structured interview format was selected because it allows for the collection of comparable data by following a set sequence of themes, while at the same time allowing for flexibility to adapt to the specific situation of the respondent (Kvale 1996). Most interviews were undertaken by researchers in-country, although some interviews were also undertaken by the research coordinator during field missions. The research team was comprised of Rebecca Surtees, Marija Babovic, Diana Tudorache, Genta Bibo, Viorelia Rusu and Milica Djordjevic. All are experienced researchers and/or social care professionals with experience working with vulnerable populations, including trafficking victims.

The research was participatory in nature, bringing trafficked people together around the common issue of their identification, return and assistance experiences. The objective was to situate these personal and individual experiences at the centre of this discussion and reflection process and engage in a discussion with trafficked persons about their experiences and perceptions as well as possible solutions to problems faced. Importantly, interviews with victims were focused specifically on the experience of identification, return and assistance, rather than trafficking itself. Respondents were not asked to relate their trafficking experience and, where this was discussed, it was at the initiative of the respondent himself or herself.

The sampling method sought maximum variation in terms of respondents and their experiences. The intention was to learn from the broadest spectrum of trafficked persons, thereby identifying a wide range of experiences and issues. In total, 80 trafficked persons were interviewed. Different profiles of victims were interviewed — male and female, adults and minors — as well as individuals trafficked for different purposes, including sexual exploitation, labour and begging/delinquency. While most respondents were women, the sample does include interviews with twelve males. Ages of respondents ranged from 15 to 75 at the time of assistance. While each member of the research team was professionally trained in and had experience working with minors, researchers purposely interviewed only older minors (13 in total) — between 15 and 17 years of age — because of their greater capacity to assess and evaluate the identification and return process as well as the assistance provided. Victims were interviewed from different countries in SEE as well as other nationalities trafficked into the region. Respondents had been trafficked to a wide range of destinations, including within SEE, the EU, Russia and the former Soviet Union, Turkey, the Middle East and Central Asia. Some victims were interviewed immediately following identification and referral and prior to their return home, others immediately upon their return home and in the initial stages of assistance and/or decision-making and still others were interviewed at different stages of reintegration. Victims were accessed from different organisations and programmes, including GOs, NGOs and IOs.⁸

⁸ Listed herein are the agencies who assisted in the research by facilitating access to their beneficiaries and supported the research team with valuable information. Cooperating organisations include in Albania — IOM Tirana, Different and Equal (D&E), Gjirokastra Community Centre (GCC), Vatra, Tjeter Vision, National Reception Centre (NRC) and Qendra kombetare pritesë e Viktimave të Trafikut (QKPVT); in BiH — IOM Sarajevo, International Forum for

Of the 80 trafficked persons interviewed, trafficking experiences were primarily related to women being trafficked for sexual exploitation, although of the 52 cases of sexual exploitation, one was male. The sample also included twelve victims of labour trafficking, 8 of whom were male and four of whom were female. There were six cases of trafficking for begging/delinquency — five female and one male; one woman exploited for labour and sexual exploitation; and one exploited for sexual exploitation and begging. Trafficking occurred primarily internationally but also included cases of internal trafficking. While the majority respondents had been exploited and then formally identified as trafficking victims, in four cases, these persons had been identified prior to being exploited, although there were strong indications in each of these cases of trafficking risk or the intent to exploit. In an additional three cases, it was not possible for the researcher to clearly identify the form of trafficking, although the persons had been formally identified as trafficked by the assisting organisation and were being assisted within the anti-trafficking framework. As the interview was about identification, return and assistance and not their trafficking experience, researchers in these cases did not focus on the details of their exploitation.

While the focus of the study was victim's direct experiences, perceptions and opinions, it was also important in some situations to collect information from service providers themselves. This was done to clarify information in a particular case or to collect more general information about procedures and practices in the identification, return and assistance process. As such, select interviews were also conducted with select service providers and anti-trafficking actors in the region, by in-country researchers or the research coordinator.

Limitations

In the course of the study, a number of issues and limitations were faced which necessarily impacted the research findings. These included the following:

- *Limited timeframe*: The limited time frame and time of year impacted the sampling frame. Some trafficked persons who agreed to be inter-

Solidarity (IFS) and La Strada; in Moldova — International Center for Women Rights Protection and Promotion Center „La Strada“, IOM Chisinau, Interaction, Compasiune and the National Center on Child Abuse Prevention; in Romania — Young Generation, Adpare, Reaching Out, Save the Children, Conexiuni, Betania and IOM Bucharest; and Serbia — Atina, Counselling against Family Violence (CAFV) and IOM Belgrade.

viewed were not available to meet within the research time frame. While every effort was made to accommodate these scheduling conflicts, it was not always possible. That interviews were conducted over a period of four to six weeks, which also coincided with Christmas and New Year's holidays, was an additional impediment.

- *Selection bias*: That many of the respondents were currently being assisted within a programme involves a selection bias that must be noted when reading and analysing the data. Persons dependent upon assistance may not feel sufficiently comfortable to discuss problems, feeling that the information they share will have negative repercussions in terms of on-going support or could be perceived as ungrateful. There may equally be a bias in terms of which victims organisations proposed to be interviewed. In some of the interviews, respondents were hesitant to say anything which they felt might harm the image of the programme or staff. At times, it was at the encouragement of the staff themselves that respondents told of issues they had faced. This makes the information shared all the more striking and significant. It also highlights that while this is an important step in engaging victims in a discussion of their needs and concerns, it is only a starting point.
- *Potentially unrepresentative sample*: In addition, assisted persons arguably, represent a certain profile of beneficiaries. That they have accepted assistance generally suggests that they have few other options and may constitute a particularly vulnerable category of trafficked persons (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007, Brunovskis and Tyldum 2005, Surtees 2005). As such, the findings may not be representative of trafficked persons generally and particularly not of those who are able to negotiate their trafficking situation, accrue some (financial and strategic) benefits and/or who do not require assistance and intervention.
- *Selection of researchers*: Independent researchers were sought who were not affiliated with service providers and assisting organisations. As it was not always possible to find suitably qualified researchers, in two cases selected researchers were from NGOs providing services. However, the researchers' high level of professionalism and impartiality meant that they were supportive and encouraging of this critical and evaluatory process, which served, at least in part, to mitigate this limitation.

- *Limited access to victims:* While a large number of organisations were contacted about the research, some organisations declined to participate, citing policies against beneficiaries participating in research projects and in spite of the fact that the focus was not on trafficking but rather the identification and assistance experience. This differed from other organisations who, after receiving the details of the project, parameters of participation and the type of topics to be explored, consulted beneficiaries about their willingness to participate in the study, some of whom declined, some of whom accepted. Because some agencies declined to participate in the research, this informed the sample itself and meant that beneficiaries in these programmes were not able to express their views on their identification and assistance experiences.
- *Time delay of interviews:* While most assistance experiences were quite recent, some of the findings outlined in this report reflect earlier trafficking and assistance experiences rather than those which have taken place within the immediate past. As such, some of the issues raised by respondents may have been addressed in the interim. That being said, past experiences may continue to inform victims understanding of and willingness to participate in the identification and assistance framework and may, in the present have a direct impact on decisions made.

2.4. Ethical considerations

This study has been undertaken with careful attention to the ethical issues which inevitably arise in victim-centred research with trafficked persons. Research was undertaken with careful attention to the ethical issues involved in interviewing victims as outlined in the WHO's *'Ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women'*. Ethical considerations were explored in detail in the preparatory workshop with the research team and a protocol developed to guide the implementation of the research project. Issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, the right to privacy and anonymity and security risks to respondents were central and each researcher was obliged to sign a confidentiality agreement. Researchers were trained to ask questions in a supportive and non-judgemental way and to anticipate issues and questions which might be traumatic for the

respondent. That the interview was comfortable and generally positive for the respondent was of utmost concern to the research team.

In the implementation of the project, careful attention was paid to these ethical issues. Respondents were contacted through different service providers who had been informed about the project and provided with written information about the research project and details about victims' role as potential respondents. In addition, in the course of the interview, each respondent was verbally informed about the research project, its objectives, how the interview would be carried out, how the information would be used, that they need not answer any questions that they were not comfortable with and that they could stop the interview at any stage without explanation. Verbal consent was obtained again prior to commencing all interviews.

Interviews were conducted in private settings, such as programme facilities, respondent's homes, organisational offices and at a time convenient to the respondent. The location was selected in discussion with the respondent and the respondent was offered the option to have another (trusted) person present. Where translators were used to interview foreign victims, they were carefully selected and thoroughly briefed on issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and victim sensitivity and obligated to sign a confidentiality agreement. Further, the issue of ethics was regularly considered within the research team and adjustments made to the interviewing process in ways that accommodated ethical issues that arose in the field.

The focus of the interviews was on the victim's experience of identification and assistance rather than of trafficking. Where trafficking experiences were discussed, it was at the initiative of the respondent and interviewers sought to guide victims back to their experiences of identification, return and assistance as much as possible. Interviewers were also attentive to the victim's comfort levels and in the course of interviews reassured respondents that they could decline to discuss anything with which they were not comfortable.

Because most respondents were currently being assisted within a programme, referrals for assistance were not generally needed. However, each researcher was equipped with details of assistance available in the country in the event that referrals were needed. Respondents were also provided with the contact details of the researcher in the event that they had any concerns or questions about the research at a later stage. Where we had concerns about the respondents or where follow-up contact seemed

necessary, researchers made a follow-up call or visit to the trafficked person and/or assisting organisation. In one country, the researcher interviewed a victim who had been abused while in assistance following trafficking. The respondent had since been moved to a safe environment with an NGO and no immediate intervention was required. However, discussions were held with the assisting NGO about reporting and follow-up on this case as well as any additional steps which might be needed, potentially within the framework of the TRM programme.

Ethics and safety have also been of primary concern in the preparation of the study. Respondents were not obliged to give any identifying information and, when they did so, this was camouflaged in field notes and subsequently in the report. Only the local researcher and research coordinator have had access to the individual field notes and all field notes have been carefully maintained in adherence with internal data protection standards of the NEXUS Institute and ICMPD. Further, in the report itself, all personal, identifying information about individual victims has been changed or omitted so that victim stories cannot be easily recognised in the report and are not presented in ways that pose risks or breaches of privacy for the victim and/or their family.

2.5. Working definitions and terminology⁹

Victim/trafficked person: For many people, the term ‘victim’ implies powerlessness and constructs identity around the individual’s victimisation. At the same time, from a human rights framework, the term ‘victim’ is important as it designates the violation experienced and the responsibility for redress. It is for this reason that the term ‘victim’ is used in this report. The term ‘trafficked person’ is also used because it too acknowledges that person’s trafficking experience as central and in need to redress. Both terms designate persons who qualify as victims of trafficking in accordance with Article 3 of the UN trafficking Protocol and/or according to relevant national legislation.

Assisted victim: A person who has been identified as a victim of trafficking and who has agreed to accept assistance from a non-governmental, governmental, international or other relevant organisation.

⁹ Many of the definitions and terminologies are taken from the *Regional Clearing Point’s Second Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in SEE* (see Surtees 2005).

Identified victim: A person who has been identified as a victim of trafficking according to a formal or informal identification mechanism.

Potential victim: An individual identified before being exploited but who showed strong signs of being in the trafficking process. This differs from a presumed victim, the definition for which appears below.

Presumed victim: Persons who are presumed to be victims of trafficking (having met the criteria of the UN trafficking protocol) but who have not been formally identified by the relevant authorities or have declined to be formally or legally identified. In some countries, this category of persons is referred to as 'potential victim', however, in this report potential victim has a different meaning. Please see definition above.¹⁰

Anti-trafficking actors: Persons from GOs, NGOs or IOs who are involved in efforts to combat trafficking in persons and who work in one or more of the areas of identification, return and assistance.

Assistance and protection: Measures, programmes and services aimed at the recovery of trafficked persons as outlined in Article 6 of the Palermo Protocol. These may be offered by non-governmental, governmental or international organisations in countries of destination, transit and origin. These might include but are not limited to accommodation/housing, medical care, psychological assistance, education, vocational training, employment, legal assistance and transportation. Assistance may involve one or multiple services.

Minor: Anyone under the age of 18 years.

National referral mechanism or system: This refers to national level mechanisms which are in place to identify, return and assist victims of trafficking. These exist in countries of transit, destination and origin and refer to the full process of national level referral from initial identification to assistance and protection involving cooperation between different government

¹⁰ Each country in the region has different terminology for trafficked persons, particularly those considered 'at-risk' of trafficking and those considered to be trafficked by not formally identified as such by authorities. In addition, different organisations also often employ different terms for these categories. In the context of this study, we use the terminologies of 'potential victim' and 'presumed victim' as outlined in the definitions above and not in conformity with any one country's or organisation's terminology.

institutions and non-governmental actors. This may involve one or all of these steps.

Recovery: The process by which victims are stabilised and their well-being is restored psychologically, socially and physically.

Reintegration/integration: Reintegration or integration of victims of trafficking is focused on reuniting the individual with her/his family or community or on integrating the trafficked person into a new community. Beyond the physical act of returning, it involves unification with the individual's social environment and is intended as a long term socio-economic solution.

Return: To return to one's country and/or community of origin. In the context of anti-trafficking work, return involves not only the physical transportation of the victim but also mechanisms to ensure that the return is safe and dignified.

Service providers: Organisations and individuals that provide one or more of the range of services and assistance provided to trafficking victims. These may include social workers, psychologists, shelter staff, medical personnel or legal professionals from NGOs, IOs and GOs.

Shelter/residential facilities: Premises that provide temporary and more permanent accommodation for trafficking victims. Shelters may be both open or closed; offer short or long term stay; and/or be tailored to emergency response or reintegration support.

Trans-national referral mechanism: This refers to mechanisms and systems designed for the comprehensive assistance and trans-national support of victims of trafficking. Trans-national referral mechanisms link the full process of referral from initial identification, through return and assistance between countries of transit, destination and origin and involves cooperation between different government institutions and non-governmental actors. This may involve one or all of the steps in the process.

Witness protection: The range of security measures needed to assure the safety of witnesses in legal proceedings. Witness protection may be offered, before, during and/or after the legal proceedings and may include any single or combination of measures which are geared toward assuring the safety and security of the witness and his/her family.

3. Trafficking and anti-trafficking in South-Eastern Europe

This section will provide a brief overview of how trafficking currently takes place in, to and through the SEE region. In very general terms, it will also consider profiles of victims and issues related to their vulnerability and trafficking experiences. As importantly, this section will consider the current state of anti-trafficking efforts in the region, with particular attention to the identification, return and assistance framework as well as national referral systems.

3.1. Who are trafficking victims?

The SEE region is an area of origin, transit and destination for victims of trafficking. Victims are trafficked to, through and from the region in large numbers, with literally thousands of victims having been identified and assisted since the late 1990s.¹¹ Some countries — Albania, Romania, Moldova and Bulgaria are primarily countries of origin — with large number of victims

¹¹ The total number of trafficking victims identified and assisted between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2004 within the countries of South-Eastern Europe was 6,255 (Surtees 2005: 12).

trafficked from each of these countries each year. That being said, there are preliminary signals that countries such as Romania and Bulgaria are also increasingly countries of transit and destination, trends which are likely to amplify with their recent accession to the EU. Other countries/entities in the region — Croatia, BiH, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia, Montenegro and the UN administered territory of Kosovo — have traditionally been countries of transit and destination but have also recently emerged as countries of origin, with nationals trafficked both internally within their own borders as well as abroad.

Victims themselves are a diverse population with distinct trafficking experiences, and include men, women and children of all ages. Certainly women were the majority of victims identified and assisted, generally having been trafficked for sexual exploitation, although also in some cases for forced labour such as domestic work. In addition, in 2004, the Regional Clearing Point Programme (RCP)¹² documented a noteworthy number of male victims amongst those assisted in SEE in 2004. Most notable was the situation in Albania where 70 per cent of victims trafficked for labour, begging or delinquency in 2003 and 2004 were male minors. Similarly, 47.8 per cent of foreign victims of labour trafficking in Serbia in 2004 were male, both adult and minors. Male victims were trafficked for labour, begging, delinquency and adoption. No cases of sexual exploitation were documented in the RCP research, although in 2003 two Moldovan males — 48 and 23 years of age — reported their case to the Moldovan police and were identified as victims of trafficking. The two men had been lured with promises of employment in Macedonia and but forced to work in construction during the day and provide sexual services at night (Surtees 2005: 302-303). In addition, IOM Skopje conducted a survey of the male sex sector which found that six per cent of male homosexuals surveyed had used the services of a male foreigner trafficked for sexual exploitation and 16 per cent had direct knowledge of someone from the homosexual community who had used the services of a foreign male trafficked for sexual exploitation (Handziska and Schinina, 2004: 10-14). Of note, of the male victims

¹² The RCP was established under the framework of the Stability Pact Task Force in Trafficking in Persons in 2002 to ensure standardized regional data on trafficking and victim assistance and to support the further development of victim assistance throughout South-Eastern Europe (SEE). In June 2005 the RCP programme was transferred to the NEXUS Institute in Vienna.

interviewed in the course of this research, a handful had been sexually exploited.

Similarly, minors accounted for a significant number of assisted victims in some countries. In 2003 and 2004, minors accounted for 20 per cent and 65 per cent of assisted Serbian victims, 100 per cent of Albanian victims of trafficking for labour, begging and delinquency and 58.6 per cent of assisted BiH victims (Surtees 2005: 13).

Trafficking experiences were also diverse and included cases of sexual exploitation, labour, begging, delinquency and adoption, as detailed in the table below. Importantly, many victims were exploited for multiple purposes. Most commonly this involved sexual exploitation and labour, but other combinations of exploitation were also noted.

Table 1: Forms of trafficking among assisted SEE nationals, 2003 and 2004

Forms of Trafficking	2003	2004
Sexual exploitation	824 (65.2%)	864 (74.2%)
Labour	91 (7.2%)	48 (4.1%)
Begging and delinquency	51 (4%)	75 (6.4%)
Adoption	0 (0%)	9 (0.8%)
Sexual exploitation and labour	245 (19.4%)	97 (8.3%)
Sexual exploitation, begging, and delinquency	10 (0.8%)	27 (2.3%)
Labour, begging, and delinquency	11 (0.9%)	2 (0.2%)
Sexual exploitation, labour, begging and delinquency	1 (0.1%)	0 (0%)
Potential victims ¹³	31 (2.5%)	43 (3.7%)
Total	1264 (100%)	1165 (100%)

Source: Surtees, R. (2005) *Second annual report on victims of trafficking in South-Eastern Europe*. Geneva: IOM & RCP.

Myriad factors and variables inform an individual's vulnerability to trafficking and often it appears to be a combination of factors that translate

¹³ This designation was used in the RCP research when individuals were assisted for insufficient time to clearly establish their trafficking experience or when the individual was identified and assisted before being exploited but showed strong signs of being in the trafficking process.

into trafficking risk. Key issues noted include, but were not limited to, age, family relations, education, economic and work opportunities at home and ethnicity. At the same time, while potential sites of vulnerability, these factors are not inevitable or all-consuming and there are many exceptions, which must be borne in mind in the design and implementation of programmes. For example, while many victims originated from “poor” and “very poor” economic backgrounds, a striking number of victims also originated from “average” or “well-off” families. Similarly, while many trafficking victims have low education levels, these were often consistent with educational levels in the population at large and a small number of victims from countries like Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria also had university and college education. And, while problematic family relations were, in many circumstances, a catalyst for individuals to migrate, many victims also reported positive and supportive family and community relationships. In some cases it may have been precisely these positive relations (and the resulting desire to support and assist the family) that led victims to migrate (Surtees 2005).

Some research does explore the complex and often multi-layered factors which serve as sites of vulnerability and potential trigger points for trafficking. Life aspirations appear to be one such factor. In one study in Romania, it was found that “at risk” girls tended to have a strong desire to seek work abroad and also had a propensity to break official and informal rules. Vulnerable girls tended to be quite independent and risk takers, able to cope with uncertainty (Alexandru & Lazaroiu 2003; cf. Bjerkan 2005; Brunovskis & Tyldum 2004). Other research has noted that many victims fall victim to trafficking as a result of a crisis, like an illness in the family or an urgent need for money (Brunovskis & Tyldum 2004; Surtees 2005; Bjerkan 2005). Some research also suggests that trafficking may occur where persons migrate to realise social and cultural obligations to support their family and to fulfil their socially prescribed roles — as wife/mother, dutiful daughter or son, etc. (Surtees 2005; 2003; 2000), something which was also documented in the field research for this study. That many victims come from societies where migration is socially normative, is an additional variable (Brunovskis & Tyldum 2004; Surtees 2005 & 2003). It has also been noted that in the context of evolving social and cultural discourses, the relationship to trafficking vulnerability is neither direct nor inevitable and identifying risk is an on-going process (Surtees 2003).

3.2. Anti-trafficking efforts — identification, return and assistance

Assistance for victims is outlined in a number of international documents and convention, perhaps most notably in the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*. Also known as the Palermo protocol, this documents outlines, in Articles 6, 7 & 8, the general rights and services to be provided in the context of victim support and protection. At regional and national levels assistance is also guaranteed in various documents. For example, in the EU where an increasing number of SEE victims are trafficked to, the *EU Action Plan* calls upon Member States to provide protection and assistance to victims as part of a balanced effective prosecution in line with national conditions and practice (4, vii). Similarly, in the Council of Europe's *Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings*, Chapter III outlines measures to protect and promote the rights of victims. Additional international principles and standards relevant to the identification and referral process include the *OSCE Action Plan*, *United Nations Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking* and *UNICEF's Guidelines for the Protection of the Rights of Children Victims*.

The identification, return and assistance of trafficked persons require a consideration of a broad range of factors, issues and situations. With different forms of trafficking identified in the region and different profiles of victims, the identification and assistance mechanisms must be diverse and appropriately sophisticated. The diversity in trafficking experience and complex interplay of choice and coercion must also be attended to this process.

3.2.1. Identification procedures

In SEE, identification mechanisms for victims of trafficking were initially developed to respond to what was perceived to be the prototypic trafficking victim — a young, adult woman trafficked for sexual exploitation. And existing identification criteria is primarily oriented in this direction and generally lacks broader, more inclusive criteria. This orientation has meant that many anti-trafficking actors have not consistently or proactively sought to identify alternative forms of trafficking and/or different profiles of victims. In some instances, law enforcement has, on the one hand, identified

“potential” victims of sex trafficking,¹⁴ while on the other hand, has failed to identify victims of labour trafficking (both male and female), treating them instead as illegal migrants (Surtees 2005a: 497, 513). The focus on generally adult, female victims may also mean that identifying actors do not have the requisite skills and training to sensitively and appropriately screen and interview minors.

Specific legislation on the identification and screening of trafficking victims is not common, although some countries include provisions on identification within their national plans of actions and the *EU Action Plan* calls upon Member States to develop an appropriate governmental coordination structure for early identification and referral of trafficked persons. Also uncommon are methodologies and guidelines for the screening and identification of trafficking victims. Some countries have developed a list of indicators or have a questionnaire for interviewing suspected victims of trafficking. However, these are more the exception than the rule (IOM 2005a: 12-13).

Another issue in terms of the steps followed in the identification of a victim or suspected victim of trafficking. Some countries have clear referral procedures in such circumstances, while others lack systematisation. Even where systems do exist, it is not always clear that all potential identifying actors have equal knowledge of the identification and referral processes. As became clear in interviews with trafficking victims, identification could potentially take place in more cases if a wider pool of public and private actors were equipped with this information and trained in identification and referral mechanisms. It is also important that identification procedures are responsive to all forms of trafficking and profiles of victims and are responsive to current trends and patterns, such as internal trafficking or changed routes (ICMPD 2006: 46; Surtees 2005).

While assessing risks to potential and identified victims is important at all stages of the identification and referral process, it is not always undertaken. There is a need for standardised risk assessments immediately upon identification. Risk will also fluctuate — heightens or abates — according to the situation, time, location and whether the individual has given a statement or is (or is perceived to be) cooperating with the police, making it important to anticipate potential future risks as different actions are taken. Risk assessments are not static; it is a continuing process and responsibility.

¹⁴ In the context of this example, ‘potential victim’ refers to someone who show strong signals of being in the trafficking process but has not yet been exploited.

Identification is generally assumed to take place in the country of destination. However, in interviews with trafficked persons it was found that many were identified in their country of origin. In some cases, this was upon their return (deportation or self return) when they came into contact with law enforcement or assisting agencies at border points or transit locations. In other situations, however, victims self-identified, accessing assistance after having returned independently or having gone unidentified in the return/deportation process. This highlights gaps in identification in destination and transit countries and, at the same time, the importance of diverse and community-based identification mechanisms in countries of origin.

3.2.2. Return and referral procedures

An important principle is that return should be safe and dignified for all trafficked persons and victims should not be returned to countries where there is reasonable suspicion that they will suffer harm, retribution, stigmatisation or discrimination. Where return is to take place, there are a number of important steps in the transnational return and referral process, as outlined in the steps below:

- victim's preparation for return (provision of information about options);
- document preparation and travel arrangements;
- communication and coordination between destination/transit and origin;
- risk assessments (security and family assessment);
- supported transportation and travel process (including accompanied return as needed and assistance in transit);
- reception and referral in home country.¹⁵

Currently in SEE, transnational return and referral mechanisms are generally underdeveloped, although some organisations demonstrate a higher standard in terms of return processes, including escorted returns and secu-

¹⁵ In addition, special consideration is needed in terms of how returns are carried out with minors. This includes, but is not limited to, escorted/accompanied returns, family and security assessments prior to return, reception centre/safe shelters which accommodate the special needs of minors and the appointment of a legal guardian in both country of destination and origin.

rity assessments prior to return. At present, returns and referrals tend to operate according to organisational links and networks, which generally means that victims are not always offered the full range of services available in the receiving country, but rather only those offered by the assisting agency and its partners. While cooperation and communication among organisations in SEE has improved, some organisations in transit and destination countries lack full and updated information regarding the availability and extent of reintegration services within countries of origin. This gap in information impedes the provision of information to foreign victims about the assistance options available upon return and toward implementing appropriate case planning. Further, service providers in countries of origin are often referred victims about whom they have only limited information, which results in extensive re-interviewing and little continuity of care. Cooperation and referral beyond the borders of SEE is also an issue and, with more victims being trafficked to the EU, Turkey, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East, there is a need for links with organisations in these destinations and for inter-governmental cooperation (Surtees 2005, 2006a, cf. Bjerkan 2005).

Another issue is that many victims experienced unassisted return. Many victims “self-returned”, travelling independently (and unprotected) and with their own funds. In addition, large numbers of victims continue to be deported from destination countries in the EU, Turkey and Middle East and are only identified as victims of trafficking in their home country.¹⁶ Few SEE victims deported from EU and other destination countries reported receiving any information prior to return regarding opportunities for assistance, protection and reintegration in their country of origin in contravention of international standards and obligations (Surtees 2006a).

3.2.3. Assistance and protection

The provision of assistance and protection — whether in country of origin, transit or destination — should be confidential and undertaken in ways that do not identify persons as trafficked, or lead to social stigmatisation

¹⁶ For example, 2978 Bulgarian women were deported from EU countries in 2003 and 2908 were deported in 2004, a percentage of whom were likely victims of trafficking. According to the National Border Police Service, as many as ten per cent of deported women could be trafficking victims but were not identified as such prior to extradition. Similarly, 221 of the 291 victims assisted by one Albanian organisation were deported to Albania and only identified upon their return home, generally by law enforcement (Surtees 2005).

and discrimination and/or put the victim at risk of retribution from traffickers. All assistance should be voluntary, non-discriminatory, non-judgmental and in compliance with human rights principles (ICMPD 2006). Services should be flexible enough to meet the specific needs and interests of a wide range of victims (males, minors, national and internally trafficked victims) and victims of other forms of trafficking (labour, sexual, begging, delinquency) and must be adaptable over time, able to adjust to new trends and developments (Surtees 2006a: 15). Special consideration is also needed to minors in terms of an assessment of their needs as well as in the provision of assistance and protection.

In countries of transit and destination

Short term services and crisis intervention for foreign victims is the primary orientation of services in most transit and destination countries, although these are generally geared toward adults rather than minors. Foreign nationals are accommodated in shelters (generally closed facilities) and provided with emergency assistance such as medical care, basic needs (clothing and food), crisis-based psychological intervention, recreational activities and legal assistance (generally in the form of document processing, although also some legal representation) prior to their return home. Depending upon the network and contacts of the assisting agency, they may also receive referral for assistance in their home country.

In some countries, where foreign nationals receive temporary or permanent residence permits,¹⁷ they have the opportunity to access longer-term (ideally reintegration-oriented) assistance. In such cases, the provision of services is offered alongside national victims.¹⁸ Where this is not the case, assistance through the social sector may provide the requisite longer-term care.

¹⁷ In December 2002, countries within the Balkan region signed the Tirana Statement on Commitments regarding the legalization of trafficked victim's status, including a pledge to issue temporary residence permits (TRPs) to foreign victims of trafficking. In August 2003, at the initiative of the Stability Pact Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings (SPTF) and with funds from the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF), IOM launched the project "Establishment of Temporary Residence Permit Mechanisms for Victims of Trafficking and Witnesses in the Balkans" in order to strengthen the capacity of relevant players in the Balkan region to fulfil their obligations within the framework of protection and assistance to victims of trafficking. Thirty six residence permits have been issued under the TRP programme in the region, since legislation was introduced (Email correspondence with Jovana Skrnjug, IOM Belgrade, December 2006).

¹⁸ For further detail about protection and assistance available in select EU countries, see IOM 2005A, Pearson 2002, van der Kleij 2003. For detail of assistance available in countries in SEE, see Andreani & Raviv 2004; Dottridge 2004 & 2006; Hunzinger & Sumner-Coffey 2003;

In countries of origin

Victims return home both assisted (through NGO and IO assisted return programmes) and unassisted (via deportation measures and self return). As such, upon arrival in their home country, some victims may already have been privy to (generally short term/emergency) assistance abroad, while others may not. Assistance in countries of origin is primarily oriented toward reintegration services, although victims do have the option to access short-term assistance upon return and/or to access services as a means of crisis intervention at later stages. The standard forms of assistance available in countries of origin include safe accommodation (short, medium and long term), basic needs (food, clothing), medical care, legal assistance, psychological assistance, job placement, vocational training, education, family mediation, recreational activities, housing assistance, financial support, etc. The extent and quality of services varies from country to country and even agency to agency. Overall, a critical issue remains the lack of standards, protocols and models for the development and implementation of victim services and assistance. Where handbooks and guidelines have been developed, they are often internal documents that are not shared or they are too general to be sufficiently operational¹⁹ (Surtees 2006a: 16).

Assistance — both short-term and that oriented to reintegration in the SEE region has typically been shelter-based, at least in the initial phase, and located in the capital city. Further, services generally have been located in urban centres and some types of services are therefore particularly inaccessible for those outside of larger towns and cities — for example, psychological and psychiatric care, specialised medical services, detoxification programmes, services for persons with disabilities, etc. However, increasingly non-residential services are being made available as well as services in other locations around the country. Among the services offered as part of most reintegration services are educational or vocational opportunity, job placement or income generation and family counselling/mediation. Such

ICCO 2004; Kvinna til Kvinna & Kvinnoforum 2003; Kvinnoforum 2003; Bjerkan 2005; Bjerkan & Dyrild 2006a and 2006b; Brunovskis & Surtees 2007; La Strada Moldova 2005; Limanowska 2002 and 2003; Pearson 2002; Reiter 2005; Rosenberg 2006; Somach and Surtees 2005; Surtees 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Tdh & ARSIS 2006; Tdh 2005; Tozaj 2006; UNICEF 2004; UNICEF & STC 2004; van der Kleij 2003.

¹⁹ One exception to this is the IOM *Direct Assistance Handbook* for use in service provision for trafficking victims by NGOs and governments which is publicly available at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/CT%20handbook.pdf.

services are most common in traditional countries of origin, like Moldova, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. However, with the recent emergence of national victims in traditional transit and destination countries, like BiH, Croatia, the UN administered territory of Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, reintegration services are increasingly required and offered in these countries. Recipients of reintegration services are primarily nationals of the country, although with the recent implementation of temporary residence permits for trafficking victims in six countries in SEE, integration support has also been provided to foreign nationals.

3.2.4. National referral mechanisms and systems

National mechanisms for referral and assistance differ substantially between SEE countries in terms of approach and stage of development. Very broadly, they refer to the co-operative framework through which state actors fulfil their obligation to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons in strategic partnership with civil society and other actors in the field (OSCE/ODIHR; Reiter 2005: 20). The objective of this mechanism is to ensure that all victims of trafficking (national and foreign; international and internally trafficked) have access to and receive adequate support and protection, as outlined in the Palermo Protocol and relevant national legislation. Assistance and protection is to be offered and available from initial identification through the whole process of return and referral, toward recovery and sustainable reintegration. That being said, when referring to national referral mechanisms, this does not imply a strict adherence to those outlined in the OSCE/ODIHR handbook. Some countries — like Serbia and Macedonia — have established national referral mechanisms along the lines of this model, with an agency within the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy responsible for the coordination of the provision of assistance and services to victims, linking with and coordinating with centres for social work throughout the country as well as relevant NGOs. However, other countries have developed their own unique and locally specific system. For example, in Moldova, the Ministry of Health and Social Policy (MoHSP) is responsible for the coordination of multidisciplinary teams at the rayon (district) level which are tasked with the provision of services from different organisations and agencies, both state and civil society. In Romania, assistance for victims of trafficking is overseen, coordinated and monitored by the National Agency against Trafficking in Human Beings which has eight regional centres and refers victims to assistance providers

and monitors the provision of this assistance. And, in Albania, the Responsible Authority (composed of representatives from the Border and Anti-trafficking Sectors, Consular Directorate and Social Service Directorate) is tasked with coordinating the referral process for initial assistance and protection and long-term rehabilitation of all victims of trafficking in close cooperation with all ministries, institutions and programmes for victims of trafficking. Thus, the models of national referral in each country/territory of the region vary significantly as do their stages of development, scope and extent of implementation.

4. Identification experiences of trafficked persons

In the research, one of the chief concerns was learning from victims about their identification experience — how they were identified, how they felt at identification and what, for them, were problems, issues or good practices in the identification process. This section will focus specifically on these three main points in an effort to situate the experiences and opinions of trafficked persons at the centre of the discussion of identification practices.

4.1. How trafficked persons were identified

Interviewed victims were identified by a wide range of anti-trafficking actors and mechanisms — through law enforcement, outreach workers, helplines, NGO and IO staff, embassy personnel, social workers, clients and victims themselves. As well, identification also took place by persons not generally involved in anti-trafficking work, such as transportation personnel, private citizens and religious organisations.

Law enforcement has been a key actor in the identification of victims in SEE as well as further afield. Law enforcement includes not only specialised anti-trafficking police but also immigration and border authorities, domestic police units, military police and anti-organised crime units. Many

of the victims interviewed were identified as a result of proactive intervention of law enforcement. In other cases, where victim's families lodged police reports, these led to their identification and release, even when abroad. One woman explained how she was released after calling her husband for help from the location where she was being sexually exploited:

As soon as my sexual exploitation began, I started looking for a possibility to tell my husband and after several weeks of complete humiliation and violence, one of the clients let me call home. I managed to tell my husband that I had been sold by my cousin and asked him to rescue me from the town, the name of which I managed to say. My husband made a statement to the police and the information about my search got to the [police]. When I was at my owner's, the [local police] came to our flat and told my owner that he would have many problems [because of my captivity]. He gave me some money for the ticket and the bribe to help me cross the borders. He was interested in my leaving the country.

Other victims were similarly identified:

I managed to call my sister from the mobile phone of one of my clients. I asked her to help me get out of the slavery I was in... I gave her the exact address of the place I was in. My sister contacted one of our acquaintances in [the police] and he gathered the information to send it further. I thought I would be rescued the second day after my call. But it wasn't so... Another girl told the owner about my call home and he beat me... A day later I managed to call home again and said crying that I would be sold to another place and implored them to rescue me immediately. Before that I had already been exploited in [another country]... As far as I understood, seeing that [the police's] actions took a lot of time, my sister went to [one organisation] and left the information there. [The organisation] sent this information to [another organisation in the destination country]. Immediately after that, a day later, the police came and started interrogating us.

I managed to call my relatives and tell them the address. My mother contacted the police in our town. In a few weeks the officers from the central police department... came to the market where I worked and took me.

In some countries, self-referral was a very common means of identification, the victim himself or herself having recognised their situation as one of trafficking or at least exploitation.²⁰ In some cases the decision to self-identify was in spite of the extreme risk that this entailed. One woman, who had been trafficked by her former lover, was violently beaten when she managed to escape and return to her home town. She described being beaten and tortured to the point of blacking out: “I was beaten before, tortured. But he almost finished me. I had terrible pain, I had blackouts. I was screaming loudly”. Nevertheless when she managed to escape from him she went directly to the police:

I was very afraid. First, because of the physical violence. Then, he raped me, threatened that he will make me disabled if I denounce him. He said that someone else will do it to me if he goes to jail. I was silent. That lasted about twenty-four hours. In the morning I was beaten again. At that moment I was not yet sure if I would denounce him to police... I was reassuring him that I will not denounce him to police. I begged him to let me go to my sister to recover. I was afraid to stay with him, because I was sure that he was just waiting for a new opportunity to sell me again... I was desperate from every side. I hesitated to denounce him. I planned to go first to my sister and to think about all. He believed me and let me go to my sister... I went to bus stop, entered the bus to go to my sister. But then I decided to denounce him. I got off the bus at the last stop in [the city]. When I got off the bus, I was afraid to walk. I took a taxi and asked him to drive me to the police station.

With regard to self-referral, helplines²¹ were especially important in seeking escape from a trafficking situation as well as in terms of accessing assistance:

²⁰ In BiH in both 2003 and 2004, many victims were self-referred, accessing assistance on their own or at the suggestion of family. This was particularly true of national trafficking victims, 69.2 per cent of whom in 2003 were self-referred. While the number of self-referred national victims declined in 2004 (to 33.3 per cent), this remains a significant means of identification and referral. Foreign victims in BiH were also self-referred in many instances — in 27.1 per cent of cases in 2003 and 21.4 per cent in 2004. Similarly, victims were self-referred in Albania (particularly minor victims of labour and begging), Bulgaria, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania and Serbia (Surtees 2005: 152).

²¹ There are various help-lines in the region which address human trafficking and violence. While many of the calls relate to prevention, many also translate into the identification of

I worked in one hotel where other women were working too. But it was their will to work as prostitutes. One of them saw that I was crying and asked what had happened. I said that I was working there against my will. She gave me a leaflet with the helpline number in [my home country] and recommended that I call. That very night I asked one of my clients to let me call from his mobile. I called the helpline and told them what was happening to me and where I was. The consultant of the helpline reassured me by saying that everything would be fine and the police would come for me and I had to tell them the truth. They asked me to make another urgent call to the helpline [in the destination country] and simply ask for help. I didn't have to explain anything because the information had already been transmitted from [my home country]. I did what they told me. The next evening the police came.

In a striking number of cases of women trafficked into prostitution, it was clients who provided assistance in escaping trafficking, both by allowing victims to make calls from their phone or more proactively, as in the case below.²²

There was one man who was coming to restaurant. He spoke [my language] very well. I asked him to help me because I was kept in the restaurant by force. He was afraid to help me but he agreed to help me at the end. He told me that he will wait for me in the car, down on the road.

A customer decided to help me. He took me to a hotel and paid the owner for a day that he was supposed to spend with me. After several hours, he allowed me to leave, so I ran off.

Outreach workers played a role in identification in countries in the EU but the general lack of such programmes in SEE, Turkey, the Middle East

victims. The anonymity of the helpline can be important for victims who are fearful and mistrustful of police and other actors. However, identification through this means also depends on the accessibility of the helpline — knowledge of an available helpline, whether it is free, what hours it is available and the skills of the helpline staff.

²² In BiH, a number of foreign victims of sex trafficking were assisted by clients — 12.9 per cent in 2003 and 17.9 per cent in 2004. Similarly, 4.8 per cent of BiH victims in 2004 were identified by a client. This trend was also noted in Romania. However, it merits mention that some of the women who were assisted to “escape” by their clients were subsequently kept by him as a personal servant/‘wife’ (Andreani & Raviv 2004; Surtees 2005).

and the former Soviet Union constitutes a missed opportunity for identification. One woman trafficked to Italy explained how when she finally managed to escape the only place she could think of to ask for help was the outreach staff:

After I had run away from the man I used to work for, I was with this guy who happened to be very willing to help me in every way. He was determined to help me return home... So he first took the phone book and looked for some numbers... Then I remembered those doctors who would come to the street in a van, and distribute condoms and leaflets and stuff... So I remembered that organisation first. And I went back with him to that place where they come [on the street], went to some girls I got along with... One of them gave me the leaflet. Luckily she had it on her. We called them that morning.

In some cases, state social workers identified victims, an improvement over past years in SEE where social workers were seldom involved in identification.²³ One minor victim was identified at work in a bar and, in cooperation with local police, removed from this situation by state social workers. Similarly, another minor victim explained that it was only upon the arrival of state social workers at the police station where she was being questioned that her case was recognised as trafficking.

In the course of interviews with victims, less usual entry points for identification were also noted, including interventions by transportation personnel, private citizens and religious organisations. One woman trafficked to the former Soviet Union sought assistance from the train conductor upon her escape. She lacked her passport (it was still held by the trafficker) and money for the fare home:

Being desperate I came up to the chief conductor of the train and told him everything. He told me that he would try to help me to cross all of the customs... There was no other way out for me. That was the only and maybe the last chance to escape. If he had refused to help me, I don't know what might have happened to me. I would

²³ Very few trafficked persons assisted in SEE in 2003 and 2004 were identified by state social workers, although some cases were noted in Croatia, the UN administered territory of Kosovo and Serbia (Surtees 2005). More recently this has also been noted in countries in SEE like Macedonia, BiH and Romania.

have thrown myself under the train... It was very difficult for me from the psychological point of view... He was very responsive. As he explained to me, he had a daughter of the same age and he thought that his daughter could have been in my place... He felt sorry for me. He understood me and he treated me well. He didn't ask me for any money.

A number of people who escaped trafficking and returned home on their own reported being identified and assisted by private citizens they met *en route*. One man explained his encounter with a man he met while making his way home on foot, a journey of literally thousands of kilometres:

He simply said that I had to have a good rest because I was very tired and weak. He said that I could stay there until my passport was ready at the embassy. He allowed me to call [home]. I tried to call some of my acquaintances who contacted my mother. We don't have telephone at home. My mother contacted the helpline... and asked for help. As my mother already told me, [the organisation] at home contacted [an organisation in the destination country]. A few days later I was called by a worker of the helpline in the destination country and offered some assistance.

Also interesting was the small number of cases where religious organisations played a role in identifying victims, although, in most cases they were not aware of the individuals trafficking status but rather identified the person as someone in need. One young woman — 17 at the time of her interview — was forced to work in prostitution and her only avenue for assistance was a nun.

During my frequent visits to church, I was confiding my different family problems to [that nun] and she has always been ready to listen to me and help me. When the situation... became extremely serious, I spoke to her. She told me about the shelter and assured me that I would be secure and protected there.

In another instance, a man who had been trafficked to the former Soviet Union was identified by a church group. He had been detained by law enforcement because of his lack of documents and not identified as a victim of trafficking:

It was very difficult for me to spend these four months in the police station. Nobody believed me. I had some problems with my legs. They failed me because of bad nutrition and depression. I was lucky because [the government] announced a general amnesty and I was released. I could hardly walk. Being in such a terrible state I came across some Christians who took me to their apartment where they prayed. I stayed there for three months. They gave me food and treated me. They promised to help me obtain my passport.

Explained another woman trafficked for begging:

One day a Christian woman approached me and started asking about my life. I told her everything. She felt sorry for me and she helped me to get a travel document. She took my photograph and went to my embassy. Then one day she bought tickets and accompanied me to [my home country]. She said that she would take me to an organisation which helps people who were exploited. This is the way I got here.

As importantly, however, victims spoke about instances of missed identification opportunities. In the case of one man trafficked for labour, the opportunity to identify and assist him was missed by different actors — by medical personnel (he was at one stage hospitalised for work-related injuries), border guards (when he tried to cross the border on his way home) and police and prison authorities (when he was arrested for illegal border crossing). In spite of relating his story to each of these actors, none took it seriously or made any attempts to assist him. The only assistance he received was from private citizens who offered food and money as he later travelled overland by foot to his home country. This is worrisome given that trafficked persons generally have very few opportunities or avenues to be identified. Consider, for example, the comment of one young girl, trafficked into prostitution in her home country:

I did not have anybody else to approach except [that nun]. I had a family that did not support me. I was feeling all the time alone, without any defence... My brother mistreated me, he beat me, my father was drinking, my mother died... People wanted to take advantage of me. The only person I could find to support and comfort me was [that nun].

In a number of cases, victims were not identified in spite of their contact and even direct request for assistance from different authorities. One woman trafficked to an EU country for sexual exploitation was arrested and imprisoned for her illegal documents and subsequently denied assistance from her embassy:²⁴

Then I was released [from prison] and provided with some money for the train to [the capital] where I could make a passport in [my] embassy. But there was another problem: in the database there was no information about me as I hadn't had a passport before... The ambassador said that he would not issue me a passport until I paid him. I told him that I had no money and he said "then get lost. You can call your parents from this place and ask them to sell their house, everything and then send money here"... I told him everything [about being trafficked]. But he didn't look interested in that.

Similarly, one victim had sought assistance from police, telling her story and asking for assistance, but was always returned to her trafficking situation:

Because most of the time the police are corrupt. Not all of them, but in most cases they are. I did go to them several times, even there in the [destination country], and it all played against me. And I had to do everything by myself to be able to get away and reach an embassy.

How victims were, at time, not identified is an important finding from the interviews and constitutes a missed opportunity which often extended their trafficking experiences. For other victims, failure to identify meant that they were arrested (often as a prostitute or illegal migrant), abused and even re-trafficked.

4.2. How trafficked persons felt about and experienced the identification process

For many victims the identification experience was a stressful one and informed by a wide range of emotions and reactions. Victims were asked

²⁴ That being said, embassy and consular staff from some countries have been involved in the identification of victims of trafficking, generally when trafficked persons approached the embassy for assistance, for travel documents, return assistance, etc. Some countries have trained their consular staff abroad in the identification and referral procedures for victims of trafficking, although the scope of their interventions in this regard are unclear (Surtees 2005).

about their feelings at the time of identification — both positive and negative — to help better understand how they, as individuals and in light of their exploitation, experienced the identification process. Victims reported a complex range of reactions — both positive and negative — to various identifying personnel as well as at different stages of the identification process. It was not uncommon, for example, for victims to feel both relief at having been identified and yet fear and suspicion toward to identifying actor. It was also not uncommon for negative feelings (fear and suspicion) to give way to those of relief once the victim felt safe and came to trust the identifying person. Victim's emotional responses were often multi-layered and coterminous. In what follows, trafficked persons relate — in their own words — these feelings and reactions.

Fear and suspicion

Perhaps not surprisingly, many victims reported feeling fear and suspicion at identification. This was often linked to their fear of being returned to their trafficking situation, many having been told by their traffickers that the authorities would simply return them should they try to escape.

I begged him to let me work down, in the restaurant. I begged him to be good to me, like I was good to him. He promised, but on one condition — that I don't try to escape or to tell to somebody. He warned me that it will be useless, because the police are with him. He said that all would be bad for me, because I couldn't prove anything.

There [when abroad] I didn't dare to denounce [my trafficker]. I believed him, that he was connected to police. Policemen were often coming to the restaurant.

In addition, traffickers also told victims that the police are cooperating with them and that they will simply be returned to them (and then punished) if they try to escape:

I was afraid that the policemen would make me go back to the place of exploitation and that the person who was following me could do the same.

Where victims felt the proximity of their exploiter, fear and suspicion was often acute. One victim, who had been held for seven years, first to

work in a bar and later as a “wife”, told us about the fear she felt when she was first being interviewed by authorities even though she was with the police and social services:

[About the social worker] She said that if I was uncomfortable with something I should tell her immediately. And if I wanted to ask her something, I could. I was so confused at that moment and I said I had no questions for the moment, but maybe I would have some later. But I was confused then, I was very scared, because my husband was outside the building.

Some victims also feared that the trafficker would find out that they had given a statement to the police:

The social worker and the psychologist came to talk with me, but I didn't want to talk with anybody, because I was afraid... I was afraid to talk because things that I was going to say might fall on the ears of the persons who exploited me and I knew them. They were capable of harming my family in [my home country]. I couldn't trust anybody.

Service providers themselves echoed this as an issue; “If the trafficker knows she is assisted, he might fear that she might pursue legal proceedings. Sometimes, victims of trafficking even say ‘I did it myself’ because they're afraid of the traffickers” (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

Fear of retribution — against themselves or their families — was an issue for many victims:

The girls are afraid... I know that they are afraid because we used to talk among ourselves about running away [from the trafficker], but they always said that they were afraid to do that. They used to say that they were afraid for their families at home because apart from those holding them, there are also the ones at home who can go and hurt their families.

But I was afraid to go to [my village] because his family was there... I'm not afraid for myself. If he wants to kill me, let him kill me. But I'm afraid for my cousins, that he can burn their house, to make them some problems... Not to kill my brothers, older or younger.

Many traffickers warned victims that they would be arrested, imprisoned and deported should they come into the hands of the police because of their illegal status, often a very persuasive argument for individuals whose trafficking experience is tied to their effort to escape home and earn money. That is, in some cases, victims fear identification itself:

[About seeking assistance and identification] I did not ask anyone for help because I did not simply have anyone to turn to... We were far away from the civilization. The nearest police office was seventy kilometres away. I did not want to go to the police because I was afraid that they would arrest me since I had no papers with me. There were no other organisations. That's why I decided to spend the winter there and then to try to get to [the nearby town].

Being illegal workers there, we were afraid of the police (we hoped that we will get money for job) and of being deported. That is why our passports were at our owner's so that in case of a police raid we wouldn't be identified as illegal workers.

One victim explained how police had, on a number of occasions, come to the bar where she worked and provided her with the contact details of assisting organisations, information which she destroyed:

We would just tear that [information] in pieces, since the boss told us not to take anything from police, to burn that immediately. "They lie, they would give you a deportation [order]." When [the police] left, we threw that [information away].

Many victims also feared mistreatment at the hands of authorities, a fear often based on their knowledge of police corruption and brutality (both at home and abroad) and reinforced by stories from traffickers.

I was captured together with another group of [people from my country] who were walking to [the neighbouring country]. When they stopped us I was scared. I said who knows what they will do to us. We have heard stories that the [foreign authorities] when they catch you they beat and kill you. But thank God nothing happened like this. They sent us in a small police station which was close, they asked us our names and that was all.

[About where to go for help] Depends. Police could be an option but some police are connected to those [traffickers].

I was scared of the police... If it wasn't for the fact that I didn't have a passport I would have never appealed for help to the police... I don't know why, but I was expecting to get a beating from the policeman... I was led to believe so by the owner for whom I worked... The owner also told me that all the police are corrupt.

[It was] almost five years [before I contacted the police]. At the beginning I was afraid of the police. I knew that many police officers were closely connected with traffickers. I was afraid of being deported from the country.

I didn't know at that moment who I could appeal to. I would never have appealed to the policeman, if he hadn't approached me first. I knew that the police were corrupt, that the [traffickers] were paying bribe money to the policemen who were patrolling the area where I was being exploited.

These are also fears informed by their own experience with police who, in some cases of sexual exploitation, were also their clients. Paradoxically, for some victims, identification was undertaken by the same people and institutions that have exploited and abused them.

I am afraid of the police. Since I was working on the street, they would come to have sex with me. I'm afraid of them. I don't trust them at all... [I was afraid] that they will put me on the street again.

I was afraid of them. Because I also had clients who were police officers.

For some victims, the identification and referral process mimicked aspects of what had happened to them during trafficking — promises of help and a good life, movement by persons they did not know, being taken to unknown locations where “everything would be fine” and “they would be taken care of”. As such, for many trafficked persons the identification process itself appeared suspicious, particularly when viewed through the lens of someone who is already stressed, frightened and confused. One victim described being moved from one police station to another in order

to give a formal statement and how frightened she was, convinced that they would take her again to her trafficker:

He took me to the new police station. I wasn't familiar with that police station, so I didn't believe him... But when I entered the station, I saw and I realized that I was not in danger, so I was not so afraid anymore.

Similar observations were made in another study with trafficking victims in Albania, Serbia and Moldova in which interventions by anti-trafficking actors appeared suspicious precisely because it was not dissimilar to aspects of their recruitment and trafficking experience. Different features of identification and referral seemed, to some victims, to mimic their trafficking experience, which in turn, directly influenced their ability to trust in these services and organisations (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

While fear and suspicion were common emotions for many victims, it is also important that they abated over time, as victims understood that their identification was genuine. However, the amount of time required to assuage fear differed greatly from person to person and was also closely associated with the context of identification and interpersonal interactions with identifying actors.

Shock, confusion and disorientation

Many victims described feeling confused and disoriented during the identification phase. In large part, this may be because identification often immediately followed escape from trafficking and victims were often still in a state of shock and disorientation. Many victims reported a good deal of confusion at identification and did not always clearly understand whether they have been rescued, arrested or are being trafficked again (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). Victims described how bewildered they felt at this stage:

I was talking without any coherence, I was all disoriented... It seemed like forever to me. Possibly half an hour, but I didn't keep track. Anyway it was too long.

I was disoriented. I was impatient to go home. I couldn't believe it. I had to see my house to believe it.

I simply locked myself up. I didn't quite understand what was happening. I was afraid of the police very much. When I had to speak

about the things that had happened to me, I got stuck in a way, blocked. And when the police officer shouted at me I got even deeper into my shell.

In other cases this confusion was apparently because victims do not fully understand the process of identification. One victim explained how she was not fully aware of what a statement was — “They didn’t explain to me what the statement was. I didn’t know anything about it”. Similarly, the conditions under which identification takes place in many destination countries — via bar and brothel raids, police operations — may further undermine identification efforts.

They told the truth, they said how everything was, but I didn’t believe it. It was 50/50. Maybe when a person is there already. But if you had never heard about the organisation, it is hard to believe it. And it was a foreign country.

In some cases, being able to understand the services on offer was tied to the specific capacities of individual victims. This can be attributed to the victim’s comprehension capacity, language obstacles, lack of knowledge and experience of assistance and also to their psychological state. As a result, many victims, in their initial contact with counter-trafficking personnel, were not always able to comprehend what was happening. This initial phase post trafficking can be very disorienting and anti-trafficking actors reported difficulties in reaching victims (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). For example, one study of women trafficked to Europe found that 56 per cent of women had symptoms suggestive of post-traumatic stress disorder upon entering an assistance programme (Zimmerman et al. 2006: 3).

For many victims, the shock and confusion appeared to be time-bound and many felt that a brief decompression period was necessary for them to understand what was happening around them:

I think that ideally they should have left us alone for several days to give me time to calm down a little... I was absolutely shocked... I don’t even remember what the police officer was asking me.

Feelings of relief, safety and comfort

Identification was not always a negative or stressful experience for trafficked persons. For many victims, being identified was the first time they

felt safe in quite some time. One victim explained how she fled her trafficker and went immediately to the police:

Yes, there in the police precinct I felt safe... I was more concerned about what would happen to me if I was forced to leave the police station.

Other victims also spoke about feeling safe once they reached the police or other identifying actors:

...when I entered the police station, I saw and I realized that I was not in danger, so I was not so afraid anymore... Then I saw some pictures of family violence, human trafficking on the walls. Then I realized that this was really police station and not some joke. Then I calmed down.

The people from the police treated me very well. The psychologist talked to me and then she talked to my mother. They also told me that many boys had been used by this [trafficker] and to bring this case to the end they needed some information. They assured me that the information would be kept secret. It was very easy for me to speak to the psychologist.

... I was very grateful and glad. I appreciated the way [the train conductor] listened to me and understood. I was ashamed but, anyway, I was glad that there was a person who wanted to help me.

In other cases, however, it took some time for the individual to feel safe, often not until they were at home or in some sort of an assistance programme.

For the moment I was afraid because I didn't know where I was going. When I got here [to the shelter], I was so scared that I couldn't say how it was. But in time I got used to it.

When asked what would have been helpful at the time of identification, a number of respondents spoke about having someone they trusted with them to provide some comfort or reassurance. For example, one woman, a minor when identified, was not permitted to have her mother accompany her while giving a statement to the police. While she conceded that it would also have been difficult to have her mother present — “maybe

she would have made it harder for me if she had been there, because I would have felt even more ashamed if she was to hear what I had been through” — she added that having a woman present would have been helpful:

I would [have preferred a woman to take my statement] and even if she wasn't taking the statement, it was important for me for a woman to be there.

The means of creating comfort were linked, in many cases, to the specific profile of the victim but also often to their trafficking and exploitation experience. Perhaps most important is that victims have options about who to speak with, including the option to have a supportive person present, like a social worker. Victims described other things which, for them, were or could have been done to create comfort in the initial stages of identification:

Yes, I trusted them. Besides they received me nicely. They bought me food, gave me something to eat, asked me if I need something.

I was lucky I was able to speak to someone from a nongovernmental organisation. I don't think I would have been able to tell the policemen the truth if it wasn't for that woman. First of all, I didn't have any confidence in the police officers, I was scared to talk about the traffickers, and secondly, I simply spoke no [local language].

Receiving reassurances was central in many victims' feelings of safety and comfort. Many explained how important it was for them to be reassured by identifying actors that they were safe, that nothing could happen to them and that everything would be alright.

Desperation and agitation

Some trafficked persons explained what could only be described as their desperation at the time of identification. While they, like many other victims, were often suspicious or fearful of identifying actors, their situation was so acute that they saw few other options for themselves. In many cases, victims were identified at moments of extreme desperation:

For me, it was most important to be safe. I didn't care if I would receive some help. It was just important to be protected.

For other persons, their desperation meant that they avoided (or tried to avoid) identification, wanting only to go home and try to recover:

[about her arrival home] I simply did not want to be tormented with questions... I didn't want to talk to anyone. I was in a state of depression. I didn't have anyone to talk to... But I didn't want to talk about what had happened to me [abroad].

I was together with another girl. She was also exploited together with me. Initially they began questioning my fellow companion and she told them everything. She also said that a similar story happened to me as well. It was at that moment that I first heard that I was a victim of trafficking... I was very tired, I didn't even care... I wanted to get home as soon as possible.

In other situations, it is precisely this desperation that leads victims to accept identification and assistance. It seems in many cases that acceptance is linked to the lack of other options and where alternatives exist, many victims do not often accept assistance (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

A number of victims described how their behaviour at identification was difficult because of feeling agitated and desperate. One victim explained how she felt and behaved at identification, noting that she was very difficult to deal with: “[I felt] very bad. I was talking very dirty. I was completely messed up and very weak”.

As with other negative reactions, desperation is something which abates over time and, with sensitive handling by identifying actors, can be addressed. But it is also important to note that because desperation can be manifested as aggression, this reaction may be misinterpreted by identifying actors and lead to misunderstanding, tension and even conflict.

Feeling ashamed and blamed

Some victims reported feeling ashamed in their initial contact with anti-trafficking actors, both service providers and authorities. Some felt ashamed of what they had been through and, in some cases, felt responsible for what had happened to them. One woman described how well she was received and treated by the police officer when she sought their assistance and yet how she also felt shame:

It was hard. I was ashamed because it was first time for me to go to police. That was on one hand but, on the other hand, I felt that I had some support.

In other cases, victims felt shame in the presence of their loved ones:

My husband insisted on my going to the police. We went together. When we came to this police officer, he was so kind to us... I told him everything that had happened to me. I was crying when describing my experience. Moreover, I was ashamed to tell all those things in my husband's presence. He didn't want to leave the room, he said that I shouldn't hide anything from him.

Or in another instance because of the attitude and comments of their loved ones:

I felt as if... as if my whole world collapsed. I felt embarrassed. It seemed as though I had asked for it myself. Because, even my own father told me this later and many other people said so too — “you asked for it”.... There were also women among them. [The message was] “What were you doing there, why did you go there? It is your fault”.

Shame and self blame was not always or exclusively linked to having been sexually exploited. One male victim discussed how failure to find work and earn money for the family left many victims with feelings of shame, to the point that they would rather expose themselves to additional exploitation:

I also heard from the men I am working with now that, when they managed to escape the place of exploitation, they didn't go home. And not because they were not exhausted and needed a good rest but because they were ashamed of returning to their families without money. They felt that they were guilty for getting in such a situation... Some of the men didn't tell the truth to anyone. Men prefer to take another chance in a foreign country in order to return home with some money.

In some cases, victims described how the behaviour of assisting persons made them feel this shame.

They interrogated me and I was talking to this inspector and I was sitting [with arms crossed]... And some policemen were at the door,

seven or eight of them, because the door was opened. I knew them in passing. They knew my brother and my father and how was I to talk to them?... And the inspector was telling me: “How can you disgrace your father like that”. And what was I to tell him then.

Our border officials are not comparable with those from other countries... They were only mocking me. They were asking what I brought from [abroad], to give them something too.

Dealing with feelings of shame was, for many victims, a central issue in their stabilisation as well as their long-term recovery. One woman, when asked what would be the most important message she could give someone who had been through an experience similar to hers, said quite simply, “I’d just tell her not to blame herself for anything”. She went on to explain:

To gather as much courage as she can and to always continue on... Because here, in this country you can never have support in such situations. I’d tell her to be prepared for no one being by her side and, afterwards, count on having to do everything herself, keep her strength. Gather as much strength as you can and go and report it.

Many victims did report positive, non-judgemental identification which, for them, was vital in the decision to accept assistance. To not be blamed and to be reassured that this was not their fault was an important message for many victims and one, they emphasized, that should be regularly repeated.

Anger, anxiety and disappointment

For some victims, being identified is not in and of itself a solution to their pre-trafficking problems, problems which have generally not been resolved and have often been amplified by the trafficking situation. For those who are in less exploitative conditions or have been able to save some money in spite of being trafficked, identification may be seen as the end of their economic possibilities. One woman who had initially been trafficked abroad but later stayed on to work in less exploitative conditions was distressed by her identification as it negatively impacted her ability to send money home to her child.

Feelings of anxiety and disappointment may be particularly acute when people are identified in transit, have not yet been exploited and still have

aspirations for a good life abroad. Where victims were hopeful migrants (and often unaware of the risk of being trafficked), identification can, at least initially, be a disappointment: “The best thing was crossing the first border. And when we crossed it on foot, it was hard, but we said we would cross every border like that. So we felt good”. Boys intercepted in transit, explained that for them the worst part was when they realised that they would not reach their destination and, therefore, would not be able to work and send money home:

Because it was important for us to leave our homes as soon as possible. And when we got into the police station we realised we would never continue the trip, never get to [the EU].

They stopped us, it wasn't easy. We had come a long way and then being caught in the end.

How victims (and potential victims) are treated by identifying actors can also play a role in how they experience this process. Some victims reported being mocked and ridiculed, which amplified their disappointment but also was often quite angering:

We got out from the [foreign police] van and got into the [national] police van. We waited there for half an hour until the police finished their things with each other and they brought us in [town]... They started to tease the young boys; “You missed it this time”. To me they said: “How did you pass there?” and some other annoying things.

Depending upon the conditions of identification and skills of the identifying actor, victims may not be initially identified, exposing them to interrogation as illegal migrants, prostitutes and/or criminals. In such cases, victims were often barraged with questions and what might have been an identifying interview became a criminal interrogation. This misidentification, and by implication mistreatment, can also cause anger and anxiety for many victims. When describing her treatment at identification abroad and at home, one woman explained it had been better abroad:

Better the [foreign police]. They wrote down our names and let us be calm. Here they deluged me; “how did you leave”, “with whom did you leave”, “what were you going to do there” and I don't know

what else... They threatened me that they were going to put me in prison if I did not tell them and didn't accept that I left with that person they were telling me.

Trust and mistrust

For many trafficked persons, the lack of trust — in people and institutions — was one of the main results of their trafficking experience. This, in turn, impacted their willingness to be identified and also to accept additional contact and assistance. One woman described how she had been provided with the number of a helpline for victims of violence by her local social worker but was afraid to call this number because a lack of trust: “It was the first time I heard about that organisation, the first time I heard such things exist. And after experiencing something so terrible, I didn't trust anyone”.

Many victims also lacked trust in authorities and this discouraged them from identifying themselves, even when opportunities arose.

I could have turned to the police, but in [that country] the police are all corrupted. I could have asked an NGO for help but I didn't know either the address or the telephone and I didn't have any money either to travel or to call.

At that moment I didn't trust anyone and couldn't comprehend in general that there are people out there who want to do good things for you.

No, I thought that the police would sell me back to the pimp. Among my clients there were policemen too. I didn't quite trust the police.

Another issue related to trust was that some victims felt that identifying actors — whether police or service providers — did not trust and believe their story. This had a negative effect on them. For one victim, this was the most negative aspect of her identification:

It was the mistrust of those people, the police, the people who take your statement. This disbelief, as if they were telling me with their eyes, “you are lying”... As if they are going to say “get lost”.

Feeling trust — in an individual or institution — played a role in some victims seeking out or accepting to be identified. It was also significant in terms of their onward referral for assistance. In many cases, some element

of trust was central in this identification process. In some cases, victims declined identification by actors who they did not trust, while accepting to be identified by those in whom they felt more trust.

For some people trust was linked to the institution itself, like the church in the case of man identified abroad after years of labour exploitation. When asked why he had trusted them he explained:

First of all, I thought that people who believe in God could not let me down ... I was very grateful to them ... They were so kind to me. Everything they were doing for me was done in an unselfish way. They did it from the bottom of their hearts ... They addressed [my embassy] and I was supposed to get my passport soon. These were normal people. They did not drink alcohol, they did not smoke and they treated me well.

Trafficked persons identified different means by which individuals and institutions allowed them to feel trust. In a number of cases, victims felt more trust and security where the authority of the institution was clear and visible. For example, for some victims, it was important that police wore uniforms and they found the practice of plain clothes officers confusing:

When I calmed down little bit, they called some inspectors. One inspector came. I was afraid to go with him, to enter his car, because he was without a uniform. He told me that he is an inspector and that I should not be afraid of him. He told me that he will take me to the other police station... Yes, [uniforms] were important to me. The inspector was in civilian dress and I was afraid of him. I asked him not to take me to the [traffickers]. He explained me that he was taking me to the other police station, where it is more peaceful, without a crowd. He promised me that we will have coffee there, that there we can speak in peace. He told me that there are inspectors who are in civil dress, without uniforms. He took me to the new police station. I wasn't familiar with that police station, so I didn't believe him. When we arrived there, I found out that he was in charge, but he was just without a uniform.

They gave everything they could. But in my head I just thought that they shouldn't be in civilian dress. I didn't believe that they were policemen.

Some were more inclined to feel trust and comfort when a woman — either a woman police officer or social worker — was present at identifi-

cation as this made them feel more safe and comfortable. In one instance, a victim described how she felt safer in the police precinct when she saw female staff; “Then I calmed down. There were also women. One was making coffee, the other was cleaning”. That being said, this did not apply equally to all respondents and feelings of trust are highly individual and context specific and are linked, at least in part, to the individuals social and cultural background. Male minors interviewed did not necessarily find women a soothing presence but instead felt that older persons were more reliable (and arguably more respected) than younger people:

Why would it be worse [to not have a woman present]? It would make no difference... I prefer it with older people because they know more [than younger people].

Similarly, in some cases, victims reported that they received insensitive treatment from female police officers as well as their male counterparts. One victim explained her encounter as follows:

Well, two [police] women interrogated me. I said nothing worse happened in my life. I am a woman, you are a woman, but a police woman who is interrogating you is the most disgusting that can happen in your life.

Significantly, even when victims talked about their lack of trust for an institution or individual, it was not insurmountable. Trust could be built and rebuilt. One woman had a particularly bad experience with the police, having been badly abused while forced to work in prostitution: “When I was working on the street, they would beat me many times. There were many girls there, but they would beat me always. I don’t know why”. And so to overcome this fear and mistrust was not insignificant. Nevertheless, her mistrust of law enforcement authorities was overcome because of her treatment by police officers after her identification, “Yes, I’m very afraid of the police. But not anymore. They helped me also”.

4.3. Issues and obstacles in the identification process

The hidden nature of trafficking complicates the identification of victims. Where sexual exploitation, labour, begging and delinquency takes place in hidden locations or under the strict surveillance of controllers, access to

these venues is very limited. Similarly, victims are often not able to seek out assistance, either for emergency remedy or as a means of escape. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that only a small number of trafficking victims are identified and/or come into contact with assistance programmes (Brunovskis & Tyldum 2005; Surtees 2005: 25).

Problems related to identification go beyond simply the nature of trafficking itself and link with a range of other issues and variables. The experiences of trafficked persons reveal a range of issues faced in the identification process, both in countries of destination and transit and in their home countries.

Access to information at identification

Receiving full and comprehensible information about identification and referral was important for victims — to assuage their fears and create a feeling of comfort and safety. Many were correctly and fully informed of the identification and subsequent process at this stage. Some victims received information which, for them, was clear, accurate and informative, which played an important role in the decision to accept support:

Yes, the woman clearly explained to me what services I could benefit from in the shelter. Everything was very clear. She gave me a brochure in [my language], where also everything was explained.

However, many victims reported receiving insufficient and/or unclear information when they were first identified and making decisions about their future and options for assistance. In some cases victims received no information from authorities about assistance options. When asked what they had been told — after giving statements to the police, meeting with service providers, etc. — many trafficked persons related similar experiences:

They didn't tell me anything special. Then they came for me in the morning and took me again to the police station... Like, "You will go today there, and tomorrow you will go to [that city]".

Police came to that place and took me to the station. They took a statement and then brought me here... They only said that if I wanted to come I could and that I should think about it. They said it would be fine and that they would take care of me.

After that he said that we will go to [the capital]. And that shocked me a lot. Well, I didn't know what was there... They didn't say anything. Only that we will go [the capital]... That we will see there with the prosecutor. He said only that.

In the case of minor boys identified in transit, they were kept in the police station and then transferred to the shelter for minors without being given any information about their detainment, what was happening and/or what would happen:

We had this problem of not knowing what would happen to us, so we didn't think about food or drinks... We were in anticipation of what they would do to us, what they would say.

In other cases, victims did receive information but many felt that it was insufficient. One victim stressed this lack of information as disorienting and emphasized several times in the course of the interview that they didn't give her sufficient information on the process, just some basic information about shelter. When initially identified it was the police that told her about the possibility of assistance:

They just said that it was some private house or that I will be in some hotel... I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know where I would go. They should have explained to me a little bit better what would happen. When I went to police, I didn't know anything. I didn't know that there is this kind of house.

Some information was what can only be described as confusing. One victim described being taken to a shelter but that she had not been told it was a shelter:

I didn't know it will be a shelter. They just said "you will go to one house"... They just said some house. Public house, something like that. I didn't have idea what was that house. I said: "I will not go there".

Of note in this case was that in the local language "public house" has a double meaning, which can also refer to a brothel. Having been a victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation, one can understand her being deterred by this opaque and even potentially frightening information.

That so many victims originate from countries and communities where social assistance is underdeveloped or non-existent means that their exposure to and knowledge of services and assistance is generally also limited. One recent study in the region found that victims were often surprised about (and suspicious of) assistance precisely because of their lack of exposure to this option, illustrated in the following case:

One victim, explained of her return, "At customs, when the police asked me why I had no money, I explained my situation, and he took me aside and explained about the [assisting] organisation". When asked about her reaction to this she said that for her, "I thought it was a gift from God. In our country you cannot get anything for free". Her friend, and also a trafficking victim echoed her suspicions, "But who am I to be helped? Especially by a policeman" (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

Indeed a large number of assisted victims interviewed in the study expressed surprise that such services and assistance programmes existed, most never having received assistance or support in the past from either NGO or government actors. One victim explained of her offer of assistance, "We all had our suspicions because it was the first time that we had heard of it and we did not believe that someone will care". Another explained that in spite of being offered the shelter, she preferred to go to prison. She thought that she would spend only a month there and she knew she could handle a month in prison. With prison she knew what to expect. But the shelter was an unknown entity for her, a "leap of faith". Even after speaking with the programme staff she was not clear about the programme and still afraid. As she said, "I could never imagine that such a place exists" (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

Similarly, consider the comments of different victims interviewed for this study, when asked whether they had been aware of assistance options while or after trafficking:

No, I didn't. It didn't even occur to me that I could ask someone for help... maybe I could have asked for help if I had had more time. I was followed by some people, I was afraid... I would have turned to an organisation that I could trust which can really help, for example, such as [an NGO]. I didn't know about such organisations at that moment.

No, I knew absolutely nothing about who I could turn to for help. I didn't even think that such organisations exist.

I think that it is very difficult for trafficking victims who come from vulnerable layers of the society and have no TVs or radios to find out some information, at least about the helpline. Such people don't have telephones either. I don't know how they can find out about assistance [in the destination country].

No, nothing, I didn't know anything [about assistance] because I went from one car into another and I was closed there at my husband's. I did not go out, was not allowed to ask about anyone. While I was in the flat, I was there, then I was in the house. I was more inside than outside. When I went out occasionally, to the market or to the shops, I was afraid to ask anyone about anything.

In addition, words such as "shelter", "safe house" and "assistance" were not always familiar terms of concepts to trafficked persons (or the population generally). Brunovskis & Surtees (2007) found that at identification many victims did not clearly understand what was meant by shelter or assistance:

When asked what they expected the shelter to be, one victim explained that she thought it would be a house full of people, children and girls and also full of cameras. Another victim said, "Where I was from I had no idea about it, what it was. I found it was good and I didn't know that before I came. In [my town] there is nothing like this and I did not know that it could be like this". Still others reported imagining it would be "a cellar with bars", "a fraud", or "a home with a lot of people" (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

This underlines that terms and concepts are often context specific and merit explanation to ensure that they are fully understood by the target group. Language and cultural barriers may also inhibit an adequate understanding of the services on offer. It also highlights the need for clear and comprehensive information about assistance options at identification as well as more broad based information about assistance options in the community at large.

Means of providing information needs to consider language, educational and literacy levels of respondents as well as the comprehensibility and accessibility of the information. In some cases, inadequate informa-

tion at identification may be less about whether information is provided and more to do with victim's comprehension of that information. That many victims at identification are shocked, confused, desperate and fearful may mean that they are not able to understand the information being given. Brunovskis and Surtees (2007) found that many victims manifested limited capacity to understand options and make decisions because of, among other reasons, shock and trauma at identification. This highlights the importance of considering information-sharing procedures through the lens of victim's experience, adjusting how and when information is given relative to the physical and psychological condition of each trafficked person. Trafficked persons cannot reasonably be expected to make decisions about their future until they really understand the options available to them.

In terms of verbally conveying information, it is important to consider what to say, how to repeat information and how to confirm that potential beneficiaries understand what is being explained and offered. In the interviews it seemed that some trafficked persons may have received information but there was a need to repeat and emphasize points and also to gradually introduce more information in ways and at times that were appropriate and accessible. Offering written material is important, particularly given that many victims require some time to process the information, weigh up their options and come to a decision about assistance. Providing written material also allows potential beneficiaries to refer back to this information at a later stage and be aware of the full menu of options. Further, victims may receive information about services at different stages during and following their trafficking experience. It is important to mobilise access points for information provision specific to victims' post-trafficking lives.

Equally important is by whom information is disseminated, with a range of possible interlocutors including outreach workers, medical personnel, law enforcement, tourism industry staff, transportation personnel and embassy and consular staff. Equipping these individuals with the skills, information and material to inform victims of their rights and options in a comprehensible and clear way is paramount. Trafficked persons should, ideally, be involved in determining what and how information can best be presented to and shared with trafficked persons (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

An associated issue is that many trafficked persons returned home without ever being identified and, as a result, were not aware of their status as a trafficked person. As such, messages about assistance for trafficking victims are not likely to resonate with these individuals as they will not nec-

essarily see themselves as trafficking victims and are not likely to understand that they are entitled to this form of support. In addition, many victims originate from rural areas and may not have access to television and radio in their home communities, which means that many will not have access to information about assistance options. This highlights the role to be played by community interlocutors — leaders, medical staff, teachers, religious leaders — in both identifying and providing accessible information to trafficked persons.

Identification skills

In discussing their identification experience, trafficked persons told of situations in which they were not identified, even in cases where they were requesting assistance. In part, this is because of the (inadequacy of) existing mechanisms for identification in many countries, both within SEE and further afield. Many countries lack adequate identification and screening procedures and often do not adequately screen irregular migrants, failed asylum seekers and deportees to determine whether they may be trafficking victims.²⁵

This may also be about the capacities of specific identifying actors. Some victims were not identified abroad in spite of being in the asylum procedure. In some cases this was because they were not recognised as victims of trafficking and/or the staff was not aware of what this meant and the assistance that should be provided in these cases. In the case of one minor from SEE, EU authorities failed to identify her and instead categorised her as an illegal migrant and deported her. It was only when she arrived home — and after some hours of interrogation — that she was recognised as trafficked and referred for assistance. Similarly, one male victim who approached the police and told of his situation was not identified by the authorities:

I showed them the passport and when they saw that I didn't have a visa, they put me in their police van. They stayed for another half an hour, waiting for something, and they took me to the police sta-

²⁵ This is not unique to SEE but has also been noted as an issue in the EU. For example, there are no provisions in the Irish law for the identification of VoTs, no Irish government police tasked with the identification of VoTs, no national indicators or guidelines for identification and the indicators that do exist — for separated children — are not appropriate for adults. Similarly, in the UK, there are no national guidelines for immigration services on identifying VoTs upon arrival, although there have been recent efforts to increase the awareness of frontline staff and, in 2005, the government introduced interim guidelines on identification of minors. Similar issues exist in other EU countries (IOM 2005a: 68, 88).

tion... No, they didn't ask anything [about what happened]. They didn't ask who is with me or who brought me or how I got there. The translator told me only that if I want to stay here, to ask for asylum, they could give me a place where to stay, but I told them that I wanted to go home... [The next day] we were taken to the airport by police. There were seven or eight other people.

In other cases, victims were not aware that relating their trafficking experience might entitle them to stay, at least temporarily, in the country of destination, and so did not tell the authorities their full story. One young woman identified in the EU applied for asylum but who did not mention her trafficking experience explained her situation as follows:

Yes, I stayed for four months waiting for my papers, and then the negative answer arrived and it seemed that they were afraid not to escape from the camp and staying in [the EU], so they put in prison until they sent me [home]... No, I didn't want to talk with anyone about my problems. I was asking only to make my papers and it didn't pass in my mind to tell anyone about my trafficking experience and no one asked me.

In the anti-trafficking sector, there are apparently also problems with identification. Brunovskis & Surtees (2007) found, in their sampling of the street prostitution arena in Serbia, a noteworthy number of street prostitutes who had been trafficked but never identified by police responsible for the prostitution arena, which is a different section than the anti-trafficking police. Further, criteria for identification does not always keep pace with trafficker's behaviours and traffickers have regularly adapted their methods in response to new laws and policies, adaptations which move faster than the measures of anti-trafficking actors. In SEE, strategic changes have included paying victims small amounts of money (to dissuade them from escaping),²⁶ mobilising the asylum procedures or getting married to

²⁶ In Kosovo, in 2003 and 2004, foreign victims reported receiving around EUR 200 or 300 per month from their traffickers as wages, which was paid regularly. In many cases, this served as a disincentive for victims to escape trafficking. Similarly, in Macedonia in 2003 and 2004, victims were paid small amounts of money, which proved sufficient in many cases to dissuade them from seeking assistance and escape. These payments, while far from what was promised at recruitment, are important given that the majority of victims were trafficked as a result of the desire to work abroad and earn money (Surtees 2005: 247, 316, cf. Andreani & Raviv 2004, Hunzinger & Sumner-Coffey 2003).

victims to legalise their status,²⁷ strategies which, for a short time, seemed to have compromised identification efforts.

One striking finding was that many people were not identified in spite of directly approaching persons who, at the very least, should have been able to refer them for some form of assistance. One elderly blind woman was trafficked to and exploited in the former Soviet Union for begging for sixteen years but never identified in spite of having come into contact with police at various stages of her exploitation:

I was detained by the police several times and I was behind bars... I was scared and thought that I would be imprisoned... I was detained for several days until the chief police officer came. I told him what had happened to me and who was keeping me and had my passport. He told other policemen "let this old woman go. She is not a thief and she is not to be kept here". They told me to go wherever I wanted. I tried to explain to them that I could not go anywhere since I didn't even know where I was and where to go. And the chief officer gave an order to take me to the place they had taken me from. So, they again left me there to the mercy of fate. I was standing there and crying. Where was I to go? No money, no passport. In the evening the owners came and the same routine began again. I was afraid to run away because the owners threatened me with death... I told my story many times, even when I was exploited by the policemen. But they didn't admit that I was exploited. Only here at this shelter, they understood me and started to help me.

Similarly, one man trafficked abroad for labour explained how he was stopped by the police in the destination country who failed to take interest in his experience of exploitation:

[I was stopped] by the police at the bus station in [the destination country's capital] when I came to buy a ticket to [my country]. The station police stopped us to ask for our registration papers but we didn't have it. They were not interested in details [about our exploita-

²⁷ In BiH in 2003 and 2004, victims reported the tactic of forcing trafficked women to marry their employer to regularize their status in the country. This was generally done after a length of time when the victim might be at risk of seeking assistance and was intended to exert additional control over her. Another strategy involved forcing trafficked women to request asylum and continuing to exploit them while applications were processed (Surtees 2005: 114, 131-2).

tion]. They were mostly interested why we broke the registration law... They wanted us to pay the fine.

It was not only law enforcement authorities who failed to identify victims seeking intervention. Another man explained how, when he was hospitalised, the attending doctor provided no assistance in escaping his exploitative situation:

You know, when I was exploited there [in the destination country], I once fainted and the owner took me to the hospital. There the doctor asked me why I didn't have any registration. I told him that my owner didn't let me leave the territory I worked. He seemed to have understood the situation I got into... I felt safe at that moment. I thought I would stay there for a long time and I would be able to go home... I was there for three days. On the third day the doctor told me that the treatment was over and the costs were covered by a charity organisation. When I went out of the hospital, I saw my owner waiting for me. Then he took me back to the place I had worked before.

Another man who escaped took a bus as far away as possible from the site of exploitation and only then sought out the assistance of the police. However, their intervention was limited:

But this was the police far from the place of exploitation and they said that I had to go back to the place I was exploited and go to the local police since they were not responsible and couldn't help me. I didn't have my passport with me... I was afraid that I would be caught by the traffickers... I had neither documents nor money.

Yes, but they didn't want to help me. I asked them what I could do to get my passport. They said I could go to [my embassy in the capital] and ask there for a new passport... I was exhausted. I didn't have any documents and money. I had nothing to eat. I had to go begging from village to village heading for [the capital].

In a number of cases, victims told their story to border guards who let them pass without documents but failed to identify them as trafficked or offer them any assistance. One victim trafficked to the former Soviet Union explained what could have been done differently in her case:

If the customs officers on the border had treated me more seriously and told me that I was a trafficking victim, I could have called the helpline right after my arrival and asked for help. I wouldn't have lost so much time looking for a person who could understand me and provide me with assistance.

Instead, in this case she and her child were removed from the train and interrogated:

They kept us at the customs area, they interrogated us. I started to cry, I told them everything I had been through... implored them to let me go to [home]... They kept me there for a long time until the head customs officer happened to enter. He ordered them to let me go and I left.

Although she was finally released, she returned home unassisted (and therefore unprotected) and was not aware of any assistance for some time after her return home. It was only after she was arrested for theft (her only means of survival for herself and her three children) that she was finally identified as a victim of trafficking:

The first time I was identified as a victim of trafficking was by the head of the children's orphanage [at home]... I happened to commit a theft because I had no other way out. I was in the street. When I was arrested, my children remained alone. The children were referred by the state to the children's orphanage. The head of this orphanage came to talk to me in prison. I told her about my life and why I got into prison.

To some degree the issue seems to be that some victims were not believed to be trafficking victims and so were not identified. While this was an issue for many female trafficking victims, it seems to have been particularly common amongst trafficked men. The failure to identify (and assist) male victims had, in some cases, extended their trafficking or led to their arrest or detention, both of which necessarily had a long term impact on these men. One man told us how, after four years in a trafficking situation in the CIS states, he had managed to come to a neighbouring capital where he was detained by the police but never identified:

I came to [the capital] by train. A few weeks later I was detained by the police since I had no documents with me. I used to spend

nights at the railway station. Once at night there was a police raid at the railway station. I was taken to the police together with one [foreign] person who had a gas pistol. He said that he had bought that pistol from me. As a result, we were both arrested. Thus I spent four months in the police station. The policemen beat me trying to make me confess that that pistol was mine. I was in a very difficult situation because I did not have any documents. I told them my story but they did not believe me.

Similarly, another male victim described how, in spite of explaining their situation and asking for help, they were not identified and, in fact, were put into jail as illegal migrants:

Some of the policemen were laughing at us, saying that we were idiots, that only fools could end up in a situation of exploitation like that... Some policemen didn't understand that we were forced to work, that we were threatened with death... they didn't believe that our passports were taken by the exploiters... Many of the cops thought that we were robbers, that we were attempting to flee the country and that's why we were concealing our true identities... Only one police officer took all the information he received from us in a serious manner... I suspect that the police didn't even bother to inspect that faraway place where we were exploited... I think that a reason for this could be the involvement of local policemen in the whole trafficking affair.

It is also interesting to note how the recent identification of "potential victims" or "at risk individuals" (those assumed to be in the trafficking process), while an example of proactive identification, is not without its problems. Increasingly in SEE, women and girls have been identified in transit and, where they show strong signals of being in the trafficking process, are often offered the option of assistance within the anti-trafficking assistance framework. However, the identification of potential victims is highly gendered and males crossing borders are seldom considered to be "potential victims", even when they are minors. In the course of the research, two male minors who were intercepted while trying to cross to the EU for work were also interviewed. While clearly at risk of trafficking and evidently from vulnerable family situations, these minors were deemed irregular migrants (rather than "potential victims") and returned home. This contrasts with

the identification of girls and women who, in similar situations, were generally offered assistance. Similarly, a number of (primarily male) victims of labour trafficking intercepted in the same country were also not identified as trafficked or even “potential victims” but rather were deported as illegal migrants.

In some cases, failure to identify victims led to re-trafficking or continued exploitation. In a number of cases, victims left their trafficking experience only to end up in another exploitative situation. With no money, no information about assistance and no means of return home, they had few options:

I met one [local] citizen... He took me to his flat... It was very convenient for him as I did all the housework — ironing, cleaning, washing... I couldn't leave the flat... Then I got pregnant... I was four months pregnant when my “husband” got into prison and I was freed... I addressed the police and they referred me to a shelter for single mothers.

In another case, a man exploited for labour was “assisted” by a man to escape that situation but who then also exploited him as a labourer on his rural farm, literally miles from any other persons or avenues for exit. The man was kept there for many months, was forced to labour, unable to leave and received no payment.

Detention and arrest instead of identification

Of concern is that in some countries trafficked persons continue to be treated as criminals and offenders rather than victims of crime. In a striking number of cases, victims reported being detained and even jailed as a result of their trafficking situation. Some were seen as criminals by virtue of their illegal status or activities in the country, often being arrested or deported as offenders of prostitution, labour or immigration laws, rather than identified as trafficking victims. Some were imprisoned for having false documents. This occurred within SEE but significantly also in the EU, Turkey and the former Soviet Union. One woman explained how she was arrested in the EU country to which she was trafficked:

I was bought by traffickers and they were taking me to [another country]. I had a forged passport. The police took me off the train. I was accompanied by a pimp and she ordered me not to say a word. But the police officer took me into a separate room and asked me

to tell the truth because he had already met such cases when girls didn't confess and left with their pimps and they were later found dead in forests ... or they became drug addicts... I was so frightened that I told everything... I was imprisoned for three months. I was interrogated. They treated me quite well. They refuted the accusation of the forged passport. But it took three months. Then I was released and provided with some money for the train to [the capital] where I could make a passport in [my embassy].

This victim was very clear about what should have happened in her case:

They shouldn't have accused me of forging my passport... It took them so long to clear it up... They should have detained the pimp (they let her go from the train) and punished her for illegal actions. They should have sent me to a special shelter for trafficking victims and they should have helped me to obtain my passport urgently and sent me directly home.

In other situations, victims were identified as trafficked but nevertheless detained and arrested and often also deported. In some cases, they were held in prisons and detentions centres prior to being transferred to a shelter or being returned home. One woman described being detained for a number of days in pre-detention rooms in spite of having been recognised as a victim of trafficking. The authorities did not refer her for assistance but instead detained and subsequently deported her. Another woman described being held in a flat, freed only when the police came because of a gas leak in the building. When the police came, however, she was still not identified; "We were placed in jail, and subsequently deported". Similarly, a group of women trafficked for sexual exploitation were held in a prison while giving testimony and statements and only upon completion of these legal proceedings were transferred to the shelter for trafficked women:

They put us into a prison cell. It had a small window. Sometimes it was opened from the outside and police officers would stare at us and point their fingers at us while saying, "Look at these girls... look how pretty they are". I had the feeling I was in a zoo. That's why when we were transported to court sessions, I didn't really feel safe, because I had heard that girls were kidnapped even from police precincts. I had the feeling that I would be kidnapped and murdered. It was psychologically difficult for me.

In other cases, trafficked persons were held accountable for their “crimes” while trafficked and only later considered a victim:

Without passports... we crossed the customs area during night time, illegally. We got off the train in the vicinity of the border and we exited. We crossed through the woods. When we already set foot on the territory, we were apprehended by the border guards, who returned us back to the customs. They detained us there for three days. We told them the actual truth. They treated us well. They bought us food. They said that we had to wait for the arrival of a law enforcement officer... We had confidence in the major, who comprehended our situation... We were led to a police officer in the town where we once more told our story. The officer detached a team of the federal security bureau to the location where we were exploited. Regretfully, after they arrived at the mentioned location they found no one there and also not our passports... They took us to a “detoxification centre”. We were held there for two days. They fed us there. Afterwards they took us to an investigatory isolation ward. There we remained for three months... We had been punished... They said that, first of all, they had no proof that I was a victim, and secondly, I violated the law.

Victims generally identified their time in prison and/or temporary detention as traumatic:

It is not good to stay in prison... this has a negative impact on me... my accommodation in prison was a frustration for me. I think that trafficking victims should be immediately placed in the shelter, a safe place, but not in prison.

I should have been taken straightaway to the shelter. It is important to offer a victim of trafficking two to three days, for her or him to feel safe. It is impossible to do that in a police precinct. It only compounds the traumatic experience. In my case I was afraid that I would be placed into prison for falsifying a passport. That made me extremely nervous.

I want to calm down psychologically speaking. I am psychologically destroyed because I had to spend time in prison. It was a trauma equal to the traumatic experience of being exploited. When I was

exploited I was in virtual slavery, whereas when I was behind bars, my soul was totally sick. I felt complete despair.

That some victims were, in addition, exposed to poor conditions and mistreatment while detained served to amplify their stress and trauma:

The conditions at the police station were awful. There were seven girls in one room. We were fed like dogs. We were locked up, like in a jail. The girls that had some money gave it to the policemen and they bought food for us. The girls felt sorry for me and gave me food. If I didn't get any food from the girls, I basically stayed hungry.

Normally, they didn't beat us. Only if they found cigarettes. Then they would handcuff us and would hang us by handcuffs with our hands up.

Linguistic barriers

Language barriers pose a significant obstacle to effective identification as noted by many of the interviewed victims:

The policeman was saying something to me but I couldn't understand... I didn't even understand that I was supposed to wait there for a while so that a lady from a non-governmental organisation could come there... I was a bit stressed because I waited for almost two hours without comprehending what was going on.

I couldn't understand [their language] well at that time. I only understood that it was an emergency centre and people were going to talk with me about what I could do further on.

The fact that the police officers were speaking to me only in [the local language] was also very stressful.

At the moment of identification I wanted to speak to a person who knew [my language]. To have anyone who could speak my language... I didn't quite understand what was happening around me.

I thought I would be re-sold again. I didn't understand anything in their language... I didn't feel safe... I needed a translator.

I didn't feel scared when I heard [my language] spoken. But when I heard [the language in the destination country], I was always shaking... That is why I am glad that the police found people [speaking my language].

Where translation was available, it was not in and of itself a panacea. One reason was the associated practical considerations — the cost and availability of services. There are also issues related to the victim's comfort levels. Some victims explained that they felt uncomfortable working through translation, feeling ashamed that the translator (as someone from their community) would know of their situation.

They wanted to communicate with me but I didn't want to. I was still feeling afraid. What I had been through. I didn't want to share it with anyone. It was my life, and all the more because of the translator, who was [from my country]. I thought my life is not her business.

In other situations, victims felt badly treated and even judged by the translator. One girl who was identified with her friend explained how her friend had been mistreated, to the point where she had requested a different translator:

[My friend], however, as far as she told me, was badly treated by the translator who was brought there by the police. The police officer didn't understand what the translator was saying. But this was not a problem for too long because [she] told the police and they changed the translator.

Other victims also reported negative experiences:

[The police provided an interpreter] but she did not translate what they were saying. When I said something, she would laugh and would tell them something else, and she laughed with the policemen.

In some cases, the language skills of identifying actors were limited which can lead to misunderstandings. One woman trafficked to the EU explained how initially without translation she had trouble understanding the action and intentions of the law enforcement authorities that had identified her:

Police visited us regularly [at the shelter] and they really helped... When they were giving us money for food, I didn't want to take it first, because I didn't understand what the money was for.

Similarly, a minor boy identified in transit explained of the translator employed by the police:

He worked in the police, he was a translator. He spoke [my language], but not that well. When he wrote, there were errors. It wasn't clear.

Some victims also reported having to serve as interpreters themselves during the interrogating of other persons with whom they had been identified, something which has serious implications both for the victim and for the other persons being interviewed. For the victim forced to translate this can be very stressful and frightening.

Then they intruded like that and started to interrogate me. Since that girl didn't know our language, they were interrogating me all the time. They bothered me. Like, she was our girl, she understands our language. So they interrogated me all the time. I was scared.

For other victims, there are risks in terms of the quality and competency of the translation, which can lead to misidentification or misinterpretation. Another potential issue is that the victim/interpreter is not objective in her role as interpreter and may not accurately relate the conversation. In some cases victims were identified and detained as a group which included women working voluntarily in prostitution, women in a relationship with the "boss" and/or women involved as pimps or supervisors. In such cases, if these female accomplices are asked to translate, victims will not feel safe to relate their experience and/or the accomplice is unlikely to accurately translate what is said. As a result, victims may go unidentified.

Poor translation can have very serious implications, including not being appropriately identified or misrepresentation of the victim's situation. For victims, the impact of this failing can be long term and on-going:

I told them everything. I told them all in [my language]. I didn't speak [the local language]. There was this translator there... I told him my entire story. It was necessary for me to talk; otherwise my life was at risk... I wasn't eighteen years old. These procedures [for minors

and trafficked persons] were not followed because the translator wasn't that good. He didn't translate every word I said.

I denounced [the trafficker], but apparently the translator didn't translate well what I said. If he had they would have kept me there [in the destination country].

I also had a problem with the translator. Because I speak very fast, the translator was nervous and didn't understand me and didn't interpret me correctly. That was extremely frustrating but I couldn't talk slower. When I'm nervous my speech becomes very fast.

Inconducive environment at identification

The identification environment was, at times, a contributor to victim's fear and may have prevented or impeded appropriate identification and intervention.

In traditional trafficking settings — like bars, clubs and restaurants — identification efforts have, at times, been impacted by the proximity of the exploiter/trafficker. For example, in some situations, law enforcement authorities tasked with monitoring these locations (as potential sites of prostitution and trafficking) interviewed women in the bar in the presence of their exploiters. In such conditions, victims found it difficult to speak, often being too frightened to say anything in the presence of the employer/exploiter. An Amnesty International report on the situation in the UN administered territory of Kosovo found that many women reported that they feared the police because of what they perceived to be their friendly relationship with their "owners". The observation of one trafficked woman illustrates both points;

Lots of police came everyday and they were friends with the bar owner. UN police came twice. The rest of the time it was KPS [the local police], mostly. A police officer came and asked me to go outside. He asked me questions but I couldn't say anything because of the owner's threats. His girlfriend spoke my language and the owner made me write down everything that I had said to the police. There was a registration process. The owner, the girls and the policeman all [sat] together, so that we could hear everything that everyone was saying (AI 2004: 24)

In other trafficking settings, the presence of the exploiter was also a problem. One woman trafficked abroad explained how she managed to

call home and give her location to be rescued. How the initial interrogation took place in front of the pimp, however, potentially compromised her identification.

The next evening the police came. I saw them from the balcony, I opened my door a little to meet the police immediately. When the police arrived we were all gathered in one room, all the girls and the pimp, and interrogated. I was frightened to answer and the only answer I gave to all the questions was “take me with you”. They probably understood what the matter was and, moreover, they had my last name. They took me from that place.

In another situation, the way that the brothel raid was conducted was stressful for respondents and not conducive to the woman feeling trust and comfort in being identified:

We felt fear when we saw guns, when they approached us. [There were policemen], a lot. There were federal police, then those from [the capital] and [another section of the police], plus inspectors, plus state prosecutor. We were in our rooms, with clients. They came, knocked on the doors. We didn’t want to open. But, suddenly, they broke the door, they caught us in act. They took pictures.

Similarly, another young woman — trafficked as a “wife”/servant to a family — described being collected by the police and transported to the police station alongside her “husband”/exploiter and his family.

There was this man, his wife, his sister, his nephew, this girl and I... I was very much afraid... And this woman, the things she said to me in the car, the lies I was to tell. I just said, okay, and I didn’t even listen to her. She wanted me to lie but I didn’t... Yes, this man gave me the evil look and grabbed my arm, and said, “make something up”. And I was scared so I said okay.

In less traditional trafficking setting, this also proved an issue. In one instance a woman who was being held by her trafficker/husband was interviewed by the police after a particularly brutal and public beating. That the interview was undertaken in her home, in her husband’s presence, impeded her ability to speak freely either on the subject of domestic violence or trafficking. In another situation, one woman detailed her return

from abroad, which included her identification as trafficked at the harbour in the transit country, but explained that she didn't want to talk about her exploitation at that stage and in that environment:

Basically, I was afraid that I would be met by traffickers, but I cannot say that I was too scared... I didn't want to talk to anyone... I was in a state of depression, I didn't have anyone to talk to. But I didn't want to talk about what had happened to me [abroad].

Other victims reported that the presence of too many people impacted their willingness to explain what had happened to them. One minor victim explained how she had to give a statement in the presence of five police officers, an atmosphere which she found intimidating and uncomfortable. In another instance, a victim explained how her interview was conducted with an open door, with all police officers and even traffic wardens able to listen. However, fortunately the intervention of state social workers put an end to this: "[The social workers] said immediately 'Everyone out, what's all this? You can't do things this way'."

Some victims explained how they themselves lied at identification because they did not understand what was happening and did not feel safe in the identification setting:

Well, he was interrogating me all the time, so I started to lie. We had to do that. So I said: "It's not true, why do I have to give a statement". He said: "I will deport you". I said: "So deport me if you like, I'm not afraid of you. I don't care". I was angry. Everything started with that rage, tears. I don't know what I was saying at that time. And then, nothing. And then again statements on what we were doing there. I don't know. At the end I told him to go out. After that he said that we will go to [the capital]. And that shocked me a lot.

Well, they told us that we will be interrogated there, so we will have to think about whether we were doing prostitution or not. We denied it constantly: "No, no, we were not in prostitution". Because of the boss, I don't know. We protected boss, I don't know who we protected.

As such, for many victims, creating a conducive and comfortable setting meant being interviewed in a private space, away from the exploiter with a non-interrogative tone. There are also other means by which iden-

tifying actors can and do create an atmosphere and context conducive to disclosure and cooperation. A number of victims interviewed felt that having a trusted someone, like a social worker, present could alleviate some of the problems and concerns they faced. Being treated with respect and sensitivity was, for most victims, central in creating a comfortable and conducive setting. One male minor who was sexually exploited explained how in fact the identification experience for him was not as difficult as it might have been precisely because of the environment created by the law enforcement authorities (specialised anti-trafficking unit) who were investigating his case. In this case,

A police officer came by car to take me to this centre. There was a psychologist there from [an NGO]... The people from the centre treated me very well. The psychologist talked to me and then she talked to my mother. They also told me that many boys had been used by this foreigner and to bring this case to a successful conclusion they needed some information. They assured me that the information would be kept secret. It was very easy for me to speak to the psychologist... The people who interrogated me were very polite and friendly to me.

When asked about the importance of having a trusted someone, like a psychologist, present at this stage of identification, he explained: “Yes [it’s important], especially when you are at the police. Because you feel stressed, you are afraid of the police and, moreover, you are ashamed to speak of some things”.

Victims felt interrogated at identification

For many victims, the identification process was adversarial and aggressive. They reported undergoing what they described as “interrogation”. Trafficked persons expressed their frustration at how they were spoken to and treated during the identification phase:

I was getting mad with so many questions. They wanted to know everything, and they were telling me that I left when I was very young, “what I have done there”, “who was the boy who sent me”, “how much money I was making in a night”. So I got tired and I told them everything and that I didn’t want to go home.

To tell the truth, I felt very bad. I was 22 years old when I was exploited, I had understood that even myself. But you feel bad when the others say it to you. There were a lot of policemen in the room, and their behaviour was rough... To tell the truth, they behaved a little bit roughly. All those questions and expressions they were using, “who was the lad”, “how much money did you make”, these kind of things.

Some victims also spoke of insensitivity by identifying actors in the interview process:

It was obvious that they didn't care how I was feeling. No one can really understand what happened with us and how we feel. Only a person like us knows what it means to suffer, what we have suffered.

Part of feeling interrogated was that many interviews started abruptly and immediately on the issue of trafficking and exploitation. Interviewers jumped immediately into questions and victim felt barraged and interrogated as a result. A more gentle entry into the questioning process was, according to a number of victims, essential in creating feelings of safety and comfort, which, in turn, can lead them to be open from the outset.

I think that girls like us must not be expected by police, but from social workers who know how to deal with us. Because when we are back [after trafficking] we are in pieces. We don't trust even our skin. [It needs] to be somebody who thinks before asking us [questions] and not asking us directly after our arrival.

Victims described situations in which the identification process was smoothed and less painful precisely because of the positive attitudes and treatments by assisting actors — both those from law enforcement agencies and also social sector actors. What is perhaps most striking is that this sensitivity was not difficult to offer and often involved small gestures which created feelings safety, comfort and reassurance. In many cases this involved asking the victim how they were, allowing them some time to decompress before asking questions, offering some food or beverage and so on. Feeling cared about, feeling that the person understood that they had suffered was important to some victims.

From a practical perspective, it is worth noting that in addition to causing the victim stress, interrogatory approaches were also often counter-

productive and did not yield helpful information. One victim explained how interrogation was ineffective in her case:

He saw that he couldn't do anything to me, so he started to speak more roughly with me, to interrogate me. "How was it that your boyfriend bought drinks. How that, how this". I told him: "Why are you asking me the same things thousands of times". Then he saw that I was angry. Then I really pushed him, verbally. Then he was angry, because he couldn't do anything.

Of note was how she viewed this officer in hindsight, able to recognise that he was working in the interests of trafficked persons — "Later, I found out that he was not bad, that he really wanted to help those women. You know, when you don't know the man, then you can't judge him". However, his intentions were compromised by the interrogatory approach he employed. This example also underlines the tension between law enforcement seeking to identify victims and that some victims — at different stages and situations — may not wish to be identified. Balancing and negotiating this tension to bring about sensitive and appropriate identification of victims is extremely complex.

Don't know who to ask for help

One consistent finding in the interviews was that many victims did not know where to turn for assistance when leaving their trafficking situation. This was the case regardless of the victim's sex, age, nationality, form of trafficking or country of destination. For many, requesting assistance from the police or other law enforcement authorities was not possible because they did not trust the police and because of their often illegal status or activities in the country, issues explored earlier in this chapter. And some victims that did seek out assistance from law enforcement authorities were neither identified nor assisted, a point explored above.

I was afraid because I was not sure whether the police came to inform my owner that [the police] were searching for me or if they came to rescue me.

I didn't know absolutely whom to appeal to for help... I had no confidence in the police... I thought that besides the police nobody could help me.

Few identification and assistance options were available according to respondents:

I knew nothing about the assistance available for trafficking victims. I didn't know who to address in the destination country in case I needed help. I thought I could go only to the police. There I didn't have enough courage to go to the police because the [traffickers] used to say that they bought the police. They threatened me with death in case I went to the police. I was afraid.

No, I didn't know anything about any possible assistance anywhere.

Access to assistance seemed to be particularly “invisible” to victims when in destination countries. A number of victims in fact called helplines in their home countries because they did not know where to seek support in the destination country, even where helplines existed.

Part of the issue in some countries may be that assisting agencies have limited access and means of outreach to victims because of the specific legal or government framework of anti-trafficking. For example, in some countries, service providers are not afforded access to prisons and detentions centres to screen irregular migrants, unaccompanied minors and arrested prostitutes as potential victims of trafficking. Similarly, where outreach programmes (i.e. to work with street children, prostitutes, etc) do not exist, this also impedes possibilities for identification.

The assistance of NGOs, international agencies, state actors and others was a welcome surprise for many victims, from a wide range of countries.

I didn't feel any fear while being around those border guards... They told me not to worry, they said they would arrange my transportation home... They told me that I would be able to spend a few days in a special shelter for victims of trafficking, located in [the transit country], which belongs to an NGO.

Do not want to be identified and assisted

Another element which merits consideration is how victims themselves experience and understand the identification process. Some may not consider it a solution to their life situation and they may not always perceive being “rescued” as positive. This is particularly likely to be case where victims have found ways to negotiate their trafficking experience — i.e. save

and send money home, make plans for escape but to remain abroad, forge a relationship with a client, get married and remain abroad — and where “rescue” and identification compromises these strategies. One woman explained how for her identification was not at all what she wanted. When asked where she wanted to go at that moment she answered simply, “Not to the station and not to the safe house or anywhere. I wanted to go back to my job here or in [the capital] or something. I just didn’t want to be interrogated, but they had to be there”.

Another woman identified abroad explained how she was planning to shortly return home and that identification wreaked havoc on her plans. She had initially been trafficked but after some time had negotiated her departure with her “employer”/trafficker and was soon to leave for home with a set amount of money. With identification, however, she was not paid by her employer/“trafficker” and her return home was significantly delayed because of her long stay in a shelter. When interviewed, she was still in a shelter awaiting her return home, some four months after her intended month of departure:

Why did everything end up like this? They disturbed me. I planned to go home in August. I didn’t want to stay longer. But everything happened so suddenly... Yes, it spoiled my plans. I planned to stay little bit longer... But the police found me first.

In addition, victims may not feel that the conditions of rescue are necessarily better than those of trafficking. This argument has particular resonance in situations where victims are detained and interrogated rather than appropriately interviewed, or when placed in centres or programmes which they feel do not meet their needs. Victims may critically weigh up the options that identification and assistance offer them and, when not satisfied with these options, may decline to be identified (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). Uncertainty in terms of where they would be taken was also an issue for victims:

Well, I was afraid mostly [at identification] because we couldn’t go back anymore, there where we were working. And because you don’t know where are you going or which kind of places there are at all.

That identification can be quite stressful and intrusive is another explanation that some victims gave for avoiding identification:

When the police in the port asked me what I did [abroad], I told them that I practiced prostitution on a voluntary basis... I was extremely tired, hungry, I didn't care. I simply did not want to be tormented with questions.

As well, some victims do not see themselves as victims of trafficked but rather as irregular or unlucky migrants and rejected the construction of trafficking victim (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007; Pearson 2002, Surtees 2005). In one interview, it was clear from the beginning that the respondent did not see herself as a victim of trafficking and even tried to persuade the researcher that she was just someone who had difficulties in her family environment. One service provider explained that this was not uncommon:

The more common situation is when we and the prosecutor think a woman was a victim of trafficking but she doesn't or she's not aware of it. We've just had a woman like this... She spent nine months here. All the facts in her statement indicated she was trafficked and that she was exploited, although she might have at one point consented to it to make money. She never felt like a victim of trafficking, even to the end of her stay and when going home.

Other women — those, for example, who are kept by individual men as “wives” — also may not recognise their situation to be one of trafficking and they may have feelings of affection and dependency for their “husband”/exploiter, which prevent them from seeking to escape their situation (Surtees 2005; Andreani & Raviv 2004).

Similarly, in interviews with trafficked males, the terminology of “trafficking victim” and the social construction that this entailed was extremely problematic and one which, for the most part, they rejected:

How to say this, I don't think I am a victim. It is even ridiculous for me to think that I am a victim.

I think that any man will not like this word attributed to him. It sounds more like a comic insult. People around him can mock him, especially if these men are young, without any life experience and who don't realize the possibility of men's exploitation.

For all of these reasons, some trafficked persons do not necessarily see identification as a panacea. They may be angry because of their loss of income.

They may resent and even be fearful of their imminent return home. They may even have anxiety about being separated from their trafficker,²⁸ particularly where the trafficker is both exploiter and lover/husband. As a result, victims may not behave in ways that anti-trafficking actors may expect them to. Rather than being grateful and relieved, they may be hostile and suspicious, fearful and distrustful, as discussed in a previous section. That not all reactions to identification will be positive is important to note in terms of anti-trafficking actors for how to act and react to trafficked persons who are potentially hostile and resistant at identification and potentially also at later stages of their post-trafficking life.

Even where victims do not want to remain in their trafficking situation, this does not always mean that they want to be identified and referred for assistance. One woman described how she and her friend were identified by the police and referred to a shelter for assistance. They were told by the police how lucky they were:

They told me only, "Blessed you that you are going there. We wish to stay there a few days because it is a very beautiful villa." ... But I didn't want to go, I wanted to be free and stay alone.

All of that being said, declining to be identified may be a temporary choice on the part of victims. Brunovskis and Surtees (2007) found that victims make different decisions about identification and assistance at different stages and in response to different factors. That is,

Decisions about accepting or declining were influenced by time, situation and the level of involvement required. Victims made different decisions at different stages of their post-trafficking life, as their individual situation evolved and in response to the level of commitment required by the different forms of assistance. This suggests a far more complex decision-making process than is often suggested.

²⁸ The relationship between traffickers and trafficked person is endlessly complex and plays not only on the economic situation but also the individual situation of the victim. Recently in some countries, traffickers have sought to bind victims to them in a very personal way, as 'wives' and 'lovers', thus complicating escape and rescue. For example, in different countries in SEE including Albania and Serbia, victims have been recruited and/or exploited by someone with whom they have an intimate relationship, including boyfriends, fiancés and husbands. In other countries, like Kosovo, BiH and Macedonia, women have been kept individually by men, as 'wives', and obligated to provide both domestic labour within the home and sexual services (Surtees 2005).

As such, when talking about 'declining assistance' it is more appropriate to speak of a continuum of decisions along which most victims move and a complexity surrounding the decision making process, the services on offer and their personal interests and needs (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

As such, to reject identification initially may not be definitive and it is important to think of ways that it is possible to (ethically and confidentially) follow-up with trafficked persons and give them identification options at a later stage both at home and abroad.

Biases, insensitivity and poor treatment

Many victims spoke about very positive identification experiences precisely because they did not suffer biases or prejudices in their interactions with anti-trafficking actors. As discussed in an earlier section, many identifying actors were central in creating feelings of safety and comfort, often through their sensitivity and non-prejudicial approaches.

That being said, some victims also reported having experienced prejudice, bias and negative attitudes from anti-trafficking actors at identification. In some cases, victims attributed this to having worked in prostitution:

They put us into a prison cell. It had a small window... Those policemen were uncultured. They regarded us as prostitutes.

The police man [who identified me] wasn't so nice... No, no, but I met him again three weeks ago, so I told him... I was with the staff from [the organisation] and he had no idea I was coming... So I went there and reminded him who I was and I said in front of everyone how he put me in the corner. But now he talks differently... Because now there are people from the organisation, it's different. But then he acted as if we weren't human.

At the end of our conversation, of my statement, one [police] woman approached me and put her hand on a small table... and another on my chair. She approached and looked me at my face and said: "Do you know some other girl who was there. You know because all of you are connected, you are all the same" ... [I felt] terrible. Somebody labels you as prostitute.

They didn't use some pejorative words but with words: "You are all the same. You cover each other. You protect your bosses." I think this is a sufficient description. When somebody thinks that it's your fault. I don't feel guilty for what happened. I know who I should blame. But when somebody blames you like that, you really feel terrible. She tells you directly to your face that you are prostitute. Or in our colloquial language: "hooker". I think this is really terrible.

These observations were also borne out in a study of internal trafficking in BiH in which several respondents confirmed that one of the key messages in the anti-trafficking arena seemed to be that "victims are advised not to prostitute themselves anymore", implying that this prostitution was voluntary (Reiter 2005: 18). Prejudices and insensitivities at identification were manifested not only by law enforcement but also other professionals. One victim described how, when she met with a social worker, the first question was whether she was "sick" or "infected", referring to whether she had any sexually transmitted diseases as a result of her sexual exploitation.

It is important to note, however, that biases and negative attitudes were not only linked to work in prostitution. One man spoke about how he and the friends with whom he had escaped trafficking were ridiculed by authorities when they sought assistance in returning home. He explained how the police laughed at them and called them names — like idiots and fools — for having ended up in their situation of exploitation. They showed no understanding of their situation and no empathy for what they had endured.

Beyond insensitivities, victims also reported some cases of harassment, threats and abuse:

Well, they took us there, we stayed there since the morning and they started asking questions. Then the policeman started threatening... He was horrible. He put us in the corner. We stayed there from five thirty in the morning until night.

[At that moment I needed] some sort of understanding, for them to act as human beings, to behave differently... I wish they had talked to us and not scared people with the five year prison sentence. I know that's impossible. There's our embassy and they can deport you. The prison might have been for a month, not more than that.

[The policeman} hit my friend because she was telling that she had seen that person for the first time the day when we left for [the destination country].

[The policeman was] screaming, “Who sent you [abroad]”, “what have you done”, “what you wanted in the border where they caught you” ... He pulled me from my blouse, and I almost fell down from the chair; “Tell me who sent you [abroad] or I will hit you with this radio in the head”. He had in his hand the radio that the police talk with to each other.

Yes, they interrogated us... Yes, it took a long time [over twelve hours]. They didn't even give us a glass of water in the station. They were horrible, terrible.

We were not beaten. They were simply interrogating us. They wanted to know in detail what we were doing there in that flat. We could not refuse to speak. In case we did, they started shouting at us. We were very frightened... I didn't feel comfortable. We were separated and locked. They interrogated us in turn.

[The police treated me] not so well. They shouted at me. I did not understand anything. I was answering in my language but they kept shouting at me and I didn't understand [the local language]. I was scared.

In some cases, the issue was less about mistreatment and more about negligence. One victim reported an instance in which she actively sought to be identified, only to be dismissed by the officer who was too busy to listen to her:

And it happened once that they caught us, a policeman took us from the street, and I wanted to tell him but the pimp's wife threatened that she would kill us or our family if we said something. But I still wanted to say something but the police officer sent us out quickly. I told him that I had something to tell him but he said that it wasn't the time, that he was in a hurry and I couldn't say anything.

It is distressing that some victim's encounters with persons tasked to help them were so negative. It merits mention that treatment at identifi-

cation may later impact a victim's willingness to be identified or cooperate with authorities at a later stage as well as accept assistance (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). As such, the impact of these behaviours can have a serious and long-term effect on trafficked persons.

Corruption

For many of the victims interviewed for this study, corruption was a concern throughout the trafficking and post-trafficking experience. It often played a role in how they were trafficked, whether they were able to escape and when and how they were identified.

Many victims related how corruption was part of their trafficking situation and, as such, often impeded their identification and served to extend trafficking situations. One victim was not identified in the EU country where she was exploited in spite of being a minor at the time of trafficking and in contact with potential identifying actors:

I worked in the street and there were girls that they would go with the police officers. And there are police officers that were pimps and sold girls.

One man who was imprisoned for illegal border crossing in his effort to escape trafficking, explained how a corrupt official demanded money to release them from prison:

The law enforcement officer gave me permission to call home. He said that if we paid him 100 dollars each, he would allow us to go...but we didn't have any money...and neither did our parents... Because we were not able to pay this money, we were forced to spend three months in detention.

Other victims also raised the issue of corruption:²⁹

I think the police should work better... The police from that village in [the destination country] were corrupted. Ideally, they should have

²⁹ This is consistent with findings from an evaluation of victim assistance in SEE where anti-trafficking organisations also reported this as a problem. Said one, "Our past experience showed that due to a corrupted system that stretches down to the most basic law enforcement organs, victims often receive improper treatment and sometimes are returned to their 'owners' by corrupted policemen themselves" (Surtees 2006a: 25).

taken us from that place [of exploitation], given us documents and some money.

The local police was corrupt. The [traffickers] paid money to the policeman that worked at the market place. The policemen demanded bribes from the traffickers because I was a minor and it was forbidden for minors to work at the market. When my mother contacted the police in [my home country], the information reached the policemen at the market and [the traffickers] kept me locked in their house for about a week. And then I was again forced to work at the market.

I would advise [trafficking victims] not to go to the police because they don't really help. They turn the whole story around in such a way that you have to prove your innocence. I've had my share of bad experiences both [abroad] and in my village. The police work more for money. And if you come to them and they see that you can't pay them, then they just ignore you.

Being a minor, I went [abroad] without my parents' permission. The people who took me there paid on the border and this was the way I got there.

One victim explained how her "employer" was well connected with the police and that she was aware in advance that any statement she made would lead nowhere and thus impacted the extent to which she was willing to engage with the legal process;

I gave a few statements in [the capital]. They asked me things and I told them. But I didn't start anything against [the trafficker] because he has friends among the policemen... I knew nothing would happen to him and that it would end there. I said it there as well. He has friends and that's how it was, there was nothing more about it. As far as I know, he is still working with girls, but not [foreign], just [local].

In one case where the victim was, in fact, identified and freed as a result of the intervention of the police, corruption was nevertheless an issue. After contacting the police in her home country to be rescued, local police did intervene but did little to address the actual trafficking situation. The police

came to the apartment where this woman was being kept and warned the trafficker that he could be arrested — “the [local police] came to our flat and told my owner that he would have many problems”. Nevertheless, the trafficker was not detained but rather merely released this particular woman, giving her money for her return home. Importantly, however, it is not only law enforcement who were susceptible to corruption. One victim reported how when she sought out the assistance of her embassy abroad she was told to come back when she had sufficient funds to bribe the embassy staff.³⁰

Corruption appeared to have a widespread impact on identification. Even where corruption did not occur, victims’ past experiences or assumptions about corruption — based on their experiences at home and abroad — impacted their willingness to seek out and accept identification opportunities.

4.4. Summary

Victims were identified by a wide range of anti-trafficking actors (law enforcement, outreach workers, embassy staff, NGOs, IOs, social workers, clients and victims themselves) as well as people and professionals not generally involved in identification, like transportation personnel, private citizens and religious organisations. At the same time, there were a number of instances of missed identification opportunities, which extended trafficking exploitation and the abuses suffered.

For many victims the identification experience was stressful and informed by a wide range of emotions and reactions. Victims reported both positive and negative responses to various identifying personnel as well as at different stages of the identification process. It was not uncommon, for example, for victims to feel both relief at having been identified and fear and suspicion toward the identifying actor. It was also not uncommon for negative feelings (fear and suspicion) to give way to those of relief once the victim felt safe and came to trust the identifying persons.

³⁰ For some victims, corruption also played a role in later aspects of their assistance and protection. One victim recounted how the judicial system is impacted by corruption in her country of origin;

From the very beginning she wanted to be my lawyer and she explained to me that I shouldn’t have great hopes since there is corruption in our country and that [the judge] might have been bribed and that is why he didn’t want to administer justice.

In addition to how victims felt, they also related problems and issues that they faced in the process of identification, both at home and abroad. These issues centred around victim's access to full and comprehensible information about their situation and options at identification; the sometimes limited identification skills of some counter-trafficking actors; victim's experiences of both sensitive and insensitive treatment at identification; experiences of interrogation and detention rather than identification as a trafficked person; some instances of corruption; some cases of mistreatment and negligence; issues related to linguistic and cultural barriers in the identification process; that identification took place in inconducive settings for some victims; that many victims did not know who to turn to for help; and issues related to some trafficking victims not wishing to be identified.

5. Return and referral experiences of trafficked persons

The return process — when handled correctly — involves a number of steps designed to ensure the safe and dignified return of each individual victim. Ideally the return should involve the preparation of documents, making travel arrangements, informing trafficked persons about the steps in the return process and assistance options at home, a risk assessment (for transit and in the country of origin), communication and coordination between origin and transit/destination countries, supported transportation and travel process (including accompanied return as needed and assistance in transit), reception and referral upon arrival and transportation within the home country. An unsafe return procedure poses risks to victims which may, in extreme cases, even result in (re)trafficking.

In the course of the interviews, trafficked persons were asked about their personal experiences of return — what was positive and what, for them, was negative — to help identify where potential fault-lines may exist in the current national and transnational return and referral processes for trafficked persons. This section will discuss not only how returns generally took place but also how trafficked persons felt during the return process and what issues and problems they faced.

5.1. How trafficked persons were returned

Trafficked persons returned home in a number of different ways — some assisted but many others unassisted. When victims returned home through assisted programmes, the return process was implemented differently by different actors. The extent of support, assistance and information varied as did the means of transportation and options for referral and reception in the home country. In some cases, assisted return was undertaken in ways that assured not only the safety of the victim but also their feelings of safety. This generally involved not only being accompanied home or met at the destination but also involved victims being fully informed and consulted throughout the return process. One victim explained how she had been returned home in what she saw as a safe and appropriate way:

There, at the precinct, I felt safe from the moment I laid my hand on my birth certificate. Thus I realized they were not corrupt... They told me not to worry, that they will send the information about me being saved by the police. And they told me I wouldn't have to remain there for long... I was escorted by a policeman until the next big city. There I was taken to the police station and another policeman took over me. Then we got on another train bound for [my home country].... When I crossed the border with [my home country], I was met at customs by the representative of the [police anti-trafficking centre] from [the capital] and we arrived on that train to [the capital]... He escorted me to my house. He warned me that the [traffickers] might be looking for me and advised me to stay with some distant relatives for a while. He also said that I could stay at a specialized centre in [the capital] that helps victims of trafficking. He said that there I would get help with all my problems. He took me to this shelter. No, I wasn't afraid, because I was escorted by the policeman. I knew that my mother was waiting for me at home and that warmed my soul.

However, in some instances, gaps in the assisted return process left victims feeling vulnerable or anxious. Some times this involved not being met by someone at home, not receiving adequate assurances about their safety, not feeling fully informed about the process or not being provided with sufficient information in case they faced difficulties:

[About unescorted travel] I was very afraid that someone would approach me and take me off the flight. I didn't speak English. This created an unfriendly environment.

When I came home, nobody [from the organisation] was waiting for me. I was looking to see if somebody was waiting for me.

As well, assisted returns were not always conducted in the most dignified way. One male minor was accompanied by the police on his return to his home country, a process which he described as satisfactory — “I saw that he was serious and I had confidence in him”. Upon arrival in his home country, however, the receiving police officers handcuffed him:

In [the capital], we were again taken to the [reception centre for minors] where we spent approximately three hours. Afterwards, a police officer came...and he put the handcuffs on our hands... I felt it was strange. He said he was afraid that we would try to run away. I told him that I had nowhere to go or run away to, that on the contrary, I simply wanted to get safely to my parents. I didn't even know where to go. Plus I didn't have any money.

When returns were unassisted, this took place in a number of different ways, some of which potentially put victims at further risk. In some situations, victims were supported in the destination country — with documents and the purchase of transportation tickets — but their security situation was not considered and transportation was unescorted. Some victims travelled home independently, without any support. Many victims described making their way home by train or bus without legal documents and also often without money for transportation. One minor explained of her return home from the former Soviet Union:

[I crossed] without a passport. [[The man who helped me] spoke to some people from the customs and explained to them what had happened to me. The customs officers let me cross the border without passport. That man gave me [a small amount of money] and I was able to get to [the capital city] by bus.

In some very dramatic situations, victims returned under what can only be described as arduous conditions. A number of male victims trafficked to countries in the former Soviet Union literally walked hundreds of miles

home because they went unidentified and were denied help when they sought out assistance in the destination countries.

5.2. How trafficked persons felt about and experienced the return and referral process

In talking about their return from abroad, victims reported a wide range of emotions and reactions. Many of these feelings were negative — fear, anxiety, disappointment, stress and frustration, nervousness and confusion — and resulted not only from the return process itself but also from how it was handled. At the same time, victims also reported more positive emotions related to their return home, including excitement and relief as well as feelings of safety and reassurance. And, as was the case in the identification stage, many victims grappled with simultaneous and often contradictory emotions. As one victim explained, “I had a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, I was glad that at last I would get home. On the other hand, I hadn’t earned any money”. Similarly, one victim put it this way: “I was overwhelmed with a mixture of anxiety and happiness”. And many victims grappled with feelings of trust and mistrust in this phase of their post trafficking lives. The coming section outlines some of the main feelings victims expressed about the return and referral process

Fear and anxiety

Some trafficked persons described the return process as something quite frightening. In some cases this was because of the risk of interception (and possibly re-trafficking) by their traffickers and also the fear of meeting their trafficker upon arrival; “I was afraid that I would meet the [traffickers] on my way or that they would meet me at home”.

In other cases this was because victims feared being arrested by authorities. One woman trafficked to the former Soviet Union travelled home with neither money nor documents. She crossed four borders, explaining at each what had happened and why she had neither money nor documents: “I had to explain everything to everyone what I had been through, why I didn’t have my passport with me. I had no choice”. As another victim observed, “I was a little worried. I was afraid that the police might take me off the bus and I didn’t have money to buy another ticket”.

Many victims were anxious about the return process precisely because they had few options and little security upon their return. Many victims were concerned about issues associated with return, including the need to return with money, lack of options at home, reprisals from traffickers and possible rejection by their family and/or their community.

It happened for the first time when I heard that I couldn't have residence papers and must leave from the centre [abroad]. I fainted and when I was awakened I started to scream, to swear and break everything I could catch. I didn't want to leave the centre, I had no place to go.

No, I didn't want to go back, I told you. I do not feel good in my family. Then, she told me it is an organisation for women and girls, you are going to stay there... To tell the truth, I didn't believe her.

[Emotions about the return] Shivers, tremors... fear regarding how I would start a new phase in my life... I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown... It took several days for me to come to my senses... I succumbed to depression.

I felt fear... I didn't know how I would be greeted by my mother. I asked them not to be sent home. I didn't want to live together with my mother.

I didn't know what would happen, just sitting around and not knowing what will happen, who's picking me up, where they will take me, if the police will be involved or not, what will happen next. So you're sitting around, not knowing what will happen once you get there, and you'll be there in ninety minutes and the only thing I could do was cry on the plane.

I was crying [on the flight] because I didn't know what I'd do or what was going to happen or if the police was going to make a scene at the airport in the crowd.

Feelings of safety and reassurance

Some victims reported very positive return and referral experiences, ones which afforded them feelings of safety and reassurance. Receiving full infor-

mation about the full return process as well as options in their home country was an important aspect of feeling safe.

For example, in interviews with male minors who were to be returned home the following day, it became clear that they had not been told about the return process and what this involved. As a result, the researcher provided age appropriate information not only about the return process itself but also about the means of transportation. The researcher explained what it was like to fly (they were returning by plane), that they could eat and drink on the plane, that they could close their window blind if they were frightened. Providing this very basic information — information which is often taken for granted — reassured the boys about the return process.

For many victims, being escorted home also added a level of safety and security which they found reassuring:

A police officer... was accompanying me to [my home country]... He intentionally came to take me home... We went by train... I felt safe with him.

This was particularly important for victims who felt under threat by their traffickers as well as for those who had very limited travel experience and were nervous about the transportation process.

Disappointment, stress and frustration

For some victims the return process was stressful because they were disappointed about the necessity of return. A number of victims spoke about how they simply did not want to return to their home country.

If I was going to choose for myself? To tell you the truth, it is not that I am not satisfied here, but if I had the documents done in Western Europe, it would be better. Because here even if you work, you cannot afford the living when you only have one salary. You work a lot and the salary is not enough.

One victim who had been trafficked from SEE to an EU country was very reluctant to return home and even after her return seemed to be particularly attached to life in the destination country. At the time of the interview, conducted in her home country, she had just been invited to return to the destination country for a brief programme about which she was very excited, and she seemed not to be able to think past this temporary

return to the country of destination. In another instance, a victim who had been in the EU for almost a year and had started to build a life for herself in the destination country, was stressed and disappointed by the obligation to return to her home country:

They were not human, they didn't allow me to stay [abroad] even if they knew that I don't have place to return to... Although my doctor told them that I can't go back. She was so disappointed. She said that I was not psychologically and physically ready for return. She said that I needed professional help, that she was afraid for me very much... she said that to the assistant who was in charge of my case... But they ignored that. They didn't take into account my case. I'm disappointed.

Being forced to return home was also difficult for other reasons. Victims who had been away from home for a long time were uncertain of what awaited them, including how they would be received by family and/or community and also what prospects there were for a stable and healthy life. Minors who had spent their adolescence and youth in a foreign country were often disoriented by a return to a country and community which they did not know. For many, their home country was more foreign than the destination country where they had built a life and had access to assistance and support.

Nervous and confused about the transport process

For some victims who were accompanied or fully briefed about the process, the transportation phase was handled with little stress. However, for others, the actual return process — transportation from the destination or transit country — was nerve wracking. Some victims were anxious and nervous even when travelling legally and with legal documents.

Nobody accompanied me... I worried a little. I was afraid that the police could take me off the train. I thought that the border guards would find the paper issued by the embassy suspicious. It seemed to me that I would be taken off the train and tortured by the police. I had a long, sleepless journey home... The conductor of the train said that if I was asked about my real passport, I had to briefly tell them everything. He also calmed me down by saying that border guards have no right to take me off the train. These words were a real relief to me.

I flew home alone without anyone accompanying me... The social workers told me to stay calm, not be nervous about crossing the border with temporary travel documents. And they also told me that the border police do not have the right to detain me because of this... They explained that to me because I was worried. I thought that the temporary travel document is not a proper, serious document.

For many trafficked persons, the travel process was something they were not familiar with, which can account for much of their nervousness and confusion. Most had not travelled extensively in or outside of their countries prior to trafficking. Travel arrangements, in the context of trafficking, had generally been made by traffickers and recruiters and many victims found the whole process confusing and disorienting. As many had, at least at some stage, moved illegally or with illegal documents or visas, they were often unfamiliar with what was involved in the transportation and border crossing process. They were also often not familiar with travel procedures, like transit and check-in, or basic aspects of air travel, like turbulence:

They didn't let me travel by myself particularly since it was the first time that I travelled by air. It was a great help.

[About instructions on transportation] They didn't say anything special to me. They clothed me, gave me shoes. They also gave me 300 dollars and took me to the airport. My flight was via [another country]. We were met in [transit] by a contact man, he put us on the plane. But he wasn't with me the whole time.

[Concerns about the return] A bit. I had never flown before... I worried about my boarding.

I was afraid a little bit of the plane, when it started to shake. But I came to [my country] quite fast.

Excited and relieved

Many victims were both happy and relieved when it came to their return. They were relieved to be out of the reach of their traffickers, happy to be leaving the country of their exploitation, excited to see their families and happy to be going home. For many victims their relief at going home was their predominant emotion:

I wasn't informed about any risks... I was so excited that I couldn't possibly think of any risks.

I was extremely, indescribably happy. I couldn't believe it... I recalled how I was staying in prison, how I was looking at the sky, through the bars and grates, seeing the birds flying in the sky above.

Somehow, I cannot describe that feeling. I was happy, of course, for going home, for getting out of it after I had found out what could have happened to me.

Well, I was looking forward to coming to [my home country] at that moment.

While many, if not most, victims were pleased and excited to return home, it was not uncommon that this pleasure was coupled also with other negative emotions, like fear or nervousness.

Trust and mistrust

For many victims, a lack of trust was central to the return process. Some victims described not trusting what would happen during return, some even feared being re-trafficked. Even where victims had received full information, they were not always inclined to believe or trust it:

They gave me information. But I didn't believe it until I got on the plane.

One victim, identified in her home country, was to be transferred by car to the shelter by assisting social workers. Even though she was provided with full information in her own language and the transportation was domestic, she lacked trust in the authorities. On the one hand, she described how she accepted the assistance they were offering and embraced the opportunity. On the other hand, she spoke about how she was fearful and mistrustful during the transportation process. For her the return came very soon after identification and she did not fully trust that the assisting agency would take her to a safe place:

But, then again, I had doubts about where they will take me. I was afraid that they will take me to some apartment and that I will have to do again all those things.

That being said, many victims put their full trust in the agencies which assisted them with return and expressed very little concern about problems or risks. Feelings of trust (and mistrust) were very individual.

5.3. Issues in the return and referral process

The return and referral process involves a number of steps to ensure the safe and dignified return of trafficked persons. The experiences of trafficked persons revealed a range of issues they faced in the lead up to or during the return — pre-departure, in transit and/or upon their arrival home.

Information about the return and referral process

Receiving full and helpful information about the return and subsequent referral process was important for victims. One young woman was offered assistance by an organisation in her home country while staying in a shelter abroad. She chose to accept this referral in spite of being a little afraid and suspicious precisely because she was fully informed about the return and subsequent referral process, which made her feel more certain and confident:

Before leaving, I phoned [the staff at home] and told her the date when I was travelling and she waited at the airport. And then she explained to me in more detail [about the options] and I understood... The personnel from the shelter paid for the ticket, brought us to the airport and put us on the plane.

Other trafficked persons were also not concerned about the return precisely because they had full information about the steps and the process:

I wasn't accompanied by anyone. I was brought by the social workers to the airport and there I underwent the ticket registration procedure and then I flew home... I was informed by social workers that I was to be cautious at the airport when I arrived to [my home country]. I was told to appeal to the police in case of danger. I didn't have any problems at the airport... Yes, I was worried a bit but I wasn't afraid.

Many victims reported not having adequate information about the return process itself — how this would take place and also what would happen in their home country in terms of possible assistance and referral.

[About agencies in her home country]... No, I knew absolutely nothing.

No. I didn't know anything about assistance. They only mentioned assistance in returning me to [my home country].

For many, this lack of information made their return a stressful, disorienting and even frightening process. This was the case not only in SEE but also from the EU countries.

Some male minors from SEE who had been intercepted in transit had received minimal information about their return home (including possible referrals) and, when interviewed, knew only that they would fly home the next night. Their return had already been delayed once without any explanation from the staff of the centre where they were accommodated. Also striking was that no one had taken the time to inform them about how the return would take place and even what travelling on a plane would be like. For these minors, this travel was likely to be quite disorienting and potentially stressful.

While many victims identified abroad were informed about the services and assistance available to them in their country of origin, this was not always full information:

I knew nothing about the services available. The people from [the organisation in the destination country] told me that there are such organisations [at home]... but they didn't give either any phone numbers or addresses. But I didn't ask either because I didn't think of the future. I was praying to God to reach [home].

[About her return] A representative of [that organisation] came and took me with him. [The staff at the destination] just said that I would travel by car with the representative and that I would be rendered assistance there... She gave me no details.

They did, they talked about the return, they told me I'd be picked up at the airport, two women from [an organisation] were supposed to meet me and I was to go and be put up somewhere... They didn't have much information really. They didn't know there were safe-houses, such as shelters. They didn't know anything about it.

Informing victims about their rights and options in their home country, including providing names and contact details for organisations that

can help upon return, is a minimum requirement (Kvinnoforum 2003: 15). Facilitating and arranging referrals where appropriate and requested by the victim should be considered the responsibility of the identifying actors, whether law enforcement or service providers. An offer of reception in the country of origin by NGOs or IOs is also important.

There are also indications that many service providers disseminate information about assistance and services available through their network of cooperating organisations rather than the full range of assistance possibilities in the country of origin. Individuals were often informed about the (partner) organisation that would meet and assist them, rather than provided with a list of different actors and agencies who they could contact in case of difficulty or for different assistance needs. In addition, most information about assistance focuses only on agencies specialised in trafficking and does not include services and agencies more generally, whether NGO or GO. Expanding the network of possible assisting agencies would be helpful, especially when persons originate from outside cities and the capital and are less likely to have access to specialised assistance. For this target group, information about state services or non-trafficking related NGOs would likely be more relevant in the long term. Also important is that victims are provided with contacts for police or other relevant authorities in the event that they face problems with traffickers upon their return.

It also became clear through the interviews that victims needed to psychologically prepare for their return to family/community, the possible issues and problems they may face and to consider how to cope with them. The provision of information was vital in that regard. One victim described her anxiety about return:

No, no one cared about us, they asked for the documents, wrote down the names, they told us they were sending us to [one location], they separated the females from the males, that was all. Three times a day they were giving us something to eat, only cold food. But who was thinking of the food? I was worried about what I was going to do when I was back, where should I go. I couldn't go to my parent's house because I left without telling them anything.

In some cases, it is worth noting that information was given but victim's stress and trauma impeded their ability to process information about the return and options for subsequent assistance:

I was told not to worry. They explained in detail how I should behave in the airport. They said that in case of danger I could address the police. I wasn't afraid that I might meet traffickers at the airport. I was worrying a lot because I didn't know how my husband would meet me... I was told that a social worker would meet me and that this organisation would offer me further assistance. They were telling me what kind of assistance I would get but, honestly, I wasn't listening to them as I was very much anxious. I was praying to get home.

This underlines the need for written material (in age appropriate language, the victim's mother tongue and targeted to a basic education level) which the victim can refer to both prior to and following their return home.

Tied to the issue of informing victims is that the information be accurate and does not promise options and opportunities which cannot be realised in the home country. For example, providing realistic information about the number of days required to process documents is important so that victims do not feel they have been lied to and so that they can psychologically prepare for the return home. Interviews with victims found that some service providers in destination countries had made promises to victims in an effort to calm them down and provide them with reassurance about their future. However, when these opportunities were not realised in the home country this led to greater problems, including a lack of trust in the service providers (cf. Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

Transportation and return mimics trafficking

A number of victims explained how, for them, the transportation phase, at times, mimicked parts of their trafficking experience. As had been the case at recruitment and trafficking, the return process involved being moved to different locations, with promises of help and a good life. As a result, many victims described feeling quite stressed during movement, even when they had been fully informed about the process.

One victim, trafficked to and subsequently assisted in the EU, was assisted in her return by an organisation which she said she fully trusted. Nevertheless she was suspicious up to and during parts of the return:

When I arrived in another airport, a man was waiting for me with a sign and he asked me if I was the woman who will go to the centre in [the capital]. I said yes. Only then did I calm down. He told

me where I was going to change the plane, because it was not direct and only then I believed that they were not cheating me.

Similarly, one woman who was escorted to the shelter explained how this process, for her, made her fearful of being re-trafficked. She accepted the assistance offered and was fully informed about what would happen upon her arrival. However, she also explained how she was not fully convinced that things would play out this way:

I had doubts about where they will take me. I was afraid that they will take me to some apartment and that I will have to again do all of those things. I saw again those pictures in my head. Then my heart started to beat fast again, I was frightened again. They told me that I can sleep in the car if I wanted to. I had a headache so they gave me one pill. Then I started to think that they gave me something to fall asleep, so they could do whatever they want... I wanted to escape from them on our way to [the capital]. We stopped at one gas station. I had cigarettes but I asked if I can go outside to buy cigarettes. They let me. I went out and was watching which side I would use to escape. Then I reconsidered it and realized that police sent me with them. And where would I go if I escaped from them?

Another victim trafficked abroad was frightened during her transfer from the police station to the shelter where she was to be assisted, frightened that instead she would be transported back to her trafficking situation:

I was afraid [in the police station] but I just sat there quietly and prayed to God. In two weeks a policeman told me that I would be transferred to a different place. I got scared. I thought they will take me to my owner. Then I was visited by a social worker who explained that I will be taken to a specialized shelter for victims of trafficking.

Similar observations were made in another study and have, in some cases, accounted for why some victims chose to decline the assistance offered to them. That is,

Typically, victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation are deceived with false promises to move to the location where the exploitation then takes place. The act of movement alone may be suspicious to victims. One victim talked about being transported

by police officers from one station to another. When asked what she felt and thought during this process, she explained that she was fearful and thought that perhaps they would now traffic her; “Afterward they drove me to the police station in [a nearby town] and at that moment I didn’t trust them. Who knows where they are taking me. When I saw the police sign, I felt more at ease. They told me that they will take me to the station and I will have food, drink and can relax and don’t worry, that they will find these people” (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

Non-identifying return

It is important that victims are not visibly identified as trafficked persons through the return process. Notifying authorities in the country of origin is not without problems where victims may be stigmatised as illegal migrants or trafficking victims or forced to participate in criminal proceedings. An individual’s status as a victim of trafficking should not be revealed from country of destination to origin without the victim’s consent, especially where there are issues of corruption and stigma which can have long term implications for the trafficking victim.

In interviews, victims told about identifying returns which, for many, were one of the more stressful aspects of the referral process.

At the police control when we crossed the border... They wanted to ask about us: “You are trafficked girls? With whom you went there?” But the other girl said that is not their business and when [the director] came. They didn’t say anything else.

In terms of identifying returns, the most commonly levied criticism is the use of IOM bags to allow them to be recognisable to IOM staff upon return home and while in transit. However, this also created potential risks, allowing them to be recognised by traffickers and/or as trafficking victims (Kvinna til Kvinna & Kvinnoforum 2003; Kvinnoforum 2003: 16). The IOM policy changed in 2004 to exclude the use of bags because of these potential problems.³¹ However, interviews with victims reported that some NGOs continue to use similar mechanisms to identify victims upon return — organisational t-shirts, signs, etc. Because many organisations are commonly

³¹ Email correspondence with Richard Danziger, Head of Counter-Trafficking Service, IOM, January 2007.

known to be anti-trafficking NGOs, this practice potentially subjects victims to involuntary identification.

There are other means by which victims are or may be identified in the return process, such as markings or notations on travel documents. To be deported (and received a deportation stamp) from some countries implies being a trafficked person. Women deported from Italy to Nigeria generally are assumed to be prostitutes or trafficking victims and have been detained upon arrival in Nigeria, subjected to HIV tests and their personal details recorded to prevent future travel abroad (Pearson 2002: 60-61). In the research it was found that victims were often aware of the importance of avoiding a deportation stamp in their travel documents:

I bribed the border guard who wanted to stamp “deported”. I took out of my pocket fifty dollars and said “no deport” and he didn’t put the stamp. My ex-owner said that if I got a deportation order I would never be able to leave [my country]. I still thought about going sometime to a normal country and finding a normal job.

Victims may also be “identifiable” because of the clothes they are wearing at the time of return. Where victims return home in the clothes used during their sexual exploitation, this can be particularly visible to outside observers — at border crossings, transportation personnel and family and community members. This type of identifying return can have long term implications for victim recovery and reintegration, given the stigma attached to prostitution in most communities. Many countries in the region have social practices that stigmatise prostitutes and, by implication, persons trafficked into prostitution. In Moldova, for example, there is a practice of identifying “prostitutes” (and, by implication, often also trafficking victims) by painting the woman’s gate black. The tradition is closely connected with prostitution, with women working in prostitution seen as “dirty” and many returning victims have been subjected to this ostracism (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). Returning home in “street clothes” can trigger such social reactions.

In some cases, victims may be recognised as a victim of trafficking (or a criminal) when escorted by a (uniformed) police officer. A number of victims felt that a uniformed escort clearly marked them and that there was a need for less visible forms of escort, like plain clothes transport:

Two policemen escorted me to the plane. They drove me and one guy. But I didn’t like it because the policemen in uniform escorted

me through the airport. People on the airport were looking at me like a criminal. I was looking at the floor. I was disgusted, like I killed someone.

Considering how to camouflage the return process can be an important first step in the recovery and reintegration process. In addition to considering the issues outlined above, it is important to consider less obvious but nonetheless significant aspects of “identification”. For example, a hallmark of much trafficking is that victims return home without anything for their families. Purchasing small gifts for family members for the returning victim may, at least temporarily or in part, serve to mitigate some of the identification associated with an empty-handed return.

Importance of assisted returns

Many victims felt that being accompanied or supported during return was important, particularly where victims did not have experience with travel and border crossings. Assistance in return created a sense of safety and security during what can be a disorienting and confusing process. In some cases this involved being escorted for all or part of the journey:

No, [the nun who identified me] and someone else accompanied me. We travelled by bus. On the way, [the nun] told me about what I could do in the shelter, courses or school and after some time maybe find a job.

A police officer... was accompanying me to [my home country]... I don't know how I would have been able to cross the borders if he hadn't helped me. He explained that I was a trafficking victim and we had no problems while crossing the borders.

From [the destination country] to the airport in [the neighbouring country] I went by car together with a driver. The driver was showing his permit at every police post and we had no problems. He was very polite, he always encouraged me not be afraid. The driver bought me a ticket and waited until I got on the plane.

Even with assisted returns, victims, at times, faced problems which were, for them, very stressful. This included when victims did not receive support *en route* or at the destination. One victim returning to SEE from the

EU flew home but was routed via another airport. While she was not escorted *en route*, she was to be met and assisted in the transit country.

Nobody accompanied me. I was to be met by someone from [an organisation] in [the transit country] but nobody met me. Panic took hold of me and I didn't know where to go... I bought a telephone card and called [the organisation] in [the destination country]. They calmed me down and explained how to register my ticket. I was lucky because one of the girls was [from the destination country] and she explained where to go.

While a large number of interviewed victims were assisted in their return, a significant number also were not. They returned independently and without assistance, a process which involves multiple risks and sites of vulnerabilities. That this appears to be occurring so prolifically should be underlined. Victims faced a range of different risks and issues during their (unassisted) return process. Negotiating the transportation and travel process — including the purchase of tickets, arrangement of documents and dealing with officials — can be very stressful. Even where returns were with legal documents and tickets, trafficked persons faced some problems. One victim travelled home by train, unaccompanied, and was harassed by some men at the train station, requiring the intervention of the police:

I didn't like one thing. [The director] bought a ticket for me and left me at the railway station. Then some guys came up to me and insisted on going with them to a hotel. I got frightened and started shouting. The police of the railway station approached and invited me to talk. There for the first time I gave some testimony... [The director] told me not to be afraid of anyone. In case something happened, I was supposed to go the police... Yes, I was concerned [about the return]. I was afraid of being contacted by people who do business with girls on trains.

Where victims were required to mediate problems due to their illegal status abroad, illegal entry/exiting of the country or travelling as a minor, this added extra levels of anxiety and also risk. A minor, sent by social workers unaccompanied across the border to the neighbouring country, described being nervous about this process: "I felt uneasy leaving, I felt afraid and uneasy. I was most afraid of the border, in case my uncle was not there, that's the only thing I feared". As another victim explained: "Yes, I was afraid that

I would be taken off the train. I had no information, how to answer the border guard's questions. I had no money to buy one more ticket".

Indeed some victims faced such problems. Unassisted returns meant that some victims were labelled as criminals rather than victims and, as a result, subjected to punishment and problems.

I was not assisted. When I was coming from abroad, I had only one certificate from [the foreign police] that said I had no documents... on the border I was taken off the train together with my child. They kept us at the customs area, they interrogated us. I started to cry, I told them everything I had been through ... implored them to let me go to home... they kept me there for a long time until the head customs officer happened to enter. He ordered them to let me go and I left. [They treated me] in a bad way. Certainly, some of them mocked at me, laughed at me and my nationality. I [belong to an ethnic minority]. The customs officers told me: "Stop telling us your fairy tales, stay here with us and you will make money here, at the customs".

It was a desk there [at the airport] where I gave my statement... [Afterward the police] called me. For what I've been through they gave me a [300 €] fine... They seized my passport for one year.

Other victims, attempting to return across international borders were arrested and detained. One man explained how after escaping his trafficking situation he was arrested while trying to cross the border illegally in an attempt to return home. He was arrested and put in prison for three months for illegal crossings. In spite of having told his story to various law enforcement and state authorities, he was not given any clemency. However, some victims were allowed to cross borders in spite of their lack of documents after relating their experience of exploitation. While they were not stopped, they also were not assisted in any way: "He [a helpful stranger] spoke to some people from customs and explained to them what had happened to me. The customs officers let me cross the border without passport. That man gave me [some money] and I was able to get to [the capital] by bus".

Unassisted return can also be complicated where safety risks are involved. A number of the victims described fearing their trafficker and immediately trying to make their way home. Being pursued by traffickers posed a risk for retribution, capture and re-trafficking. One woman trafficked for prostitution into the EU was helped to escape by her client.

So I ran away one evening and spent one week at his place. [The traffickers] found out that I was living with him and I had no passport but I went to the embassy and obtained travel documents and I came home by bus... The client paid for me. I had no money when I ran away. This client gave me money and bought me clothes. I didn't want to go to the police, I was afraid. But I thought that one way or the other they would still harm me. If they realized I returned home, they would want to take me back and harm me.

Some types of unassisted return — namely deportation — may contribute to further vulnerability.

They put us as animals in the police vans and dropped us at the police station.

No one was doing this kind of [victim assistance] job there. It wasn't an assisting centre, it was a refugee camp. They were sending you with the police to the airplane and that was all. My documents, my passport, they gave them to the pilot and told me that I was receiving them in [the airport].

Service providers in SEE and victims alike noted cases of deportation of trafficked persons.³² An associated issue of unassisted return — whether deportation or self return — is that victims are often unaware of possible avenues for assistance and may not be aware of or have access to the assistance framework. It is quite common in some countries in SEE that victims who return independently spend some time at home before they access assistance.

Creating a supportive and protective return process requires attention to the individual needs of each victim, including their psychological state and capacity to negotiate the transportation phase. In the case of minors, returns should always be accompanied and supported.

Interrogation and poor treatment

Border crossings for many victims were the most stressful part of the return process. Some victims were stopped and interrogated at border crossings,

³² For example, large numbers of Bulgarian women have been extradited; 2978 were deported from EU countries in 2003 and 2908 were deported in 2004, a percentage of whom were likely victims of trafficking. The border police estimate that as many as ten per cent of deported women could be trafficking victims but were not identified as such prior to their deportation from the EU (Surtees 2005: 167).

a very disorienting and unpleasant experience. It should be noted that such “interviews”/“interrogations” occurred even when victims had been identified as trafficked and were travelling with legal travel documents and transportation arrangements:

When I got to [my destination], the police detained me. They started asking questions, they made me write what happened. Then they took me to a military base and again made me write everything that had happened to me. This lasted for half a day. They gave me something to eat but I didn't want anything. I called my brother who is a military man and asked him to come and take me. Then he came and took me.

I didn't know that I had to pass through the police in [the airport]. I asked for my passport from the women on the airplane and they told that the policeman there had those. I asked the policeman in the end of the stairs, he asked me about my name, I told it. He said to me that I should follow him because were some documents to be filled out about me. I followed him, he sent me in the local commissariat. They started to ask me, “what had happened to you” and a million other things, “who sent you [abroad]”, “what did you do there”. I didn't want to reply, why should I reply? Did I had to tell them what happened to me ten years before?... [He was] screaming, “Who sent you in [abroad]”, “what have you done”, “what you wanted in the border where they caught you”.

I went out from the plane and that policeman... He took me a different way then other passengers. I was wondering where I was going. That policeman gave my papers to one man. I was scared. Then one... policeman approached. He took my papers and said: “Come with me!” I asked: “Where are you taking me?” ... I told him that I didn't do anything. “It's mistake, I didn't do anything, I don't know what you are thinking of me, but I didn't do anything, really”. He said: “I know how you didn't want to do it, like all others! I know where you were and what you wanted!” I was swollen from crying. I didn't know what else to tell him. How can I make him believe me? How to explain to him what happened? And he was leading me, mumbling all the time: “You will see”. He brought me to the window. People there were asking me something. I signed.

Another victim described being detained by the police for three days while they interrogated her about her trafficking experience:

The police took us. They questioned us. Not only me but all of the girls that I was in the plane with. When my turn arrived they asked me how I arrived in [the destination country], I told them by boat. They asked me also with whom; I didn't want to answer that question. I told them that. I was thinking that many people will be risking their life if I give this information. I told them I didn't want to answer that question and that I wanted to go home to my family. They were all around me about two hours, asking for the name of the person who took me to [the destination country] My answer was "I won't be telling you that". After that they called my city police and asked them to inform my parents they should come to pick me up. My father arrived three days after... Three days surrounded by policemen, they kept questioning. Their only concern was to pull out of me the name of the guy. They didn't care about me because the only concern of the police is to make girls denounce. What might happen to them if they do so, they just don't care. But I was thinking far more than that. I was concerned first thing about my parent's safety than mine.

Being met by service providers, like social workers or shelter staff, often served to avoid such difficulties:

I remember that there in front of the police booth, it was [the NGO director] waiting for us. And I said that she couldn't be her. And she asked us if we were the girls travelling from [the destination country]. At the police control when we crossed the border, until [the director] came, they wanted to ask about us: "You are trafficked girls? With whom did you go?" But the other girl said that is not their business and when [the director] came, they didn't say anything else.

Similarly, another returning victim explained how the intervention of the receiving shelter staff was essential for her in dealing with the authorities at the border and indeed substantially changed their attitude toward her:

Then it was my turn and I gave the officer my travelling document and he just looked at me. Then he asked me where my passport

was, why I'd been in [the EU], and I said I'd lost it in [the EU]. He returned my travelling document and gave me a suspicious look and started asking me questions — why were you there — meaning cut the act. I told him I didn't have to discuss it with him and told him to go down and look for two girls carrying a bag with [the NGO name] on it. They were waiting for me. Then he said, "First you're going to talk to me and then you can talk to the shrinks and doctors who are waiting for you there". I started crying and getting all hysterical... In the meantime, that woman [from the shelter] came and said who she was and where she worked, said I had been there and that they brought me home, that everything was arranged through them. Then he realised what I'd been doing there and he said we had to have an interview but without any pressure, that I don't have to say any names, but simply tell them why I didn't have a passport and I had spent so many months there. Then I talked to them.

Delayed return of foreign victims

For many victims the period prior to their return was lengthy; trafficked persons in some countries were kept waiting while documents were processed, transportations arrangements made, statements taken and other procedures undertaken. For many, this waiting was very stressful:

The waiting is killing me. I've been waiting for a long time. They say yes, it will happen. In a little while, then in 20 days, it will be like this, it will be like that.

It bothered me because I stayed too long.

That many of these victims were kept in closed shelter facilities — with no freedom of movement and a range of other restrictions — served to amplify the stress of many beneficiaries.

It would have been good going out for a short while, at least, but being closed for two and a half months, it makes you go crazy.

For some victims it seems that delays were related only to the processing of documents, a process which could be expedited with the cooperation of home and destination country officials.

I was around four months in that shelter. They said, that prosecutor said that I will leave in one month. I thought, if it is like that, one month will pass fast. I thought that I would leave first, since I was from the country. But it wasn't like that... Girls from abroad went crazy, they started to make chaos. That woman from shelter, she probably was in contact with police and she managed to send them sooner.

When I started to be insane, I said to those women: "C'mon, check those travel documents".

And, as one victim explained, it was never clear to her what caused these delays, having received little explanation from shelter staff or police:

No, it wasn't [clear why I stayed so long]. I asked why. I asked several times. They said because of checking or travel documents which were not prepared. I said that is not possible that they can't prepare travel documents for three months. In three months they can prepare ten travel documents.

In other situations, delays were apparently due to their involvement in legal proceedings, although how and why this was the case was not always clear. In the case of one woman who had been in one shelter for almost five months, neither victim nor staff could explain why her return had been delayed for so many months. In another situation, a victim had been in a closed shelter for two and a half years with her young child while custody papers were processed and legal proceedings followed. Here again the delays were at odds with the process time needed.

Some returns were delayed by excessively bureaucratic procedures. One man — detained and imprisoned because he illegally crossed a border — faced many difficulties when he was finally released. His case illustrates the problems of bureaucratic procedures which unduly delay and even prevent returns:

No, I didn't know anything [about getting new documents]. They said the only possibility to find my passport was finding those individuals who exploited us... Before we were released from that prison they visited again the site of our exploitation but they found no one there. We were released from prison. In accordance with the law, the state should issue us some money so that we could travel to

our country. We received papers with which we were to appeal to the bank for the issuance of cash. However, at the bank they refused to issue us money because we had no documents. We returned back to the prison but the chief of the institution said that he couldn't help us. He also said that we should manage on our own. We ended up again at the border crossing. The border guards told us that they would try to call their colleagues at the other customs so that we would be allowed to cross the border without identity papers on the basis of the certificate of release from prison. We waited for two hours and then they replied that they would not let us cross the border without proper documentation.

When asked if he had considered turning to the embassy, he answered that he hadn't: "We didn't even suspect that such a thing was possible. If I knew I would have surely gone to [the capital] to obtain my documents. But we didn't know. And nobody told us either". In the end he once again attempted to illegally cross the border:

We went to another border crossing point, at the juncture where all the buses and vehicles passed. We wandered about 14 km away from the customs and we illegally crossed the border during night. We swam across a channel... The water was rather cold but we succeeded... I was afraid, but what could we do?

The delayed return of victims causes undue stress and strain and is an issue which merits serious attention. In this latter case, the delay added serious physical risk and potentially other legal complications.

Risk assessments and security considerations

Victims of trafficking may be pursued by their traffickers for retribution or to bring them back into their exploitative work conditions. In some countries, traffickers have been known to intercept victims *en route* — at border crossings following deportation or upon arrival at home. Return could also pose a danger in cases where the victim's family members and friends have been threatened, the perpetrator is part of the trafficking victim's social circle and/or is aware of the victim's place of residence, the trafficked person is socially marginalised, the government is unable or unwilling to provide protection, etc. (OSCE/ODIHR 2004: 81). In some cases this will mean that the victim should not return home; in others it means that victims

will require an escorted return home as well as security measures in the origin country. Many victims had serious concerns about the transit and return process because they feared being intercepted by their traffickers, being re-trafficked or facing their traffickers at home. Explained one victim, "What can I say, I was terrified. I didn't want to come back to [my home country]. I knew that the persons from whom I escaped were going to cut my head".

In the majority of the interviews conducted, victims arrived home safely. But many also did face problems *en route* and/or upon arrival.

I was very afraid that there was a higher chance to be caught in [the capital], at the train station. In order to avoid the risk of being caught by the [traffickers] at the capital train station, I got off the train at the station before the last [about 20 km away from the capital]. I didn't have any money on me. I walked for a long time then I got on a trolley bus. I was dirty, everyone was staring at me. I was ashamed... [When I arrived home] the traffickers were already waiting for me. They were yelling at my mother, at me. I couldn't say anything. They threatened that they would kill me if I didn't go back.

A number of victims reported being prepared for possible problems that they might encounter *en route* and how to address them. In such cases, it seems that some sort of risk assessment was undertaken (albeit often informally) and victims were prepared with information about how to react in case of problems. As one victim explained, "I was told not to worry. They explained in details how I should behave in the airport. They said that in case of danger, I could address the police".

Risk assessments were undertaken for very few victims, at least to the victim's knowledge. This was true even in cases where acute risk was subsequently identified. The limited exchange of information between many agencies in the origin and destination country seems to be one obstacle to risk assessments being systematically undertaken. In addition, protocols for standardised and systematic risk assessments are generally lacking and seldom implemented. Assessing risks of return are especially vital when victims may return to a situation of exploitation and vulnerability or to families which were complicit in their trafficking. One minor victim was returned home without any interference from state or NGO social workers, in spite of the girl having been trafficked by her mother and previously abused by her step-father:

I wanted to stay longer [at the shelter] but my mother wouldn't let me... I would have stayed there for longer, after all [my mother] had done to me... I'm sure I wouldn't have returned home My stepfather was abusing me. I wouldn't have gone back.

However, it is not only for minors that this risk assessment process is vital. One male victim trafficked to the EU managed to escape his trafficking situation and went directly to the police. He gave a statement against his traffickers and then was returned home, both rapidly and without any attention to potential security issues involved in his return. It is worth noting that this man has since been under threat by his traffickers, forced to live in different locations to hide from his exploiters.

There are some cases where victims should not be returned to their home countries — where they are personally in danger or will face stigmatisation or discrimination. Some of the victims interviewed should have been afforded status abroad, at least temporarily, because of issues and potential risks associated with their return. That a number are currently under state protection in their home country and others are awaiting resettlement abroad supports the importance of a thorough risk assessment and options for residency abroad.

Reception in home country

For many victims, reception experiences upon their return home were not altogether positive, although reasons for this anxiety varied from situation to situation. In some cases, victims were anxious because of a lack of reception — not being met by an organisation and having to face authorities on their own or not having any options for assistance. In other cases, however, reception was stressful precisely because of how they were received by agencies and institutions. One returning minor explained how she was handed over by the border police to the assisting NGO:

That [policeman] at the window said: "It will be okay, just sign here". I signed. "Where will I go?" He said: "I will give you to them". 'Them who?', I asked. Then four guys in black shirts appeared... It was written [the NGO's name] on the shirts but I didn't see. In that moment, I didn't see anything... I was in the middle, two in front of me, two behind me... They were holding me. I escaped from that mess to my mother.

Another issue in terms of reception was different victims' reactions to having family members present upon their return. As one service provider explained, "Sometimes there are relatives in the airport and they are afraid to tell the whole story and then they refuse to come with us. Usually they say that they have been in jail or else how to explain that she did not send money or call?" (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007)

An important question in terms of reception is who informs the family about the return and what rights victims have to keep their return confidential. One minor victim, was surprised to meet her mother and relatives at the airport upon her return, as she had not been consulted about this prior to her return:

In that mess I saw my mother... I don't have any idea [who informed my family]. I just know that my mother was waiting for me... I didn't know that my family knew.

As no risk or family assessment had apparently been done prior to her return (at least not only that involved the victim), informing the family could potentially have put this victim at risk again. While this family was not involved in the girl's trafficking, this was not known to the receiving agency at the time.

5.4. Summary

The safe and dignified return of trafficking victims involves a range of activities and where such procedures are not followed, returns can pose a risk to victims. This may, in extreme cases, even result in (re)trafficking.

In talking about their return and referral experience, victims reported negative emotions and reactions — fear, anxiety, disappointment, stress and frustration, nervousness and confusion — which resulted not only from the return process itself but also from how it was handled. At the same time, victims also reported more positive emotions related to return, including excitement and relief as well as feelings of safety and reassurance. Many victims also reported simultaneous and often contradictory emotions such as being happy and relieved about the return home but also fearful and nervous about what awaited them at home.

Victims faced a range of issues in the return process, issues which arose pre-departure, in transit and/or upon their arrival home. These included a lack of access to full and comprehensible information about the return and

referral process; that the transportation process sometimes appeared to mimic the transportation they had undergone when trafficked; the importance of non-identifying and assisted returns; interrogations and poor treatment by authorities in transit or upon arrival home; the delayed return of foreign victims; issues surrounding adequate and appropriate risk assessments and security consideration; and unsatisfactory and even stressful experiences of reception and referral in their home country.

6. Assistance and protection experiences of trafficked persons

Affording adequate and appropriate assistance and protection to trafficked persons is vital in their immediate stabilisation and toward their longer term recovery and re/integration into society. As such, the various aspects of assistance and protection were central in discussions with victims, with particular attention to their individual experiences both abroad and in their country of origin. In an effort to better understand these experiences, three main areas were focused on — how trafficked persons had been assisted and protected, how they felt during assistance and what, for them, were problems, issues or good practices. The objective was to ensure that observations and recommendations about assistance and protection issues was firmly grounded in the lived experiences and opinions of trafficked persons.

Victims were trafficked to and through a wide range of destination countries and, as such, their experiences were quite diverse and represent the situation far beyond the borders of SEE. In addition, the diversity of their backgrounds and their trafficking situation means that they had a wide range of assistance and protection needs. Interviews were conducted with trafficked persons at various stages of assistance — for emergency and longer term, reintegration-oriented support. In spite of differences between the various countries — socially, economically, politically and culturally — some consistent themes and issues emerged when speaking to victims about how they saw, understood and experienced assistance and protection.

6.1. How trafficked persons were assisted and protected

Assistance and protection was offered in transit and destination countries as well as countries of origin by NGOs, IOs and GOs. Some assistance was trafficking-specific (offered by specialised anti-trafficking agencies); other assistance was not. The extent and quality of the services varied from country to country and even from agency to agency.

Assistance in countries of transit and destination was generally short-term for foreign victims, although this has changed somewhat with the implementation of temporary residence permit options for foreign victims in some countries. Assistance was often generally shelter based (commonly, but not exclusively, closed-type shelters) and involved emergency service provision toward stabilisation and the return of victims. By contrast, assistance in countries of origin generally involved both short and longer term assistance but primarily focused on reintegration support. This assistance was typically shelter-based, at least in the initial stages of support, with the longer term objective that the individual is (re) integrated into the family and/or community.

For some victims, service at home often followed the provision of assistance in the country where they were identified. However, many victims were not identified while abroad and, therefore, did not receive assistance and support. For these victims, assistance in their country of origin was their first encounter with service providers and, in such cases, victims also generally required some short-term crisis intervention prior to a focus on longer-term needs.

6.2. How victims felt about and experienced the assistance and protection phase

In terms of how they felt this phase of intervention, victims expressed both positive and negative feelings, some of which they experienced simultaneously. Trafficked persons described negative feelings — from fear to shock and confusion, from suspicion to stress and shame. Importantly, they also spoke about how, in this phase, they had positive feelings, most commonly feelings of comfort and safety, a sense of belonging, not feeling alone, relief and gratitude. And, as was the case in each of the previous stages of post-trafficking life, victims spoke a lot about their feelings of trust and mistrust.

In many cases, victims reported more negative feelings at initial stages of assistance when they felt less confident and comfortable about the assis-

tance and with service providers. However, this generally transitioned quite quickly to more positive feelings once trust and confidence was established. As such, the emotions explored below were often specific to certain periods of victim's post-trafficking lives and fluctuated over time and in response to individual victim's assistance experience.

Fear

It should not come as a surprise that victims were often fearful when they first accepted assistance, both in countries of destination and origin. Almost without exception, fear was one of the predominant emotions that trafficked persons felt in the initial stages of assistance. Fear, for many trafficked persons was linked to their fear of the trafficker — fear that they would be found and returned to them, fear of retribution against themselves or their families and fear that they were not sufficiently protected.

I wanted to stay [in the shelter] for some more time because the traffickers made a threat that they would immediately kill me on my return home if I ran away.

I can't go home. The person who trafficked me and who I denounced lives next door to the house of my parents.

They told me about the foster family in [that city] and I was scared at the thought of it. First because my boss had a sister in [that city] and he came there all the time. He comes to [that city] every other week. He would see me on my way to school.

I was scared [when the recruiter was released]. At that time I wouldn't even leave the shelter... I realized myself that my life was in danger. I think I will have to leave the shelter in a few months and I think I will go to some acquaintances in [another town]. Maybe they will let me stay there over the winter. I am afraid that the recruiters will find me there and kill me.

Fear was also, in some cases, a more generalised sense of fear borne of their long term victimisation and exploitation:

It was hard at the beginning because I was accustomed to lying. I was afraid to tell the truth out of fear that I would be beaten up. I had been beaten up for so long, almost every day, so I was afraid.

But when I realized that nobody wanted anything from me, I calmed down. After one year I was different. I even gained weight here.

In some cases, this fear led people to reject assistance; in others fear played a role in victims accepting assistance (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). One woman trafficked abroad initially went home to her family but eventually accepted to stay in a shelter because of her fears:

I stayed home from November to March but I couldn't resist any longer. I was in constant stress. I was always afraid, always in tension. The police told me that I could be taken to a centre and I accepted.

For many victims, this fear was addressed over time — with the building of trust, the processing of shock and trauma, the creation of stability and comfort and, in some cases, the provision of a safe environment. One victim, in the initial stages of assistance, described feeling “Bad... unsure... frustrated”; but later felt more comfortable:

[Now I feel] good... now I have already understood that there are organisations that wish only good for me... Maybe the problem was in me. I was very frightened. I didn't believe in the possibility of unselfish, free assistance... I simply needed some time.

Nevertheless, victims also noted that fear can reappear in situations of change. One victim who stayed quite some time in an assistance programme in the EU and had every reason to trust the assistance model described how afraid she was when plans for her return home were first discussed.

I spoke to [the NGO director in my country] on the phone. She explained to me about the assistance programme that helps girls recover after they went through similar situations, to reintegrate into society. She explained everything about the assistance. It's true that I was scared at the beginning but I told myself to go and see how it could be.

Recognising that victims are likely to be frightened for some time after their exit from trafficking is an important basis in programming and response.

Shock, confusion and disorientation

Many trafficked persons described the first stage of assistance — which was generally, although not always, abroad — as one where they were quite shocked, confused and/or disoriented because of the experience they had endured:

To tell you the truth, I was very tired and I don't believe that I was understanding what was going on. I was distracted. It was March, it was cold and the thing that I believe I wanted most was a hot bath and to sleep.

First they helped me to get over this. I was in a state of shock, I was having nightmares. I was afraid to stay there. I thought that the traffickers were coming after me, to look for me and it was helpful to speak to [the social workers].

But strikingly victims also reported being confused by the assistance model to which they were referred, with many not really understanding what was being offered and why. Confusion was noted in the victim's country of origin as well as destinations and was by seemingly caused by inadequate or confusing information, shock or trauma, limited comprehension and limited experience of assistance (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).³³

When I first arrived at the shelter in [that city abroad], I didn't really understand why these shelters existed. I didn't really understand the aim of assistance and I practically didn't realize that I was a victim of trafficking.

Back then I didn't really comprehend what they wanted from me and I didn't really understand why I was entitled to receive this assistance.

[About the services and assistance] I don't remember exactly. She was telling me something... accommodation... food... I don't remember what else.

I had never heard of a centre like this... It seemed like an unknown place, I stayed at the beginning because I didn't want to go home. The first three days I stayed without talking because I wasn't clear about everything. I didn't know what was going on.

³³ As an illustration of this confusion, when asked about their expectations of a shelter, one victim explained that she thought it would be a house full of people, children and girls and also full of cameras. Another victim said, "Where I was from I had no idea about it, what it was. I found it was good and I didn't know that before I came. In [my town] there is nothing like this and I did not know that it could be like this". Still others reported imagining it would be "a cellar with bars", "a fraud" or "a home with a lot of people". Alternatively, in some cases, this confusion led victims to decline offers of assistance (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

Other victims reported feeling both confused and disoriented at the start and requiring some time to adjust to the specific model of assistance which, in one case, the beneficiary found less amenable and appropriate than that which she had been offered while abroad:

When I came, to be honest, I was shocked... I was shocked first by the girls, I mean by their behaviour... But you know how it is... when you come somewhere you have to adjust to things. Look, I was eight months [in a shelter] abroad... There I had my own room, kitchen and bathroom. That was not something big but when I closed the door, nobody can enter.

Importantly, shock, confusion and disorientation appeared to be an initial, short term reaction which abated over time once victims were better able to process and comprehend the assistance and protection being offered to them. Levels of shock and confusion also appeared to be highly individual and context specific, linked to individual trafficking experiences and personal backgrounds.

Suspicious of assistance

For many trafficked persons, the assistance offered was new to them and triggered feelings of suspicion. In some countries, a noteworthy number of victims did not seek out assistance until some time after their trafficking experience precisely because they were suspicious of available services and assistance organisations. In some cases, this suspicion (felt by both victims and their families) led victims to decline assistance (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). In other cases, victims accepted assistance but only with trepidation and often also only after some time. One woman was assisted only after a number of years precisely because she was suspicious of the assistance offered when she first returned home and accessed help only when in dire need: “Yes, simply it was the first time I heard of it. And I didn’t dare, I didn’t know”. Significantly, she explained how this suspicion might have been overcome. She was initially identified by the police who did not offer any referral and so she sought out assistance from the centre for social work which then referred her on to a victim’s helpline, although not one that specialised in trafficking. For this woman — a minor at identification — having the social worker serve as intermediary and contacting the service provider on her behalf would have helped to assuage her suspicions and might have led her to access assistance earlier.

For some, this suspicion and reluctance seemed to be because they had not been exposed to assistance in the past, whether state or non-governmental. Many respondents reported that they had not heard of such assistance, especially in their home countries, and were sceptical and suspicious when it was first offered.

I felt a little puzzled when I came to the shelter, here in [my home country]. I didn't believe that something like that was possible... and even there in [the destination country] the assistance seemed suspicious... I couldn't understand what it was for.

I still wasn't sure what sort of charity and assistance we had in [my country], why I was being helped at the shelter, why I was being given money, rendered assistance. I didn't believe in good fairies back then.

Some suspicion was linked to a specific form of assistance, the most striking example with regard to psychological assistance:

I didn't have time to talk to the psychologist. I honestly didn't understand why I needed a psychologist. After all, I am not a mental patient.

I don't know what to speak to a psychologist about. I don't understand what a psychologist does.

I've heard that only people with some mental problems go to a psychologist.... In general, I don't know what psychologists do.

At least for me it's not clear what a psychologist's assistance is... I wasn't quite willing to speak to her about my experience. I simply didn't want to. I felt uncomfortable because I didn't quite understand what she wanted from me.³⁴

In other cases, suspicion seemed to be because services were free, with many victims noting that they did not trust anything that comes for free

³⁴ Some victims came to understand the importance of psychological support over time:

No, I think a psychologist's help is very important. I came to understand that only after several meetings with the psychologist.

Only afterwards I found out from other girls that you could appeal to the psychologist if your soul was in pain.

and because it was not normative in their country (cf. Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

Yes, when I was told about the existence of such a centre where all services are offered free of charge ... I got frightened... I didn't believe in charity... Then I understood that the centre is sponsored by some foreign funds. But people abroad are much kinder than here and they ask for nothing in return for charity.

At first I didn't believe it. In general, I can say that I didn't believe that today somebody can provide free and unselfish assistance.

I was told that I could stay there with my children for some time. We would be treated and fed. I didn't believe at first. Nowadays it is a rare thing to have something for free. I thought they would ask for something later. I was also explained that it was a foreign organisation that arranged assistance for such girls. I thought that they would probably want to remove some of my organs. It was strange for me to have free assistance as it was the first time in my life.

For me, this was surprising. I couldn't imagine that I can get anything for free... I've never in my life had such a chance... I was even shocked that I didn't have to do anything in return.

I was a bit surprised [that assistance was free of charge] but he said that this was an international organisation and I instantly thought that it was a religious organisation.

[The social worker] explained that money comes from the country where I had the problems and that I deserved it. But I still don't understand how someone can just give me money for nothing. That's the part I don't understand.

That being said, suspicion of free services may be, at least in part, context specific. In some countries, victims were seemingly more familiar with free of charge assistance from the state or NGOs than in others.

A noteworthy finding was that some victims felt suspicion because the proposed assistance was not dissimilar to how they had been recruited and trafficked. A three-country study on why victims decline assistance found that some features of assistance seemed to some victims to mimic the traf-

ficking experience, which directly influenced their ability to trust in these services and organisations. Some were scared of where they were being taken when they agreed to assistance, not sure that they could trust the service providers or police. One victim explained that she was fearful in the transportation phase; “Afterward they drove me to the police station in [a nearby town] and at that moment I didn’t trust them. Who knows where they were taking me”. Interviews with victims in this study echoed these findings. Victims who were moved from temporary to more permanent centres were trepidatious and suspicious about the move.

I stayed for about two months in [that centre]. After two months, they told me through the translator that I had to move to another centre, because I couldn’t stay there... I told them that I didn’t want to move, I was scared, I was not sure where they were sending me... They tried to explain to me how these centres operate, what I was going to do there and that they, were going to take good care of me. I stated that I have to see and check this place with my own eyes and the persons who were working within it. I wouldn’t accept if that was not possible. They accompanied me to the centre where I was going to stay. I went there with the social worker and the translator.

Free services and assistance also echoed promises made prior to trafficking. Said one social worker, “when we tell them [the assistance] is free of charge it’s rejected because they were trafficked under the same situation” (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007).

Further, victims explained how the possibility of being re-trafficked had occurred to them when offered assistance:

Indeed, I was a little bit scared. I was thinking at a certain moment that maybe I got back from where I left... When I saw that big house... and there was a shelter, but I never saw a shelter in our country. And I was scared, thinking what will happen with me.

There was a computer there. There were all of the conveniences. But I still thought that they were going to sell me again.

I didn’t quite believe him. My mother told me not to speak much to strangers... She is anxious. Even now she sometimes says that [the assisting professional] wants to take me abroad. My mother says that she doesn’t trust anybody and she doesn’t trust the doc-

uments [he helped me with] too because nowadays everything can be forged.

Even where victims were not fearful of re-trafficking, they nevertheless often had suspicions about assistance.

I was very desperate. I had nothing and I remember that she gave me some money for cleaning my room and then I looked at her. I could not trust anybody... I felt that people wanted something in exchange from me so I just looked at her and I asked: "What do you want me to do for you?" And she said that she didn't want me to do anything but study and be nice. I couldn't trust that at that time. Later on, she said that we should go together and buy things that a girl needs. I looked at her as if she had gone crazy but I went with her and she only bought good stuff. And I asked her: "what do you want from me?" And she said again only to study and be nice.

To tell the truth, I didn't believe them, because I didn't want to go back. They told me I was going to stay in [the capital city], in a centre and I was going to be well but I didn't believe it. I thought they were lying to me because I was told in these centres they beat the girls... The girls I stayed together at the camp told me that.

While receiving some initial assistance abroad often served to create trust and assuage victim's suspicions upon their return home, this was not a panacea. Some victims remained suspicious of assistance at home in spite of (positive) assistance abroad and as a result did not (or did not immediately) accept assistance. Even those that did accept often remained suspicious and concerned for some time. That being said, this suspicion was something which services providers were generally able to overcome once it became clear that the assistance was genuine and well intentioned. Overcoming suspicion in order that victims would accept assistance, however, was neither direct nor uncomplicated.

Stress and agitation post trafficking

After leaving trafficking, many victims felt stressed and/or overwhelmed. These feelings were manifested in different behaviours — like anger, irritability and sadness and/or depressions. One woman's description of her first days of assistance illustrated such feelings:

...basically, I was just talking, telling them that it was what I needed. I was furious when talking and no matter how much they told me to relax I was not able to control my anger. I was crying and all. It hurt so much. I tried suicide and was lonely and so on.

As other victims explained, trafficked persons behave very differently in response to their very different trafficking experiences and personal situations, but stress and agitation were not uncommon:

I would like to say that it is very difficult for the shelter staff to work with all beneficiaries... Each beneficiary has her own character... Some girls try to contact their owners... Many girls find it difficult to begin a new life... Many of them are used to making easy money ... It is hard for them to recover physically and psychologically at least in the first period.

Girls were nervous, agitated, some of them frightened. Some of them didn't speak at all, others spoke too much.

When I got here, I was cursing all of the time. I got into fights or was hysterical. [The director] said that it wasn't nice and I listened because she said that little by little things would get better. And then I told myself not to do those things anymore and everything became normal.

I am tired of problems and I think all the time how I can get out of them. I am stressed at work, I come home, I try to sleep but it is all a nightmare to me. I wish I would die.

I could not trust anybody. I was talking dirty. I even raised the knife at somebody.

This stress and agitation was often an initial reaction which abated over time and in response to the professional overtures and interventions of anti-trafficking actors and service providers. But, in the short term, it often caused tension and difficulties not only for staff but also other programme beneficiaries.

Feeling judged and ashamed

A number of victims reported feeling ashamed and also judged, feelings which for them caused them a great deal of angst and anxiety during the assistance process and beyond.

For many this “shame” was because of their trafficking experience, which was often related to prostitution.

Some people laugh and say that you were a whore in the street. But they don’t know what it is in your heart and how many nights you didn’t sleep, with how many men you were forced to sleep or do other things. Others would have maybe turned their back. If you go home everybody points the finger at you and you know how difficult it is to walk with your head high and smile when everybody knows what you did.

There are people that say that it is better to [kill yourself] than to live with such shame all of your life. Because it is a shame to stay in the street. Only I know how it felt to stay and watch the cars pass by the street. It is a shame. How would it be if my husband found out? Because there will come a time when he will find out.

Shame was also an issue for victims in terms of telling their families about what had happened to them while away.

At first I didn’t want to tell them. I was ashamed. I was even ashamed with myself. When I ran away from there, I took the trafficker’s documents with me. But I didn’t want to go home so I went to my grandmother’s place. But she discovered the papers and called my parents. When I spoke to my father, I started crying and he realized that something had happened and I told him everything.

For many victims, it was important to be reassured that they were not responsible for their trafficking. When asked what advice they would give to other victims, a number focused on the need to address these feelings of shame and blame:

I see girls who work across the street, near to our apartment. I see them when I go to my balcony. It’s hard for me. I cry. I know what I went through. I would give her advice to go to police. It’s not her fault. It’s their fault. For example, it’s not my fault that I did that.

[It helped], the words of [the NGO staff]. She said that what happened to me was not because I wanted it and then I felt that someone faraway cared and thought about me.

For other victims, receiving assistance was what caused them feelings of shame:

I am still ashamed to appeal for help first... My mother is also hesitant and ashamed to do so.

I will never appeal for assistance first, because I am ashamed... I would accept the assistance when the organisation first offers me this assistance.

[About calling a helpline] I didn't have any courage. I was ashamed to call and ask for help... I am not used to asking for help... That's why my cousin did that for me... Yes, I prefer not to appeal for help first... I feel shame in asking for something... This is my nature.

I liked how the social worker told me not to hesitate or feel shame if I required assistance and that I was to directly appeal to them... I indeed needed help in collecting some information for a document, which was required at school and the social worker helped me.

No, I did not know of any others except [one NGO] and then I found out about [another NGO]. I also knew about the Department of Social Affairs but I didn't want to contact them for help...because I was ashamed to ask for help.

Sense of belonging, of not being alone

While many victims focused on negative feelings and emotions, others discussed the ways in which the assistance model provided them with a sense of belonging which they found important in the stabilisation and recovery process. When asked what, for her, was the most positive aspect of assistance, one woman trafficked to the EU but also assisted in her home country explained the importance of not feeling alone:

To tell you, in general, about here and also there, I noticed that I was not alone, that there were people that accepted me the way I am. I went through this bad experience and I found support. I noticed that always when I was feeling alone, there was somebody next to me, to tell me "heads up, you are not alone", something like this. Somebody was listening to me also.

Other victims had similar experiences:

I went for the sake of socializing. Also I went to take a bath there, because we don't have decent living conditions where I am... It was for socializing, to feel better, and just to spend time some place where I could take my mind off things. By socializing with girls who went through what I did. We had an hour to ourselves when we would listen to music, talk, have a laugh and take our minds off things.

Well, I saw I was not the only one who... I realise now, I realised a long time ago, that it could happen to anyone, no matter what race you are or anything. At the time I thought it was only happening to me, because I have such bad luck and felt like vanishing... And the fact that we could have fun and socialize and at the same time we knew what we went through.³⁵

Importantly, while being around other trafficked persons was helpful for some victims, others found that the setting amplified their stress.

And also I couldn't speak to the girls even if they went through similar situations. Sometimes I was crying when I was remembering my experience. They were asking what happened but I couldn't say what was in my soul.

Every girl was restrained and we didn't communicate with each other.

To some degree the need and desire to be with other trafficked persons appears to be time-bound — with victims finding the presence of others particularly important in the initial post trafficking phase. Others found it important to make a break with the trafficking services and other victims as part of their reintegration and recovery process. A community comprised only of trafficked persons may serve to remind victims of their "differentness" and past problems, which may lead to a sense of social

³⁵ Bjerkan & Dyrliid (2006b: 19-20) also found that generally the sense of community and commonality was positively assessed by women in reintegration programmes. Many beneficiaries appreciated being able to unburden themselves through talking and sharing with others in the programme:

The girls exchanged trafficking experiences — each one of us shared our story with the others. When I told the others about my experiences, I felt very good.

The girls at the shelter communicated and shared problems. I felt better when I related to people who could understand me — when I am able to share my experiences with somebody.

segregation that contradicts the objective of recovery and reintegration (Bjerkan & Dyrliid 2006b: 10).

Comfort and safety

Many victims spoke about the calming effect that many service providers and assisting organisations had on them both initially upon accessing assistance and also over time.

I met for the first time [the social worker] who came to pick me up at the police station. She told me that we were going to an assisting centre and I was going to be safe. I felt good because she didn't ask me to tell her anything about what I have lived because I was exhausted and the only thing I wanted was to have a bath and rest. She told me that I was going to do exactly that and I felt calmed.

I felt safe there. It was good. After the stress that I had, it was good to end up all of a sudden in a place where it was peaceful, where you could sleep, have something to eat, to have things explained to you and be told that you would get home safe. I was pretty peaceful.

I called and the girls from the helpline were so polite and calm. They invited me to the office to meet a social worker and they also told me that my travelling costs would be reimbursed. I was afraid when I came to the first meeting with the social worker. I thought they would look at me as if I were a monster. But everything was fine. I liked the way the social worker behaved. She was calm and benevolent.

For some, this comfort level was immediate; for others, it took more time to establish. The time needed to create comfort seemed to be linked, at least in part, to the specific experiences of exploitation. Where victims had suffered abuse and/or abuse of trust over long periods of time, it seemingly took more effort and intervention for them to feel calm and comfortable. In addition, where victims had a negative family/personal situation before trafficking, creating a sense of calm and comfort was also a time consuming and not uncomplicated process.

For many victims, the structure of programmes — whether residential or day programmes — offered a safe space for them to speak and interact. One victim — a victim of both sexual violence and trafficking — explained that her visits to a day programme for victims of violence provided the safety she lacked in her daily life:

It was the system they had. Everyone speaks without interruption. Nobody interrupts you. There's no smoking, no going out, you can go to the toilet if you have to. There are no other people present. There is no judging others. Every woman accepts other women. They realise that it is not their fault what they went through, and so on. And those rules in workshops, I liked that. And I kept going there.

That being said, feeling safe did not always translate into feeling comfortable and many victims struggled with loneliness (for family or friends) while in residential assistance programmes where access to family and community was generally restricted, both when assisted at home and abroad:

I cried for two weeks. It was hard. Although there were problems at home, I kept thinking and I still think about home. I am safe here and everything is fine but I think about my family all the time.

Relieved and grateful

For many victims the assistance they received was vital and they described feeling much relief and gratitude. Many respondents felt that assistance — with all of its problems and issues — was of vital importance in their recovery and were grateful for the assistance and support they had received both at home and abroad (cf. Bjerkan & Dyrliid 2005, Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

We agreed to meet at a certain place at the bus station. I worried that we wouldn't meet. It seemed to me that I was dreaming. I couldn't believe that someone was going to help me.

At that time, I needed a friend, somebody who would understand me, who would support me, to tell me that things are not black. I needed support and not to look back all the time.

I'm so proud of those people. Thank god that such good people exist. Thanks to [the director], thanks a lot because she organized a place like this, where people like me can stay. Thanks to good people that give money and who think about us. We really need help. Not only me, but all girls there. I am very satisfied and I will be grateful until the end of my life to [the director] and all of the people who work in the organisation.

I am grateful to this organisation for existing. And if it hadn't been for that, I really don't know how much longer I would have lived

in that [situation]. And who knows what else would have happened to me.

Other studies have also noted that victims often feel a great deal of gratitude toward those who offered support and assistance following trafficking. Bjerkan and Dyrliid (2006b: 14) observe that one beneficiary described her relation to the counsellors in emphatic terms: “They are very supportive! I would not know what to do without them — who to seek advise from.” Similarly, Brunovskis and Surtees (2007) found that gratitude was a prominent response from almost all persons assisted within programmes, due, at least in part, to the fact that many beneficiaries had few other options for recovery and often relied on services for even the most basic support and even survival.

Trust and mistrust

Because victims have been deceived and their trust badly abused, lack of trust was a consistent impediment in the provision of assistance, an issue flagged by anti-trafficking actors and trafficked persons alike. Lack of trust informed assistance very broadly and tied in with a range of issues, such as suspicion and fear.

When I first talked to [the social worker] I didn’t know whether I should believe her or not. But then I said that it was best to come and see for myself and I realized that what she had told me was true.

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear why building trust is of the utmost importance in assistance and protection work. And, in the interviews, victims discussed what for them were the ways that they came to trust again and also what can potentially be done to build trust. For some, it was a question of time:

At the first meeting with the social worker, I talked about very few things and those things I was telling were lies. I needed some time to fully trust and tell the truth. After that, I remember I felt released and hoped that they were going to help me. The employers of the centre contacted a centre in [the capital] and I agreed to go there because I couldn’t stay longer in [that programme].

For others, trust was linked to specific people and, in one case, even to a specific nationality:

[The social worker] was balanced and spoke in a calm voice. She reached the bottom of my heart. I felt I could relieve my heart. There was no tense atmosphere. I liked the way she talked to me, she really understood my problem. She is always nice to me though I was referred to [another organisation]. She explained to me very clearly what kind of assistance was available and who could provide it. It is a very rare case when I ask for help but she inspired my trust. She has always kept her word.

I liked it. They hosted me very well. I didn't understand [the local language] but there, all the staff and those whom I met, were smiling all the time. But still I didn't want to talk. I didn't trust the people at that time.

Because once they told me that there were [staff from my country] there [in the programme] who would take care of me and arrange for travel documents, I gained trust.

Some victims accepted assistance initially because they had a generalized trust in the assisting institution. This was not uncommon in cases where the church or a religious organisation offered to help:

One day a lady approached me and asked me how I succumbed to begging... I told her everything. She said that she was a religious person and that made me have more confidence in her. She took me to her home and she offered to assist me in obtaining documents. I slept non-stop for two days at her place. Afterwards we went to their church and met the pastor. The pastor said he would help me.

In the centre I saw even nuns. Their presence made me feel well... How to say this? Their dress, behaviour, kindness, maybe and the fact that I knew they believed in God made me feel good, safe. Nuns are not the kind that might do something to hurt you.

Similarly, where victims were referred by someone they trusted (including other victims of trafficking), this was central in the decision to accept assistance and feel more comfortable:

On my coming back, I met a friend of mine who had also been exploited... She already was a beneficiary of [this organisation] and

she recommended me not to be afraid and address this organisation for assistance...Yes [I trusted them] because my friend has already benefited from the services provided by this organisation.

For many victims, feeling trust was about having promises fulfilled³⁶ and came only after they had been assisted. In many case, it seems that real trust was withheld for some time:

To treat me well... not to promise much. But if they promise, they have to fulfil it.

They simply did what they promised to do. They never promised what they were not able to do. They are always glad to see me in spite of my big problems.

They were sincere to me. They kept their promise. They respected me.

And so I started to trust her because everything that she said actually happened and I also realized that indeed all that she wanted from me was to study and listen to her. So I said to myself that maybe I could get a second chance.

Some victims linked trust to feeling understood and being well treated:

The fact that they understood our problems, that they promised help and eventually delivered it.

They treated me kindly, with understanding. They respected me.

The way they treated me, respected me, took my needs into account, provided me with any assistance.

In the case of some victims, confidentiality was of the utmost importance and they trusted someone when they felt that they would guard this confidentiality and privacy:

³⁶ In others cases, trust was severely compromised by broken promises:

They said it was not possible to buy a house for me... They shouldn't have given me the hope that they will buy a house for me here. Those people [abroad] weren't fair with me... I asked them a number of times if this is possible in [my country] because I couldn't believe it. And they confirmed. They just wanted to calm me down a bit, but that caused more damage.

She's not the type of person that would tell everybody something that I told her.

Once trust was built it could facilitate further referrals and support. One woman was assisted in a programme which subsequently closed and then referred to another programme. When asked about trust for this new organisation, she explained:

Well, I had trust. I was governed by the fact that I trusted the centre and I wanted and could go on trusting them. And if they gave me this kind of information about who I can turn to it was a 100% sure thing. So I went on to look for this [new organisation] no questions asked.

Another explained:

I didn't want to appeal to other organisations in [my country], but [this organisation] was recommended to me by [the organisation abroad] and in a way I had confidence in it.

Similarly, a male victim of labour trafficking explained how he accepted the referrals of a police officer who had assisted in his return:

When I came to the prosecutor's office in [that city], the police officer introduced me to [a government official] and he said that [that man] could assist me with many things... [This government official] already explained to me that he works for a certain organisation, which assists the victims of trafficking to obtain documents, with food products, clothes and education... I didn't think that a swindler would come to the policeman's office in order to trick me into something... I liked the fact that he was serious... He was very friendly to me... He was always very polite with me... I trusted him... I wasn't afraid because it was the policeman who got me acquainted with him.

That being said, there were some respondents for whom trust did not develop and a number of victims spoke about their lack of trust in individuals and institutions, feeling they could only rely on themselves in moving forward with their lives. Among respondents were persons who had declined some forms of assistance because of a lack of trust. One minor victim, asked what a person or an organisation could do to build trust, was quite pessimistic in this regard: "I don't know. I simply don't trust any-

one... I believe that it is me myself who can help me". She also explained how her mother, who had been instrumental in the decision to decline assistance, felt that assistance was "unacceptable"; "She considers that if you are helped now, then you will have to pay for the assistance offered...she doesn't believe strangers". This sentiment was consistent with a study on why victims decline assistance, where issues of trust and mistrust were a central undercurrent in the decision-making process for victims and their families (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

6.3. Issues and obstacles in assistance and protection — destination, transit and origin

This section explores victim's inputs on the critical issues in the provision of assistance and protection in countries of origin, transit or destination. Observations and inputs are not equally relevant for all countries. Some of the issues below relate specifically to residentially based programmes which, while common in SEE, are not the only type of assistance available. Similarly, some observations are particularly relevant for countries of destination and may not be equally applicable in countries of origin. That being said, many of the findings touch on issues of relevance for a wide range of organisations in an equally wide range of countries.

Cultural and linguistic barriers

For some victims assistance abroad was impacted by gaps in culture and language, sometimes with staff, sometimes with other programme beneficiaries. In some cases, it was what might be called a type of home-sicknesses — wanting to have someone to talk to in one's own language, in one's own social and cultural framework. One victim assisted in a programme with beneficiaries of different nationalities explained her relief at contact with persons from her home country:

After that two more girls came and they were [from my country] too, and it was also helpful to have girls from my country. It's different when you are with somebody from your country. I was having all the time the impression that I am not understood, if they are of another nationality, language.

As a corollary, where victims cannot communicate with others, assistance can be isolating. One respondent explained how it was alienating for her at the shelter when people of the same nationality were together and speaking in their own language:

It was difficult to me when they were all speaking. I don't know [their] language. They spoke [their language] so I was alone. When you sit alone, you think, when will this finish? It was crazy.

Language barriers between staff and beneficiaries can also have an impact on service provision. One foreign woman assisted in SEE did not receive any psychological assistance because of the lack of translation facilities and, as she herself put it, had to overcome her bad moments on her own. Other victims described their awkward attempts to communicate with staff and other beneficiaries, communication gaps which clearly impacted how well assistance of any sort could be administered:

There are bad moments sometimes. But I manage to overcome them. I understand others a little bit and they understand me a little, so we communicate. Slowly they started to understand me. We manage to understand each other somehow.

At first it was difficult. I was asking my brother to translate everything I said.

While translators were sometimes used, this was often a luxury and not financially viable in all cases or in large amounts. One woman had limited access to translation and made due with the limited language capacities of one staff: "There was also one woman who was working in [my home country]. She spoke a little bit [of my language]. They provided me with a translator twice".

Similarly, culture can create barriers in assistance programmes, a point illustrated by one victim assisted in a foreign country.

I did not feel comfortable. I didn't feel that they could understand me and I needed to speak with somebody else. But I came here and I had someone with whom to speak. I felt that somebody could understand me. I felt better when somebody was listening to me. In [that language] I couldn't say everything. I didn't know all the words. .. [It was] not just the language, maybe it was also not being [from that country].

Another victim highlighted the value in having translators, staff and beneficiaries from her home country or at least someone who is aware of and in touch with some of the cultural and social mores: “She took care of us as she was from [my country] but she had been staying in [that EU country] for six years... She really was a sweet girl. She treated us really well”.

As has been noted in many domestic violence programmes, interventions are developed based on the worldview of (generally middle class professionals) which informs how programmes are structured (according to the normalised models of food, language, child rearing, dress, etc.). This can mean that support provided does not always or completely reflect the needs, values of worldviews of foreign residents and beneficiaries. Further, barriers are not only about the language itself but about means of communicating in different cultural environments (Arora 2004: 8). Similarly, studies with immigrant women and refugees have often noted the complications in conveying information and providing services across linguistic and cultural barriers. For example, one study of service provision with abused immigrant women in Canada found continued barriers due to language and culture, experienced both by staff and beneficiaries. In some cultures, sharing personal problems with strangers is not acceptable and yet is the basis of many assistance programmes. And the individualistic focus of some programmes may be problematic for women who come from societies and cultures that frame their lives *vis-à-vis* family and community and the orientation to an independent life is also at odds with this idea of self (Arora 2004: 13-15; Fulbright 2004). Significantly, and as has been noted in the context of mental health services, the willingness to access care is informed by other culturally relevant variables like age and sex. (Hollifield 2002: 421). Such issues also resonated with victims. One trafficking victims from SEE spoke about the gap she felt with the staff abroad, all of whom she liked very much and felt supported by. But for her, there was an intangible cultural gap that she felt with the staff abroad.

Given that culture informs service provision, there is a need for more attention to the specific social and cultural dynamics that influence recovery and reintegration. As many victims stay temporarily and even permanently in countries of destination, this becomes especially important. In other fields, service provision involves assistance in dealing with the multiple stresses of life in a new country/culture, such as accessing services they are not aware of, apprising them of the legal framework in the country, providing linguistically and culturally appropriate services, considering cul-

tural issues about privacy, stigma and shame, paying attention to family and community control over decisions, etc (Cooper et al 2004: 30-32). In terms of some specific forms of assistance, cultural barriers are particularly salient. Psychological assistance is a case in point where cultural variables need to be taken into account as well as how to engage effectively and appropriately with persons from different social and cultural frameworks (Hollifield 2002: 421).

Access to information about assistance and services

Central to an empowerment approach is that victims are actively engaged in and fully informed about the decisions and options in their post-trafficking lives. This requires that full information be disclosed to them about a range of issues, including the various forms of assistance available at home and abroad, their options within these programmes and also how assistance can be accessed both at present and at a later stage. Some victims reported being fully informed and briefed about the assistance options. One woman returning from the EU was in direct contact with an assistance programme in her home country and able to make decisions prior to her return:

I spoke to [the director] on the phone. She explained to me about the assistance programme: that it helps girls to recover after they went through similar situations, to reintegrate into society. She explained everything about the assistance. It's true that I was scared at the beginning but I told myself to go and see how it could be.

Similarly, one woman who returned home and contacted an organisation was similarly satisfied with the information she received: "She explained to me very clearly what kind of assistance was available and who could provide it". This full information was important for victims in stabilising and also toward making plans and decisions for the future.

That being said, other respondents did not always have access to information relevant for their recovery, lacking information about assistance options both abroad and in their home countries:

Before being trafficked I didn't know about such services. Neither did I know upon arrival. I was lucky that my mother found some information about that. When I was trafficked, I didn't think that anyone, besides the police but they are corrupted, can rescue you.

It is hard to locate such services... Victims do not know where to appeal for assistance.

In some interviews, in destination countries victims asked researchers to provide information about assistance options and contact details in their home countries because beneficiaries had not yet been informed about these various possibilities by anti-trafficking actors. In more than one case the trafficked persons had been in assistance for months with no information about options at home. Procedures need to be improved to provide more information to victims about assistance options in their country of origin in order to enhance their chances of successful reintegration (cf. Brunovskis & Surtees, Rosenberg 2006, Surtees 2005, 2006a).

Some victims also received incomplete or insufficient information as in the case of one foreign woman being assisted abroad whose return had been delayed for a long time. For her, it was important that the information shared be accurate and complete, even if it was “bad news”. She preferred to know in advance what the real situation was, even when this meant knowing about a possible delay of months.

I asked them when I can go to my home. They said — tomorrow. I stayed for two years... Yes, I did [ask why I stayed so long]. When they came in the morning, I asked them should I prepare to go home. They said: “You will not go home, you will return here”. I said: “But you said that I will go home.” They said: “You will not go home, until we see what we will do”... They told me that it will be trial. But there was no trial at all.

Even when some information was provided, many victims did not feel it was sufficient:

They didn't tell me that it was a safe house. They just said that it was some private house or that I will be in some hotel. They said that even they don't know where that house is. They told me not to be afraid. They told me that everything will be fine with me. They told me that it is not jail; it is not something against my will, that it is according to my will only. They said that I will have all necessary conditions — to sleep, eat, not to be tortured, that I can stay how much I want.

Whereas in some countries victims had a very clear picture of their reintegration programme and had been fully engaged in the decision-making

process; in other programmes this was not the case. This was illustrated by one woman who, when asked about how long she would stay at the shelter, explained that she had not yet been told this by the service provider; “They know, but we don’t know. I don’t know if I will stay there for two to three months or ten months”. Later in the interview she also observed, “I know that I can’t stay here for long. I don’t know for how long I can stay here, but I know it’s limited. I don’t have anywhere to go. I need a job”.

Another issue was that victims had limited information about other programmes and organisations that might be able to provide some assistance — trafficking and non-trafficking specific, state and non-state services. And the information they did receive was generally mediated through service providers rather than them engaging directly with the different possible avenues of assistance. This meant that in some cases victims were limited to the services of one organisations and its network rather than offered the full range of services and options (cf Bjerkan 2005, Surtees 2006a). One man trafficked to the former Soviet Union was identified and assisted through a church and, upon his return home, knew only of the services available through this network:

I had no idea which organisations I could address to ask for help. I knew only the church that I was referred to by those religious people in [the destination country]. I did not know that besides the state organisations there are NGOs.

Given that all organisations — governmental and non-governmental — work with limited resources, cooperation and coordination between organisations is of importance. Including the widest number of professionals from all sectors in anti-trafficking efforts serves to ensure broader identification and that victims have access to a wide range of services. In many situations, cooperation between agencies not only augmented the assistance options for victims but also served to avoid the duplication of services. In a number of cases, victims explained how service provision had involved the support of different agencies. The case of one woman provides an illustration of this point. She had been supported in establishing a small business by one organisation which specialised in this work. The business was going well until an illness in her family meant that she had to use her earnings for medical care. The organisation then referred her to other organisations which helped her with this medical assistance, allowing her to continue with her business which was vital to her (and her family’s) well-

being. The importance of cooperation and coordination (and access to information) was also commented on by beneficiaries:

I noticed that [this organisation] and [that organisation] cooperate very well... They had a very sensitive approach to me and my needs were taken into account by both organisations.

I like to observe how the organisations cooperate with each other and the fact that different organisations may offer different types of assistance.³⁷

It is not only an issue of cooperation and coordination within a country but also transnationally. Service providers in one study in SEE reported the lack of full and updated information regarding the availability and extent of reintegration services within countries of origin, impeding their ability to advise victims about the full range of options: “We need to have better contacts with organisations in other countries, especially in the EU. We know the NGOs in the region but now we need to make links to EU countries” (Surtees 2006a).

Being better informed about services in origin countries means agencies can make an informed choice in the referral process and advise victims of the full range of services available to them upon return home, regardless of whether they are provided by the receiving agency or can be accessed through a referral process. Limited communication between programmes means that victims may be referred without the receiving agency being briefed about the case or provided with the appropriate case information (Surtees 2006a).

Also important is access to information about assistance and support within the community at large. Victims were asked to what extent assistance options were visible and accessible to people — to victims or to the community generally.

I think that trafficking victims don't know where to ask for help. Now in [that town] people from [that organisation] go to schools to dis-

³⁷ By contrast, some victims commented on the lack of cooperation between some agencies and how beneficiaries were, at times, caught up in the interagency tensions and competitions;

I also noticed one bad practice. They speak badly about other organisations in the presence of beneficiaries. They said that [this organisation] is monopolizing the victims. That nobody can approach to her or to her beneficiaries. That [that organisation] is forcing beneficiaries to work in exchange for assistance. That they close their beneficiaries as prisoners, etc. It's really surprising.

cuss, they distribute brochures... This is a good thing ... It's a pity that I didn't have such information when I was at school. I think that would have been useful for me.

I knew nothing about this [assistance]. Even now I don't really know anything about assistance. We don't have a TV set or a radio at home. And we do not read newspapers either... I wouldn't have been able to find out about assistance if [the service provider] hadn't contacted me first.

I knew nothing about the services available [at home].

When asked how victims themselves would convey information about the assistance options, they often had very clear ideas about how this should be done and, more specifically, how it could have been done better in their case:

I would explain to her in very simple words what kind of assistance is available and, taking her hand, I would bring her to the organisation I was in ... I would introduce her to the staff of the shelter ... I would give her some time to familiarize herself with the things at the shelter so that she gradually believes my words.

Such an approach has been employed by some organisations which invite victims to the facility so that they can see exactly what they are offered and also meet with other beneficiaries. It is generally only at this stage that they are asked to decide and, if they decline, still given the option to return at a later stage. One psychologist said of this strategy, "It is one thing to tell them about assistance, it is another thing to show them" (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). Speaking with victims about what information they need, in what format and with attention to language at an age and educationally appropriate level is needed. Allowing them time to process this information and make informed and carefully considered decisions is also important.

Access to justice

Many trafficked persons agreed to be involved in legal proceedings against their traffickers, although often for different reasons. In a number of cases, the need for compensation was a prime motivator. One victim explained, "I intended to testify against the criminals myself. I want them to return

the money they got while exploiting me. In [my country] you can find a house in the village for 300-800 dollars. I want to get this money". In other cases, revenge was the single most important argument for women to testify against their traffickers. Bjerkan & Dyrliid (2006a: 9) have noted:

When we met "Jasmina" the trial against her trafficker had lasted for one year and it was still not approaching any immediate end. Despite the hardships and the extremely time consuming process, "Jasmina" insisted she did not regret that she had agreed to testify. She said her main motivation to take part in this process was revenge. The trafficker who had sent her abroad had prevented her from seeing her daughter for several months. Meanwhile "Jasmina's" daughter was left with her grandmother who is an alcoholic. "Jasmina" knew that her trafficker was also a mother of a small child and she considered it the perfect revenge to make her suffer, as she had, from a forced separation from her child.

In other situations, victims agreed to testify out of a desire to be safe (and for others to be safe) and not have to worry about retribution from their trafficker:

It isn't that I changed my mind immediately. But thinking of the horrors that I had passed, I would be safer if these persons would be closed in prison.

If the criminals were going to be in prison, I was going to be more calm.

"Iulia" was contacted by the local police and asked to testify against her traffickers soon after she had returned home... Her main reason for doing so was that she wanted to stop them from continuing their activities. She had got to know that the same persons had recruited and exploited a large number of girls and felt obliged to help prevent even more persons to suffer similar destinies (Bjerkan & Dyrliid 2006a: 10).

In a handful of cases, victims participated in trials and sentences were handed down. One victim explained: "I testified against the [traffickers] and I won that case. I felt glad that they were punished". But it is reasonable to say that access to justice is heavily constrained and often in ways

that involve real life risks and consequences for the victims. Where victims were involved in the criminal and judicial process, many were not satisfied with how the process had transpired. One victim explained what should be done differently, “To receive a more qualified legal assistance, to have a better state protection of the witnesses who testify against traffickers”. Another victim was very disappointed by the judicial system, which failed to both prosecute the trafficked and protect him and his family. He expressed regret at having given a statement to the police:

They should help them more. At least they should make sure that the protection offered by police is real because, for example, my sister received calls from the traffickers in which they were telling her that I had ruined a business of hundreds of millions and something like this cannot be forgiven. We should also be treated differently by the police... You help the state for nothing. I for one wouldn't do the same thing again. I thought it was the right thing to do, because that guy did a lot of bad things to many people like me and he might have continued. But by testifying against him I harmed myself because I have lived on the move ever since. That's the only remorse I have... Even if [my wife] was younger than I was, she was smarter and told me not to testify to the police. I did it my way and that's it. Nothing can be changed now.

Victims also did not always feel that their case was well-handled by their lawyers. Take, for example, the case of one victim who described being regularly shouted at by her own lawyer, who told her she was not good for anything and that he was more inclined to believe the trafficker than her. In addition, this woman explained how her interests and experiences were not appreciated by her lawyer:

Some time later when the trial had already been on for half a year, he tried to persuade me to retract my testimony by saying “she is still your relative, feel sorry for her”. I was shocked. He was urging me to do that and I, eventually, said at the trial that I felt sorry for my relative.

Another complaint was that victims did not receive information about their case from law enforcement or the judiciary and were not kept abreast of developments in their cases:

[The attitude of the police] was like...“leave me alone, I have more important things to do than that thing of yours”.

The only thing that I would still like to do, and told myself that I should do it one day, is to call the police officer in [the destination country] who handled our case because I am curious to learn what happened.

No, they did not contact me. I went to ask if there were any news. I said where I was going, what I was doing. They said, there wasn't anything... They would have called if there had been anything.

Victims also expressed frustration about the length of trafficking investigations and subsequent trial proceedings, many of which continued literally for years.

This is going on for more than a year and there is no end in sight. Either one lawyer is absent and then the next one is not there.

Yes, I want these people to be punished. On my coming back to [home], I filed a statement to our local police office. But there hasn't been any answer so far. The social worker said that the [anti-trafficking police] could handle my case. [The social worker] and I even went there. I testified there and then I was invited to the local police for several times to continue testifying and that was the end. Four years have passed since then and no result.

Other negative impressions were collected because the legal process was experienced by many victims as confusing, inaccessible and beyond their control:

I get the feeling that the judge speaks a different language, using words I don't understand but then I forget to ask my lawyer about them. When I testified at the police, they took my passport but didn't return it yet.

The prosecutor rejected my file... Organized crime police completed the file. They said that everything would be fine but when the case reached the court, the prosecutor rejected... I called [the police officer] once to ask about the case. She told me that she was surprised about the rejection of the file because she had done the file prop-

erly and gathered enough evidence. She told me she didn't know why the prosecutor had rejected the file.

While this may be particularly acute for victims with limited education, it is also an issue for trafficked persons generally and, arguably, the population as a whole. Support in understanding and navigating the legal process is of vital importance and can play a role not only in the victim's sense of security but also his/her sense of empowerment.

Some victims felt that in some cases the lack of justice was linked to corruption. One victim raised the likelihood of bribery in the case that had been brought against her traffickers. The case resulted in fines rather than prison time: "The prosecutor's sentence was 18 years and a half of imprisonment but the judge imposed a sentence of paying a fine — 1000USD from each trafficker — and then they were granted amnesty... they weren't even punished... for them 1000 USD is a trifle".

For some victims, the lack of justice had real life consequences in terms of possible retribution. Many expressed being fearful all of the time, the impact of which can only be devastating for both the individual and their families:

I am afraid... because the people I testified against can learn that I am there... It is not quite difficult to find it out... They have already threatened me before... A girl from the shelter told me that sometimes girls from the shelter are paid by traffickers to get a girl, who testified against them, out. I am afraid. The trafficker's brother already served a term of imprisonment. I expect from them anything. I am afraid everywhere: at home, when I go to take my daughter from kindergarten, even now I came to the interview accompanied by my mother.

I didn't want to go to the police. I was afraid. But I thought that one way or the other they would still harm me. If they realized that I returned home, they would want to take me back and harm me. So I thought it was better to go to the police and tell them everything. I did and they were even in detention. But then they released them. I told police that they were my pimps, I told them everything. The police put them in custody for one night but then a [foreign] friend of theirs came and spoke to the police. He said that they worked for him and the police released them. And the police did nothing afterwards.

It was hard and I am afraid to go home. I am afraid because they are still at liberty. They still have girls as prostitutes there. I know this from my friend. They sit at home free and without anybody doing anything to them and the girls are afraid.

No. I don't feel safe at all. I expect that any day the [traffickers] would come after me, the whole family of that one who got arrested... There's nobody to ask for help or to keep you in hiding. I shall have to do something on my own.

Security and safety issues

Victims and anti-trafficking actors stress the need to attend to security risks when providing assistance in the country of destination or transit as well as upon return home. Victims and their families may face retribution from traffickers when they testify against them in court or give a statement to the police. Victims may also be at risk of violence or re-trafficking upon their return home, particularly when the trafficker originates from the same region.

Victims described their feelings of insecurity and lack of safety when faced with the possibility of coming into contact with their traffickers (or their trafficker's families or allies).

When they told me that I was going back [to my country], I thought about what could happen to me. I knew that some of them were still free and I was afraid to get in their hands again.

Yesterday I spoke with my counsellor, that I'm afraid a little bit. The [traffickers] know that I'm in [the capital]. That is written in my statement — that I'm in the shelter in [the capital]. I didn't want the court to know that. Inspectors sent me there but they don't know where I am exactly. [The capital] is big city, but anyway... Sometimes, when I think about that and walk, I turn around and think that some of them are just behind my back. I'm concerned.

I know what a threat they are, what kind of people they are and that's why I was afraid.

This thing put me on the road for over two years now. I lived with rent for more than a year and then we moved at my wife's mother

but then we had to leave because the traffickers found out where we were. So we moved again to a relative of my wife. We don't know how long we'll stay here. I think the only possibility that we have is to leave the country. My sister told me that those people threatened to run me over with the car if they found me.

You see I live very close to [the traffickers]. There is only one village between us and every movement is known in these villages. It's hard, it's very hard. Every time I go home, regardless of how happy it makes me feel to be home for holidays, I feel something in my heart and I am scared to be there. You never know what might happen. Even if I don't go out to the city or to the disco, they can still catch you when you go out to buy bread or do some shopping. It's not a big deal, they just take you in a car. They are not afraid.

The guy is in jail and he has been convicted for 15 years, only he has appealed the trial... I can't say I'm satisfied but this guy has his own relatives outside and I'll never be 100% safe. One day I'll get out of [the shelter], because one day I will. It's not that I'm scared but I know I'll not be safe out there.

Many also raised concerns about problems that their families and community members might face.

I think about my mother and my sister and I am afraid of what could happen to them because of me. Just as they caught and beat my mother up, they could go at night in the house, beat them again and nobody would know.

One issue which came up in interviews with victims was the degree to which they were fully informed about the security and safety risks of testifying. One woman who had agreed to testify in court was quite blasé on the subject of her safety and security: "Yes, I will testify against him with pleasure. I don't have reason to be afraid. I didn't do anything to be afraid. Justice is on my side". This was in spite of problems other victims had faced in the same country in proceedings against their traffickers, begging the question as to whether she had been fully and adequately informed of the risks and safety concerns.

Importantly, not all security and safety problems involve retribution and violence from traffickers. Victims may also be exposed to violence by neigh-

bours and community members after returning from a situation of forced prostitution. One victim described being raped by some men in her community at a village event because, as they put it, she had given sex to men abroad, why not to them (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). Another victim trafficked to the EU explained how a friend had been raped in her community upon her return: “One girl who came back from abroad told me that she was raped by her neighbours, they said ‘you can sleep with [foreigners], will you refuse us?’”.

In a number of cases, threats and violence were exacted against victims and security risks were very real:

The trafficker met me on my way to the police station and threatened me with a knife. I knew she wasn’t joking because even her husband was stabbed with a knife by her. She threatened that she would kill me if I did not retract my testimony. I informed the police officer about the threats and he asked me to make a statement about the threats and that was the end. They promised to detain her for several days but didn’t do that because there was no evidence. In case of emergency, I was supposed to address the local police. When I was given a personal lawyer, I told him about these threats but he didn’t pay attention to them. He said “she won’t kill you... don’t be afraid ... forget it”. The policeman from the local police also threatened me with the pistol ordering me to retract my testimony against the trafficker. I complained to my lawyer about that; he wrote a note and gave it to me to pass it to the local policeman. When the policeman read the so-called “appeal” (there wasn’t even the lawyer’s signature there), he laughed to my face and told me to get lost.

[The trafficker] said: “You put my brother in jail, but, sooner or later, I will kill you”.

[When I got home] they were already waiting on me. There were about seven [traffickers]. They were yelling at my mother, at me. I couldn’t say anything. They threatened me that they would kill me if I didn’t go back. They said that they bought me and that I have to return some money.

Some victims described facing safety issues and, in one case, violence as a result of their involvement in legal proceedings against their traffickers:

No, [the trial] didn't resolve any problems. They are all free. Immediately after I am out [of the shelter] they will find and kill me.

This endangers me very much. I had so many problems when I went to the court. Every time we have to enter through secret passages, to exit with an escort.... I told you, every time we had problems. At the entrance his wife attacked me. My lawyer saved me there. I was so afraid, confused about what she was doing [there]. There I saw her only two to three times and I was surprised that she was in [the city]. She pulled my sleeve but my lawyer defended me. Then again she attacked me in front of the judge's door. Then they allowed me to go inside before scheduled time to give my statement... Well, okay, I know that nothing can happen to me in the court. But they scare me with words... They say among themselves: "Look how they protect her good. This will not be forever. We will find her and kill her". I know that there is security in the court but those words scare me.

[At home] I am afraid. Because I am involved in a court case against them. The prosecutor rejected my file and [the traffickers] caught my mother, beat her up and threatened her and the police did nothing.

Safety issues were amplified by the general lack of protection for victims, even during court proceedings. Some respondents received protection.

Even the police didn't allow us to enter the court room because it was not safe... We always go through some secret passages into the court. They hide us somewhere. At the end, when we couldn't manage, they called the chief inspector of the police and he gave us inspectors for the escort.

Many others did not:³⁸

When I went to the police I did it on one condition. I knew that if I would say anything about this family, I would risk being followed

³⁸ Of 364 trafficking victims represented by the Centre for Prevention of Trafficking in Women (CPTW) in Moldova, only 3 were provided with state security measures during the stage of criminal investigation and in front of the court and victims were often forced to come into contact with their traffickers in court proceedings (CPTW 2006: 14-5). Other anti-trafficking actors also described the general lack of victim/witness protection in most countries, although some victims received protection on a more *ad hoc* basis, through the personal intervention of some committed police, legal and judicial professionals.

by them. So I told police that I would give a statement only if they offered me protection. They told me that they would do it but after I gave the statement there was nothing. I told them that I was followed by the traffickers and they told me to come to them if something came up. And I asked them how was I supposed to go to police if I got hit by a car? Then they called me again to go to the police but I didn't want to go anymore. There was no point in me going there. I shouldn't have brought my story to the police.

At least they should make sure that the protection offered by the police is real because, for example, my sister received calls from the traffickers in which they were telling her that I had ruined a business of hundreds of millions and something like this cannot be forgiven.

In one case security risks were the result of law enforcement having violated the victim's anonymity and providing information about the case to the media:

[The police officer] gave a statement to the press. There was my full name... All newspapers were full of that. "Girl was pulled out from the criminal group... Name of girl is that... she lives there... age that... she was married... she has son... name of the son was..." I was shocked. I couldn't continue... They harassed me at my house, they threatened me. Many things happened. They were in custody only 48 hours and they let them out. They didn't have proof.

In the absence of individual and on-going risk assessments it is difficult to assess the extent to which security constitutes a risk to victims. Further, there has been very little research into the actual risks to victims and cases of retribution and violence against victims, both those who did and did not take actions against their traffickers. What is clear is that many victims — both while they are abroad and upon their return home — did not feel safe. For many, there were very real safety issues that needed to be considered by police and service providers at different stages of their post-trafficking lives. Risk assessments should be done on on-going basis and in response to the victim's evolving situation. Risks will arguably fluctuate according to situation, times, location and involvement in criminal proceedings. It is important that service providers and law enforcement also anticipate potential future risks as different actions are taken. The pro-

vision of temporary (and permanent) residency permits is one means by which some of the immediate security risks can be addressed,³⁹ and, in some SEE countries, temporary residence permits have been provided to foreign victims while decisions are made about steps forward. In some cases, this has included long term residence options including the possibility of social assistance programmes.

Dealing effectively with safety and security issues constitutes a significant obstacle in the SEE region. Law enforcement authorities may not have the resources to provide requisite security in all cases and/or may not be committed in this regard. Witness protection is needed at both destination and origin often pre, during and post trial, although the needs are more long term and intensive when serving as a witness in one's home country.

For some victims the decision to accept assistance in a shelter programme was directly linked to the threats s/he and the family received or their more general security concerns:

Before I came to the centre, [the traffickers] were every evening outside my house. And even if I called the officer and told her that I would be home, how much can she do as I am here in the village and she is in the city?

If I had some money, once I'm out I'll hire a special police agent to watch over me. Because even if this guy is in jail, I don't feel safe outside the centre.

While safety and security issues were noted by many victims, it should also be noted that many victims faced no threats or retribution and returned home safely. In the absence of systematic risk assessments, it is difficult to establish the extent to which safety is an issue for victims. What is clear is that risk levels for all victims are not the same and there are many cases where security is not an issue. While many anti-trafficking actors argue that it is better to err on the side of caution and anticipate high risk situations, this does not come without a cost to victims. Where safety and security concerns are not relevant, to overly emphasise these may impede the recovery and stability of victims. Victims without security concerns may become

³⁹ TRP options are available in seven countries in SEE and the EU legislation Council Directive 2004/81/EC on the Residence Permit requires EU countries to provide residence option to trafficked persons.

unnecessarily stressed and anxious about their safety in ways that may prevent them from returning home or to “normal life”. There is a need to carefully balance the possible security risks with attention to the daily life of victims and their need to return to normalcy.

Programme models, rules and restrictions

All programmes have rules and regulations. They are intended to facilitate the smooth operation of the programme to avoid security and safety issues, to prevent conflict between residents, to correct problematic behaviour and to prevent victims being pursued by their traffickers. That being said, there appear to be situations in which existing rules and restrictions may not be consistent with the profile or needs of beneficiaries.

Recently there has been some discussion of the need to consider and evaluate some of the rules and restrictions in place in residential programmes, both for trafficked persons and other victims of violence (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007; Brunovskis & Surtees forthcoming 2008). And in interviews with victims, shelter rules and restrictions were consistently mentioned as an area of importance and, often, of concern. Of significance for this study is how trafficking persons perceived and experienced these rules and restrictions.

Rules and regulations related to a range of issues, including timetables and schedules, communication and contact outside of the programme and freedom of movement. Being briefed about rules was often one of the first discussions victims had upon entry into different shelter-based programmes:

[The social worker] entered the shelter with us and there was this woman who worked there in the shelter and they talked about how it was in the shelter, about food and all, we had to cook and clean ourselves. They explained the rules of the shelter... You mustn't use the telephone and bring alcohol in. No, we mustn't bring in alcohol, we mustn't tell anyone where the shelter is and so on... I gave [my mobile phone] to staff there.

[About the rules] No phones, no going out, no alcohol. It is for our own good.

The following sections present victim's reaction to some of the more common rules and regulations, with attention to how they, as beneficiaries, perceived and experienced them.

Timetables and schedules

Most shelters had set time schedules — for meals, activities and bed times. The rationale for these schedules, as with many of the rules, is to keep order in the shelter and to keep things running smoothly and without conflict. However, for a number of respondents (the majority of whom were adults), these schedules were restrictive and, in their opinion, often unnecessary. Many found some of the rules infantilising — being required to take afternoon naps or told what they could and could not eat.

She told me, for example, “Here we have only breakfast, dinner and lunch. You have to eat, not to skip any meal. After - there is no meal”.

It was super in the shelter. But the problem was because we had to wake up and then to go to sleep again during resting hours from two to four pm. For example, we woke up around nine to ten am. Then we had to go to sleep from two to four pm. Then you woke up and you had to go to sleep at eleven pm. I didn't like that, for example. We were not allowed to watch TV during resting hours. I didn't like that.

A number of victims flagged structured meal times and, linked to this, access to food as an issue in some programmes:

Another thing that made me feel bad was that one day I was feeling hungry, but we had already finished our meal. I went and took the butter and one of the girls working in the centre told me to take it back right where I took it. Tension was created. In the end the girl explained to me I should have asked for permission first.

[About food preparation] Then, for example, what you don't like to eat, you had to eat. When I eat that, I feel sickness. I haven't eaten fat since I was little. When I see that somebody eats fat I feel sick.

We were not allowed to drink coffee more than twice a day. I didn't like that.

But if we feel like eating something else but what is on the menu, that particular social worker won't let you have anything else. What is on the menu is what you get... If we go to take a bottle of water she comes with us to check what we take. She's afraid that we'll take something else. She was counting one day how many bottles, jars and other supplies were left.

And also we complained for food. We wanted something sweet. They gave us a small bowl with chocolate cream. It's nothing for twelve girls, nothing... No, I wasn't satisfied with the food.

But if you complain, they say: "Oh, but you ask for coffee every thirty minutes". Somebody already complained. We have the right to ask. That food was for us.

Programmes where beneficiaries had greater autonomy in terms of basic daily activities — like cooking, decisions about sleeping hours and managing their leisure time — were generally more positively received by victims.

Communication and contact outside of the programme

In countries of origin and destination many programmes have very tight restrictions on communication and contact with persons outside of the programme. For example, in many programme mobile phones are confiscated for the period of stay:

The first thing she asked me [at the shelter] was if I had a mobile because they first said I won't be allowed to have one. It came as a shock. What would I do without a phone?

Phone calls were limited and often made only in the presence of a social worker:

We could call home three times [in two and a half months], in all the time we were there.

I have only one objection — I can't phone my family. Only once a month. This is not enough. Everything else is okay. I wish it was possible to speak more often with my children and family. All other things are super.

We have the right to phone just once monthly from the shelter. Our family can phone more often but we can phone just once monthly. My son told me that he has no money to phone me.

[About contact with family at home] Fifteen days prior to my return I had the possibility to call home and announce to my dad that I was coming home.

Often the explanation for this practice is that victims need to break from their trafficker and that through telephone communication the safety of the shelter can be breached.⁴⁰ However, while these may be concerns in the initial post-trafficking phase, it seems that rules are not adjusted over time and in response to the specific needs of individual victims. That being said, one victim experienced graded regulations, with restrictions on, for example, phone use, eased over time. This approach, which appeared more consistent with an objective of reintegration, was positively assessed by the trafficked person: “Yes, I am now [allowed to use a mobile phone]. For a month or so [I was not allowed]... so a month, maybe even less”.

Contact with family members is also quite rigidly monitored in some programmes and meetings with family members were often in the presence of the shelter staff and even law enforcement authorities. In some cases, this was at the request of the beneficiary and, in other cases, it was a requisite security arrangement. However, this is not always necessary or even requested and questions should be asked about to what extent reintegration takes place under such rigid controls. Victims related the importance of contact with their families in the recovery process:

I couldn't stay anymore there inside [the shelter] and wanted to go back in [my town]. I wanted to stay with my aunt and to have the possibility to meet my father and my younger brothers who live with my mother. I didn't want to stay there anymore.

For the moment, I need my close relatives, my friends. I have an urgent need to live outside, so I might feel a little bit different. Because when you stay all the time closed in a place, all day inside, you start thinking a lot of things. I get extremely sad.

Attention is needed to the potentially stabilising and reassuring impact of a victim's contact with their family, whether in person or by telephone. That some victims have been known to leave programmes or decline to accept assistance because of such restrictions on contact with family and friends merits some thought (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007).

⁴⁰ One foreign victim noted the paradox in having her phone calls monitored by social workers at the shelter who did not speak her language:

Yes, of course,[someone is always present]... They have to see who we're going to call... I didn't [like that], but then again when I talk in my language, they can't understand it all.

Freedom of movement

In many countries, victims are accommodated in closed shelters, the rationale for which is generally legal (foreign victims in destination countries lack the legal documentation to move freely about the country)⁴¹ and due to security concerns (the risk of retribution from the trafficker). However, in many cases, such restrictions are used even where such legal and security issues may not be a concern. As one victim explained, “I have not any big complaints except that they didn’t allow me to go out. I had no reason to be closed. I have no problems nor any risk. I haven’t been denounced. I asked for a job very early because I was bored inside”. Most programmes in SEE use a variation on the closed model approach even when they are oriented toward reintegration. This continues alongside the more recent implementation of programmes which use more open models of residential care.

Interviews with victims assisted in both destination and origin countries revealed that coping with life in closed shelters was among the more commonly cited problems, although the level of stress this arrangement induced varied from victim to victim.⁴²

I wanted to leave that house, even to go to the street. Because it was like being in prison. You have bars on the windows. You feel like you’re in prison. You are not allowed to go to the balcony... Like in prison. Bars all over around. You are standing like in jail.

Well, I was sad and you know how it is to stay in a closed place. I had nothing to do all day. But I got used to the rules.

For example, there were some rules about going out. We couldn’t go out of the centre and they wouldn’t let us, unless we were going to the professional building centre. I felt like I was in the police station again, like a prisoner.

⁴¹ This legal rationale has been somewhat diluted by the temporary residence permit options now available in seven countries in SEE as well as a number of countries in the EU.

⁴² This was also noted in other regions, like Asia, where trafficked persons took issue with the restrictions involved in the care models: “After we were rescued we were kept in a shelter for seven months. We had to go through health check ups and the doctors were very uncooperative with us. We spent a very regimented type of life in the shelter. Several girls during their stay there even requested the shelter in charge to send them back to the brothel or to their house” (ILO 2006: 8)

We were confined to that location. Although it was a comfortable place, I felt like a bird in a golden cage... I understood that I managed to violate the legal visa regime, I did not have a passport... I understood that I had to observe all the rules... because I was illegally residing there.

It didn't seem bad. I had problems at the beginning with the rules, that I couldn't go out by myself as I was doing [abroad]. But soon I was adapted with that.

We couldn't go outside... Psychologically this is extremely hard... One girl lost her mind practically in front of my eyes.

I think the first thing is freedom... For two months and two weeks, I was locked between four walls. I was banging my head against the radiator and I was hitting the walls with my bare fists. I was simply going crazy. When I talked to the director and she told me that I was supposed to stay for two or three more months, I was destroyed. I protested.

They wouldn't let you get out of the courtyard unless you were accompanied by them. Just like a prison. So we sat all day, ate, watched television.

One girl — 16 years old when assisted — explained how, for her, a trip to the doctor's office was important because it allowed her to get out of the shelter:

Well, when I had to go to the doctor, I was happy because I would go out in the fresh air. I was looking forward to it. And also we would go by taxi and we would return by taxi... It was good to go to the doctor. I was so happy that I will go out.

For some respondents, the closed model led them to question their decision to accept assistance.

It was just like a flat. Maybe the bad thing was you weren't allowed to go anywhere... It would have been good going out for a short while, at least, but being closed for two and a half months, it makes you go crazy. I might have not agreed to come [if I knew about the limited freedoms]. Maybe, I'm not sure.

Yes. I said: “I will not go to that shelter; I can’t be in a closed space. I’ve had enough of closed spaces. I’ve had enough of mistreatment”. They said: “It’s not mistreatment, you will go nicely in that shelter, you will stay there as long as you wish, after they will transfer you, they will decide where you should go”. [I said] “I don’t want to go there”.

These observations are consistent with other research which found that programme restrictions, such as limited freedom of movement, sometimes led not only to problems in the programme but also to victims declining assistance (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). Other studies have also questioned the use of closed models for all cases, especially where security risks are not high and where reintegration services are needed (Brunovskis & Surtees 2008; Reiter 2005: 17; Rosenberg 2006). In addition, it is worth noting that the *Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking* explicitly highlights the need to protect victim’s right to freedom of movement and to ensure that anti-trafficking measures do not infringe upon this right (UNOHCHR 2002).

In some countries, there are accommodation options that are less restrictive in approach, allowing for more freedom for beneficiaries. Some programmes employ a multi-staged shelter model which addresses the different stages of post-trafficking life for victims — an emergency care shelter for a first short stay and emergency intervention, first care shelters for a stay of two to three months and autonomy house for victims in the re/integration process (Kvinnoforum 2003: 11). One SEE national trafficked to the EU was initially at risk and so prevented from moving freely, a restriction which was eased over time. She explained of her time there:

It went quickly. I was doing some sport, exercise, they made different kinds of programmes. We could take a walk outside. We had only to say where we were going and for how long. If we wanted to go in the park we said that we were going in the park. For too long they wouldn’t let us because it was not safe for us. The traffickers are living in [that country], so it was safer not to find us. And we were saying to the shelter’s staff where and what we are doing. The truth is that they knew everything we were doing.

A number of victims were assisted in programmes abroad where they were afforded more freedoms than in their countries of origin, where the

objective of assistance is reintegration and a transition to an independent life. The possible disconnect between these objectives and a closed assistance model is important to note. One victim explained of her time in assistance abroad:

The rules were not so strict. We could go out twice a week. For example, I was going out two days during the weekend together with my friends from the centre. They were giving us money to go out. They only required to know where we were going, which place and with what we were travelling, by bus or by train and that we had to return in that time. It depended when we were going out. If we had any problem or we couldn't get back, always somebody was ready to pick us up with a car.

Determining the need for different shelters models (whether closed, open or one with specific conditions) should certainly be based on risk assessments for individual trafficking victims as well as the specific legal framework. However, they should equally be based on the overall objective of the programme, whether emergency, crisis intervention or longer-term reintegration.

The use of penalties and punishments

A number of programmes implemented penalties and punishments in cases where rules were not adhered to. These sanctions varied from programme to programme as did the offences for which beneficiaries might be punished.

Yes there were penalties. If you do something wrong, then you had to stay in the room all day... For example, if you don't do something well or if you have a fight with other girls. I had a fight with one girl.

Well, for example, if you break something, if you refuse to do something in the house, then you have to go to your room.

We all got some sanctions. We were grounded to our rooms or prohibited from going out.

If we come late, there's no going out... Until they change their mind.

From the perspective of some victims, penalties were an essential component of a well-functioning communal arrangement like a shelter. At the same time, not all regulations were perceived as equally important and

many victims took issue with being punished for what, to them, were minor or irrelevant infractions:

They did catch me once looking out the window and they gave me a warning. It was very strange to get a warning for such a stupid thing. But now I calmed down. But still it is not fair. It's still a window and you're only looking out of it. And even if we are to leave the windows open, they still think we're looking out. But this doesn't mean that if we leave the windows open I'm looking out all day long.

For example, if you wanted to go somewhere, you had to register in a book and indicate the hour of return. Even if you were late by just a few minutes because of traffic, they would punish you.

In other cases, punishment was felt to be heavy-handed and caused problems for the beneficiaries:

And if I were to get into a fight with someone because they were picking on me. I was fighting with them and then I would be punished with 200 sit ups. And that's how I had a strike of appendicitis.

The rules are: get up in the morning, make your bed, sweep and clean the room, do morning exercises. If you don't do any of these, they give you a punishment.... They put you to do something else, harder than tidying the room or morning exercises; or they keep your weekly salary.

Negotiating rules and regulations

Beneficiaries objected to rules which did not make sense to them or which were felt to be unnecessarily restrictive. For example, one victim who did not have any specific security risks according to the police was prevented by the rules from spending time with her mother who lived in the same city where the shelter was based. Even phone contact was limited and she was able to call her mother only once a week. Given that reintegration was the goal of the programme, being disconnected from her family seemed to be counterproductive.

I could go to my mother, but I had to return at ten pm. They let me go. Then I would return at ten pm. But that upset me, why at ten pm? Why I can't stay to sleep at my mother?... I was unsatisfied

because I couldn't go out, I couldn't phone my mother when I wanted and because we had to go to bed at eleven p.m. That upset me. This is not the army.

Similarly, another victim explained how the restrictions had a direct impact on her efforts to build relationships and limited her autonomy, both important parts of the recovery process.

It would only be normal that if I met someone I'd say I live in the shelter. And I'd come here and say that I'm seeing someone and that I want to go out with him. So I met this guy in the video club, we've been seeing each other for two years now, and he invites me out, but I can't go because I have to be home by ten. What should I tell him about why I can't go out, why I don't have a phone? They're depriving people of all these things. Maybe I want to get drunk. I need it at some moment... Why must they control it and say you can't do it? And all the things I wasn't allowed to do. I'd go to [a nearby town], get drunk and then come to the shelter and say...I don't even remember the lies I said.

It is important to have rules for maintaining order and avoiding tension and conflict. And many of the shelter beneficiaries discussed how rules were important for them as residents in the programme. One resident explained how she was unhappy about some of the other residents breaking the rules of the shelter; "The [social workers] tried to talk to them to explain and teach them the right things but these girls simply disobey rules. Because of one we all suffer and I don't like this. If I needed problems I could have stayed at home. I was already tired of problems, I had them every day and I came here to be peaceful and mind my own business". In other cases, respondents explained how programme rules provided a feeling of security and were not excessive:

No alcohol, no drugs... not revealing things. You cannot give anyone the number. We have a landline but we can only call if the number cannot be identified. We have to know who we are calling, we only call landlines and zero is blocked.

First, you cannot do [prostitution] and you were trusted with everything. But the only rule is that you cannot be involved in prostitution. You can start school or find a job or something like that.

That being said, for many victims — the vast majority of whom are adult women — some rules and regulations were problematic and even disempowering.⁴³

Overall it was important for beneficiaries that rules were not excessive or unreasonable. Some trafficked persons explained that for them the programme rules were fine when they were consistent with the rules one generally has when living at home:

Yes, typical things... They were the same rules — no alcohol, no drugs, no revealing the address, no going out too much, you're supposed to tell someone when you're going out. In the beginning we were supposed to report all the time, in the beginning, the first month and a half it was only until eleven pm, and then we could go out occasionally... basically there were some rules, basically it was not doing the things you wouldn't do at home. It wasn't that strict. Basically, the reasonable limitations, not like in those shelters where they overdo it.

Rules were okay. No alcohol in the apartment. They told us the rules before we moved in. We had to be at home at eleven pm. "If you have obligations in the morning, we don't care if you stayed late, obligations have to be fulfilled." It was for our sake. It was very good. We received money. [Our obligations were] school, work. You miss these three times and you are out. They were working with us. There was trust building. It was not important for them that we were at home before eleven pm; they wanted to see if we will respect rules.

Somewhat paradoxically it seems that rules were often unevenly implemented by different staff within a programme, which might be read as recognition that some rules are heavy handed or, arguably, unnecessary:

We were escorted for two months, and then they let us go. The policeman who was guarding us just said "trust". We go and come back, from two to five pm.

⁴³ Similarly, Bjerkan & Dyrliid (2006) noted that some victims found rules and regulations constraining,

Vesna told us she had experienced it as difficult to stay in the rehabilitation shelter. She had a feeling that the personnel wanted to control her. She had got to know that a lot of the women who had been staying in this particular shelter ended up going abroad once more and she assumed the control exercised by the personnel was an effort to prevent this from happening to her and the other women staying there.

They took mobile phones from us. It was okay. I liked [two social workers] and [the psychologist]. I would enter the office and then we would play music on the computer. They would allow us to check our mobiles if we had some calls. We could send some message then and we would return mobiles after.

Some victims who had experience with different shelter models, both at home and abroad, spoke about the difference between restrictions in different types of programmes. One woman explained how in one programme the rules were extensive and there were many restrictions:

No, phones weren't allowed in the beginning. We could switch on our phones once a week, check messages, in the presence of someone working there. We weren't allowed to answer the messages. I could phone my mom or one of my parents once a month or two or three times... Later you were allowed to phone a female friend, then a male friend and that was all. And the workers there would sometimes take our phones.

She juxtaposed this with her experience in a more open-concept programme:

When I came to [this programme], it was all about trust. They let us make phone calls, we had a landline, we had mobiles, we had everything and they trusted us. They gave us everything, but they provided it in a way that they were waiting to see if we would betray that trust. So in the beginning it was basically about seeing what would happen and how it would happen. So we were paying them back in a way for all the things they gave us because you figure, I didn't use to have anything before.

Another respondent also compared her experience in a closed shelter where she was immediately after trafficking and in an open programme:

We could go out freely, stay out as long as we want, have boyfriends. But we were not allowed to reveal where we lived or bring anyone there... But it was really nice, nice and relaxing. Unlike when I came [to the closed shelter]. It was a disaster, a real prison. It was like some home where you feel awful.

There are necessarily differences in the need for rules based on the security situation of individual beneficiaries and the objective of the programme. And there are certainly situations when a closed model and other restrictions are needed. However, it became clear in the interviews that restrictions were often implemented across the board and with little attention to individual protection and needs. That being said, the research process also yielded information about different models which, arguably, stand as good practices. In some programmes, assistance is multi-staged, with high security stages initially that allow for decompression and the requisite time for the victim to separate psychologically from the trafficker. At a later stage — usually after a period of a few weeks or perhaps a month — some restrictions are lifted, allowing for a more normalised recovery period.

One respondent explained how the rules in one programme were adjusted over time and in discussion with the beneficiaries, based on their needs and situation. In one situation, some of the beneficiaries had broken the rules of the programme — staying out too late and drinking alcohol.

The staff found out about that... So they called a meeting and I was thinking that they would throw me out for coming late. But instead we sat down and discussed things as normal people do, to see what each person wants and needs, and what they could do to meet those needs. And I asked them why I wasn't able to go out, why won't them let me spend one weekend at home, why all the people from [the capital] were able to go... So, first we settled that, you can go home and sleep over. Then [the social workers] came the next day and said they decided that we could go out when we wanted, "if you want to stay out until four in the morning, okay". The only condition was that everyone fulfilled their obligations, meaning you can't be late for work, school. So we started functioning really well. It was a breakthrough. It's important when no one has control over you... Having that freedom is really... you're human regardless of what happened in the past. You've got some problems, maybe with yourself, but that's what I needed, to be able to go out, and socialise, and not make the shelter my whole world.

As has been noted in shelter services for victims of violence, there is no 'one size fits all' model and people may be left behind when they don't like or are not able to adapt to such models. Some victims may feel that the combined impact of a series of restricting rules trigger unsettling connections to

the controlled environment and the sense of powerlessness they faced in the exploitative situation they escaped. Some women need constant supervision, especially at vulnerable stages, while others respond better to the group model where they can get support from others (Fulbright 2004). Considering all of these dynamics is important in the development and regular adjustment of models of care for trafficking victims.

Complexity of the reintegration process

The social and economic environment into which a victim of trafficking is reintegrated (or integrated) is comprised of different layers — family, community and society — all of which represent different interests and values, which, in turn, have an impact on the reintegration process (Derks 1998: 15). Interviews with victims revealed just how complex this process can be for many victims and that re/integration is seldom smooth or linear.

In most cases, victims return to the same social and economic situation that they left initially, the one that triggered their initial migration. And, while assistance can provide some support in addressing their pre and post-trafficking problems, it is often insufficient to address the full range of issues that victims faced. In essence, to return home involves reintegration into an environment which, in the past, may have been unsustainable and even unhealthy. The difficulties of trafficking add another layer of stress and strain further the situation.

I grew up in very difficult conditions. In the house of my father and my mother I don't have the minimal conditions of living, lack of food, hot water, put aside the care of my parents, only quarrelling and beating I have seen. My mother is the main reason why I finished like this.

Reintegration and return tends to be marked by particularly high levels of uncertainty and tension and these feelings are often, at least in part, rooted in the fear of returning without having fulfilled the aim of leaving home in the first place. One of the main problems in reintegration is that the victims often lack a basis for reintegration — they have no job and no money and they may also live in poverty (Bjerkan & Dyrliid 2006b). Equally, the social environment — family and/or community — may involve components which not only do not support reintegration but even undermine it.

More generally, it must be noted that trafficked persons face structural problems like endemic unemployment, high costs of living, lack of state

assistance — which cannot be tackled by (generally quite small) assistance programmes.⁴⁴ It is worth underlining that in spite of the satisfaction of many victims with much of the support they received, they stressed as central in any reintegration their need for employment and economic support, generally the main triggers for their initial migration.

[About what services are needed] A well paid job...there are no workplaces in my village... The only thing that worries me is the fact that I don't have a job. I would feel more assured if I could save some money to be able to support my family.

Now I am with my family. For me and for them, it is important that I am not anymore with the person who harmed me so much. I help my mother at housework and come from time to time to meet the girls here. However I am not satisfied. Our economic situation is very hard and I need a job to continue to support myself and my family.

Bjerkan & Dyrliid (2006b) found that the kind of training offered to women during their rehabilitation can contribute to reintegration success. Trafficked women may enjoy increased respect both from their relatives and in their local environments if they return home with either financial or other forms of resources, such as income generation skills. In these cases the women may find that their trafficking experience has been converted into something positive. That being said, even those who were able to find work often found that the salary was not enough to meet their needs or that the working conditions were such that they could not lead a normal life with family:

Yes, I worked long hours, from twelve to sixteen hours. I wanted to find something with regular hours but I couldn't find anything.

⁴⁴ Programmes offer skills training and, at times, small business opportunities to trafficked persons. But these training courses may not be sufficient to build the requisite skills to find relevant long-term employment and may not be adapted to and viable within the local economy. As well, victims may not be able to accept longer-term training options when there is the immediate need to contribute to their family economy. And small business options have not always proven successful for trafficked persons and may, in some situations, amplify vulnerability. Where individuals incur debt because of a small business, this might lead them to return to trafficking to meet this debt. Similarly, businesses run by victims who are socially stigmatised may not be viable, with community members unwilling to support her success or resentful of the assistance she has received (Derks 1998; Somach & Surtees 2005; Surtees 2000).

Now I am okay, but with some little difficulties. The salary is not enough. I was told to stay in the centre when I asked to go out and live in an apartment, because it is better. But I didn't want to. When we were in the centre, we had very good food, now we can hardly afford it.

If they can help me with some sort of assistance, either with money or with food. The salary is not enough for food, although I am by myself and I don't pay electricity, water and rent. But I can hardly pass the month. I go to work at six o'clock in the morning and I come back at six o'clock in the afternoon and you know how much the salaries here are.

An associated issue is that life abroad has given some individuals a taste of affluence which they cannot achieve in their home country. As a result, trafficked persons may decide that a return home — to their country, community or family — is not an acceptable or desirable option.

I wanted to stay in [the destination] but I also wanted to return to my child... I liked a lot the lifestyle in [the destination country] and I didn't want to leave there.

It was simply psychologically difficult for me to accept the differences in the lifestyle here, in a common village, without minimal living conditions, while I was remembering the luxurious living conditions in [the EU]... I thought that if I talked to someone from [the EU] I would somehow be more in touch with civilization.

In a noteworthy number of cases victims faced temporary setbacks and even “failures” in the assistance and reintegration process. Reintegration is not linear or uncomplicated and victims may need to return to the programme at different times in their post-trafficking life, seeking either crisis intervention or to address a more deep-rooted problem. Some victims temporarily returned to programmes after a period of living independently; after a conflict in their family, economic crisis or tension in their personal relationships. Some victims sought assistance a number of times after “graduating” from the programme. In many cases this assistance provided a safety net, which many lacked within their broader social environment. This option to temporarily return or seek support was, for many victims, vital to their continued recovery:

I stayed before in this shelter for six months but then I wanted to move with my boyfriend. It was for one year. I had to give a new statement to the police and I met [the director] again and she felt that it was something wrong so she asked me if I wanted to come back and I could come. This thing impressed me.

[The social worker] told me that the door is open for me always... They told me that I can come back at any time. I accepted that because I didn't want to go to my mother like that [after an argument].

[My boyfriend's mother] is the owner [of the shop] and she can't accept our relationship. I was working the whole day, since other girls would leave, because of her temper. She was yelling at others, whining all the time. She fired [my boyfriend and me]. We lived together at that time. But we argued because he was very jealous. So I left the apartment and returned to shelter.

In other cases, set-backs did not involve victims returning to assistance programmes. Rather, victims spoke about a return to activities they had done while trafficked — in most cases prostitution — as a “resolution” to the problems they were facing in their reintegration:

I had many episodes when I wanted to drop everything and go back to the streets where I would try to make money for myself. I just had moments like this when I felt that that life was too easy. This thing with the street was in my blood. I was so used to it.

When I was at home with my parents, we did not have enough to eat and I used to look out on the street and think at the choices that I had. And the street looked like a way to make money.

It became clear in the interviews that trafficked persons faced many unexpected obstacles — social, economic and personal. And because of their vulnerability — due to trafficking as well as, in some cases, preceding trafficking — these small crises may be sufficient to derail their recovery and reintegration. As such, flexibility in programmes — the possibility that they can return, willingness to provide support at a later phase, attention to their individual needs — addresses, at least in part, the fact that re/integration is not smooth, linear or fast.

The importance of having someone to rely on during the reintegration process was a consistent theme in interviews with victims and seemed also to be an element in the “successful cases” interviewed. For many this predictability and reliability was found, at least temporarily, with the staff in the assisting programmes, both from NGOs and government institutions.

I feel good when I come to talk to [the social worker]. I think about everything during the week and then I come and talk to her. I tell her everything and it feels much better. She understands me and I keep nothing from her. Because I don't have a friend with whom I could talk and whom I could trust.

Yes, she [the social worker] asks me when I come home, “How was school, let's see what's for homework”. She cares, they all do, but she asks if there are any new marks in school. If there is nothing I'm supposed to learn, and I always say I do, then she says, “I'm going to check it, have it learnt by then and then, and if I'm not here that day, you can ask someone else to check your studying”.

When I had an argument with the girls, the psychologist invited me to her room and we talked for hours. She also talked to me when she saw I was in a bad mood. She supported me morally. This made me feel better.

Now I am happy that I told [the social worker] everything because she understood me and offered me emotional support. And I am sure that should I have troubles in my life or need protection, I can always count on the support of [this organisation].

While continuity of support from programmes is important, it is not a long-term solution and attention is also needed to developing and transitioning to other support networks. As such, it is equally important for trafficked persons to have support outside of the ant-trafficking assistance framework, ideally from family, friends and the community who will likely be an important part of their future. Support programmes need also consider how they can work to activate and strengthen supportive relationships within the close surroundings of the beneficiaries, which may involve family mediation, counselling, community awareness-raising or different forms of assistance to the family (and even community) as a whole. Victims themselves spoke about the importance of these person relations in their recovery:

I think that trafficking experience is something that you will never forget. I find very helpful my husband's help and support. If he hadn't supported me, I might have gone mad. It is very important when you have a close person who can understand you and help.

Balancing autonomy and dependency

One of the most complicated aspects of assistance is striking the balance between providing support and not creating a situation of dependency. Where victims lack alternative forms of support — and this is often the case, at least in the immediate post-trafficking context — this is not an uncomplicated situation. Many victims had a strong dependence on service providers and anti-trafficking actors as well as the range of services they offered. Many victims expressed how programme staff was their “family” and that they loved and depended on these people.

When I met that woman from shelter, she was everything to me in that moment. Mother and father, I saw everything in her.

Yes, they told me that I would be met by a social worker from [the organisation at home] and then all of the necessary assistance would be offered until I had my feet firmly on the ground.

And if I have a problem, I can come to [the shelter staff] and tell her because she's like a mother to me. I had nothing to learn from my mother. All that I learned I did so from her.

Trying to develop and support autonomy in victims is severely constrained by the environment in which social workers and victims themselves. Service providers must try to balance the provision of support without giving too much support; being friend and family to victims but only in the short to medium term; helping them to solve problems without creating dependency; wanting to solve their problems but knowing that this can undermine their autonomy. Bjerkan and Dyrliid (2006b) found that many reintegration programmes residents depended heavily on the counsellors for advice and support in different matters, which leaves a lot of power in the hands of the counsellors and demands great caution and sensitivity in order to be balanced in a constructive manner.

Some of the persons interviewed had clearly become dependent on assistance and service providers faced a difficult task in trying to develop

their autonomy. Take, for example, the statement of one woman who expressed her desire to be supported for a long time:

I would like to ask you to send my message to people, because I can't reach them. Especially to [the coordinator of the NGO]. I would like to ask them to help me for some time when I go out of the shelter so I can live alone.

Comments from other victims echo this dependency:

I did not like that this assistance has limits. It is impossible to provide me with some housing.

It's good that I'm being helped, however, I need to be helped every-day. Sometimes I call the helpline and tell them that I urgently need milk for the baby and they reply to me that it is impossible.

I want to be rendered assistance on a permanent basis, at my demand.

It is also important to recognise that the conditions of exploitation often contribute to a victim's dependency. One victim of both domestic violence and trafficking talked about being controlled for so long that she found it hard to imagine how she would be able to move on to an autonomous life: "I was missing out on life anyway, always in somebody else's hands. I was what you call his slave. Go there, do this, you can't do this, can't do that, you should do things this or that way. And that's how I lived. Only under orders".

One key aspect of building autonomy is to engage victims in a discussion of their future plans and aspirations. However, this was not always done by programme staff. One woman interviewed did not seem to be aware of plans for her future and, when asked how long she would stay at a shelter or about plans beyond this stage, she expressed a notable lack of clarity: "I don't know anything. Nobody spoke with me about it". Others also revealed their lack of involvement in decisions being made about their post-trafficking life. One woman trafficked to the EU spoke about how the police, having taken her statement, took her to a shelter. When asked if they had discussed this with her she explained: "No, they didn't ask. They told me that it's going to be good for my safety. I didn't know anything. They could have told me anything. I had no idea". Similarly, another woman described being forcibly taken to the shelter after what she described as

her “interrogation” by the police: “And then, the [police] forced me. Literally, the police forced me to go to shelter. I spit on that shelter... I will spit on it always”. Some victims were forced to be involved in the legal process, without being briefed about what this entailed, potential repercussions or giving their consent: “If somebody had told me that I could refuse to testify, I would have done it. This could have made me feel much safer. Yes, I took part in testifying and now I regret about that. Because I don’t feel safe. I worry about my child and myself”.

That being said, many organisations employ an empowerment approach in their work, striving toward autonomy and independence. This empowerment approach assists trafficked persons in reclaiming control over their lives and ensuring that adult women and men are treated like autonomous adults (Jordan 2002: 30). For many victims, assistance clearly had allowed them to build the confidence and strength to lead an autonomous life.

I am completely satisfied. Everything was very good... Now everything depends on me.

I have had more meetings with the psychologist. I liked that very much. The psychologist helped me to better understand myself. To regain my confidence ... I feel much better when I speak to a psychologist. It is very important... it is even necessary... psychologists teach you how to be strong.

But [the social worker] doesn’t give us everything on the plate. I know I have to study. I have to behave because otherwise I would have to leave.

Many victims described how they were central to all decisions made about their assistance and protection needs and were aware that the end objective of their assistance was a transition to independence and autonomy:

I will leave when I can and when I feel that I can stand on my feet. This means that I have to be patient and work.

And then they come up with that solution... They said it wasn’t obligatory. That no one was forcing me. It was my will.

There isn’t anything I particularly disliked. Everybody was doing things while consulting me. They ask me if I want something.

[The social worker] asked me what I wanted to do and I told her that I wanted to continue with the school. I now go to school and everything is all right.

Victims themselves described how when they faced problems, staff helped them to work through these problems rather than simply providing advice or acting on their behalf. Working through issues and problems with victims was important in building autonomy and confidence:

I want to finish school first and then I'll see what I'll do. I'd like to be a hair stylist first but [my social worker] said that for me it would be best to go on with the school. She said that she wouldn't force me but she asked to think well about my future. I was in school for three weeks but then I wanted to go home. My mother fooled me with many things but [my social worker] asked me to think carefully and not listen too much to my mother. And I thought that maybe my pimp talked to my mother to pull me back [into trafficking] so I didn't go home.

Once I called the helpline and asked [the social worker] for advice. It was the time when my husband stopped drinking for a short time. My husband insisted on having one more child. I asked [her] "what shall I do?". She didn't say "do this or do that". She simply asked me if I was ready to bring up and provide for the second child if my husband had another fit of hard drinking. I liked it very much. She made me understand that I needn't hurry, that it was important to feel self-confident before making such decisions.

It often happens so that you need just one push from the organisation to wake you up and begin a new life. These organisations are not obliged to help us... In fact, quite a lot depends on us.

Some victims were clearly moving toward or at a stage of autonomy when interviewed. When asked whether they would accept further assistance, their responses indicate this emergent autonomy and confidence:

I don't think so. By now I must get through on my own. I believe that all the organisations helped me enough.

I don't think that the organisations are obliged to help me for a long time. I think that I have arms, legs. There are victims that return with

grave problems, maybe they have a greater need for help. So I don't even dare to think about more help. I already feel better knowing that these organisations are around, even if they don't offer assistance in goods.

I hope very much to enlarge my business. I am happy that my husband supports me. I am sure that the worst things are already long in the past and now many things depend only on me, on us... I think that the assistance I have already received from organisations is adequate. I am very grateful to them.

Stigma, victim blaming and discrimination

Many trafficking victims raised the issue of stigmatisation and discrimination as problems they have faced in the recovery and reintegration phase. Stigmatisation and discrimination generally occurs when the social environment — whether family or community — disapproves of an individual's behaviour or activities. In the case of trafficking victims, it is often assumed that the stigma and discrimination is related to prostitution. And certainly many victims interviewed spoke about this. That they had not entered prostitution willingly or were exploited in the process is often of no consequence in terms of assigning blame:

They do not tell me to my face but I have heard that bad rumours are spread about me in the village.

People in our community are inclined to criticize. They don't understand such things and they are more likely to blame rather than show compassion.

No, they didn't know [about my trafficking] but there were rumours that I worked as a prostitute there since I came back with a child.

There were things with the school... There are some girls who say that I'm a whore... There is one boy but when I spend time with him the headmaster asks me why I do that. But I can't stay alone. The others avoid me. The headmaster says she is sorry. All of them tell me that I should stay on for another semester. If I go to my village they call me a whore; if I go to school they say the same thing and it's very hard to get over something like this.

I wasn't feeling comfortable [at home], thinking of what I did where and I have been, I was feeling bad. [My family] pretended they didn't see me... I kept myself in a room, stayed alone and I cried a lot. [My mother] stood away from me. I knew that even if I try to talk to her she wouldn't understand me. My mother and my father are born and live in a village. In the village people talk. I didn't go outside my house, I stayed all day inside and only sometimes I went out in the courtyard... My parents didn't want me to. I don't blame them. My little sister returned from the school crying. Her little friends were telling her, "Your sister did this and did that".

If they are going to point fingers at me, let them do it. This is probably my fate... I know that it wasn't my wish to work in prostitution... Here people don't differentiate between forced and voluntary prostitution.

Of note is that so much victim blaming and stigmatisation occurs within the immediate support environment of trafficked persons, including family and friends, to which victims return and live after their exploitation. As with the community-at-large, much blame and stigmatisation is associated with prostitution.

Even my grandmother calls me [a whore] and it hurts to hear it from someone so close.

My family told me it was all my fault. They didn't understand me. It was my brother, he blamed me. My mother is old, she didn't understand very well. There were times when I wanted to leave home. I believe it is very important for your family to support you. It is difficult to count on a strange person, because you think that if my parents didn't understand me, then who else can?

I have a little nephew and because I was in the street, my sister had forbidden me to see him. Even now when I get along better with my sister, my nephew still does not know me as his aunt.

That being said, family members often reacted differently and some victims reported how their relationship with their family had improved and had not been poisoned by stigma and blame:

We weren't getting along too well before. There were fights, beatings. Now it's much better. There were still some fights but not like before... When I argue, I start crying, my mother comes to me and supports me. They talk to me.

I am sure that my mother was happy to see me and my father too. But, on the other hand, they were trying to avoid any discussion about what went on there or to ask any questions... Yes, I told them everything and they were disappointed and upset, but not with me. They were upset because of what had happened. I didn't expect that they would be so good to me.

I trust only my husband. He supports me very much... He takes care of my child.

In other situations, victims found support amongst some relatives or family members and not others:

I don't receive bad words from my parents but I do get them from my grandparents and my aunts. My mother is always with me but not my father.

My brother and sister still love me. My husband always humiliates me, calls me a prostitute. He is always jealous, although he has no reason to be.

I planned to stay with my aunt, because she understands things better than my mom. And I explained to [my aunt] why I'd stay with her. [My aunt] would understand if I told her about what happened but my mom would never even look at me again.

Where victims of trafficking were being assisted, this, at times, amplified the negative reaction and discrimination of friends, neighbours and community members. Some seemed to resent assistance being given to "prostitutes", while others apparently felt that assistance is something only for "social deviants", like alcoholics. The need to rely on assistance seemingly lowered the person in some people's estimation and, in some cases, seemed to be particularly an issue amongst men who, according to social norms, should be able to take care of themselves as well as their families.

I think our community doesn't quite understand why girls who were sexually exploited should be provided with some help. They think prostitutes should not be helped.

I heard from other girls that in their villages, where the people know what happened to them, the fellow villagers are not very glad when they see assistance delivered to them from specialized organisations... For example, a girl who opened a sales booth in her village, while being assisted by an organisation, was in a way rejected in her village. The people gossiped about her that "it was better if they helped proper hardworking people, instead of this prostitute". I think that in a small village it is impossible to keep secret the fact that someone helps you.

Yes, at least where we live, people don't regard you well, if you ask for assistance from state organisations... Usually, assistance is requested by drunkards or people that don't want to work to maintain themselves.

Most people do not believe that it was really impossible to exit the slavery. ... They think if such things happened to you, you are stupid. And stupid people do not stand high in people's esteem... So, you should scramble out of the situation yourself.

... and blame too. I suppose that in my village people would blame me saying that "after such disgraceful behaviour, he doesn't deserve to be helped".

Many men are ashamed of appealing for help, because our society does not really accept or approve of men who appeal for assistance. They must manage on their own.

In some cases, it was difficult to disentangle whether the stigma was because of receiving assistance, their trafficking experience or because of a stigmatising identity like prostitute or being from an ethnic minority:

My husband blames me very much. He says "go there, go, they help prostitutes and why do they help prostitutes? They'd better help normal people".

If people in my neighbourhood find out that I was given this flat, they will probably say "well, a [woman from an ethnic minority] was

given a flat but normal people are not assisted". That is why I will not tell how I got this flat. And my acquaintances whom I told about the flat still don't believe me.

Stigma, blame and discrimination seem, in some cases to be time bound and some victims reported how community stigma to which they were initially subjected, changed over the weeks, months and years following their return home: "The people gossip and speak ill of me. They think that I worked in prostitution, because I came back pregnant... Lately, it has all calmed down a bit". Brunovskis & Surtees (2007) also found that it was often a matter of time — sometime years — before the community accepted them back and treated them normally. One victim who returned to her home community was shunned each time she went to the village shop, treatment which continued for two years before the situation finally normalised.⁴⁵

While blame, discrimination and stigma were certainly pressing issues for many, it is important to point out that it was not an inevitable result of trafficking, whether for sexual exploitation or other forms. In some cases, it took some time to make family and friends understand and accept back the victim; in other cases they accepted him/her immediately.

My husband and my parents know about this...nobody else knows...and I don't want them to know... In general, my parents and even my husband support me and feel compassion towards me.

My sister totally supports me...she feels compassion towards me.

My family understood me and they didn't blame me.

When I went with my counsellor to [my town] for a new identity card, they took me to my sister. For some time I didn't want to tell her. But when I saw that I will stay for a longer period in the shelter, they took me to her and I explained it all to her. At the first moment she suspected that I was lying, that I did something, that I was in prison. Later she believed me and she cried.

An issue which has been largely under-considered to date is how stigma and blame can be overcome in victim's post-trafficking lives. Brunovskis &

⁴⁵ Similarly, in Cambodia, while the initial return was noted by all, this attention generally abated. One woman explained, "everywhere I went, I heard people talking about me...After two or three months they stopped. Now I go to the market to sell firewood as before" (Derks 1998: 43, cf. Surtees 2000: 190-191).

Surtees (2007) have argued that there are also likely behaviours which mitigate the stigma, thereby allowing the family or community to “forgive”. Better understanding the precise causes of stigma and culturally appropriate ways that stigma and discrimination might be mitigated is needed.

Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

Given the risk of stigma and blame, many victims seek to keep their trafficking experience a secret from family and friends as well as the community, which may impact their decisions about assistance:

This year in March [one organisation’s] volunteers came to our village to spread brochures with the helpline telephone number. My mother came up to them and told them what had happened to me. She took one of the brochures and gave it to me. At first I couldn’t make up my mind but I re-read it several times. I was afraid that my story would be spread. Finally, I decided to call this organisation because the information would be confidential and I would remain anonymous.

Other victims in the region expressed similar concerns about confidentiality:

Because [this] is a small country and I was afraid that everyone will find out about what had happened to me.

I didn’t have any confidence that the information will be kept secret... I was afraid that the whole village would find out, where I was and what happened to me.

Trafficking victims are afraid to ask where to go and ask for help. They are afraid because they are not sure that information about them will be confidential. I would not have asked for help if it hadn’t been for my friend, who is also a victim.

For me it is very important that my secret is kept. I don’t want rumours about me in my village... Many of the [victims] are reluctant to request help because they are afraid that their stories will get out.

In some cases these fears — that their story will be public — may lead victims to decline assistance. That is, to accept assistance may identify them

as trafficked to family and community (cf. Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). This is particularly likely to be the case when organisations are known as anti-trafficking agencies.

Even if the girls know about the [assistance] they are afraid to approach them because the whole village will gossip. I am convinced that if I offer any victim from our village to receive assistance from [the organisation], this person will refuse, because she is afraid that the whole village will find out. I don't even know how other girls here receive help. Many girls don't have the courage to apply for help because their privacy will not be respected.

For some victims, satisfaction with assistance was linked, at least in part, with the confidential way that their case had been handled:

Nobody knows. Neither my neighbours nor my mother. And I am happy that my secret has been kept by these organisations. I am simply afraid that my mother will not be able to keep this secret and the villagers will start gossiping... Unfortunately, in villages information spreads very quickly and it is not always understood correctly... They are inclined to criticize trafficking victims.

I am very satisfied [with the services]. I like that [the director] keeps my story confidential. I can really trust her.

She promised to help me and she did. And she kept my story a secret.

Of note were the instances where victim's privacy and confidentiality were breached within the assistance framework and, in many cases, in ways that had serious and long standing repercussions for the trafficked person and their family.

When I came back, I tested positive for HIV at the local clinic. Then the whole village got to know it. My neighbours learnt about it. I had very many problems. They didn't let me approach the well. They treated me as if I were a piece of dirt. They humiliated me. I had many problems with my child at school. They wanted to expel him from school, although I showed them the negative result of his test, under different pretexts. I suffered a lot.

When asked whether she had made any complaints, she explained she had tried: "Yes, to the chief doctor of the clinic, but nothing came of it.

Now it's too late. How can you change the attitude of the community? I should never have thought that it could happen to me. I thought I would never get in a situation worse than trafficking".⁴⁶

Some victims also faced problems when their trafficking experience was shared with the media:

Once the local policeman sent a group of journalists to my house. They came to take my picture. I asked them to leave me alone. At that moment my lawyer came and I asked him to help me get rid of those stupid journalists since he was my lawyer. He did nothing and sometimes even laughed.

[The police officer] gave a statement to the press. There was my full name... All newspapers were full of that... I couldn't believe that my story reached [the neighbouring country]. I was shocked.

Such problems raise issues about how information about victims and their cases can and should be shared and known amongst anti-trafficking actors. While there are reasons why information might be shared between agencies and institutions, there are equally cases where victims may be uncomfortable or unhappy with this.

Yes, the police from the railway station [in that town] sent the information to the office of the public prosecutor and to the workers of [the NGO in that town]. When I came to [the capital] I was contacted by a lawyer from that [NGO's office in the capital]. It was an unpleasant surprise for me that my testimony was going around [the country]... I didn't feel safe. It seemed to me that the whole world knew my story... It was very important for me that very few people knew it.

Yes, the police officer from [the capital] knew about my arrival, that is why he asked me to come. I don't know how he found out about

⁴⁶ Breaches of confidentiality also occurred at identification and during returns. One girl, a minor, described her interrogation by the police in her home community following her escape from trafficking, an interrogation which 'outed' her to her family and community:

What annoyed me most the whole time was an open door and the whole time there were policemen and traffic wardens turned all into ears, listening to my interrogation. And I knew all of them and they knew my brother and I felt uncomfortable".

it. Maybe because I was searched by [the police]... Certainly, I was unpleasantly surprised that the police were looking for me and I was asked to come to [the capital].

A lawyer from that [anti-trafficking] organisation asked me to tell him who exploited me and where I was exploited before I was bought by the father of my child... They told me it was for my own safety... I was convinced that this information would not be transmitted to the police. I did not agree to cooperate with [the local] police... because many of them are connected with the pimps.

Some victims reported feeling that their confidence had been violated by social workers who had shared what was, for them, intimate and personal information, with other service providers:

It turned out that [the social worker], who I liked a lot, I loved her, I trusted her, and she was a person with two faces. I discovered that.... I told her some things about my mother, about my life... She used that information and told that to everybody. Yes, it was a catastrophe for me... She was my mentor. I heard those stories she told in her office. I realized then, she was not my friend. If I tell you something confidential, you can't use that to become more important. Is that for sale? Has that market value?

Because I talk about some things and then some person comes out of nowhere and they know my story. It was supposed to stay between you and your social worker.

This is not to say that information sharing between service providers is not needed or advisable. Rather what is needed is the (limited) sharing of information on a "need to know" basis, with strict parameters and protocols for confidentiality. With such parameters, it was possible to have confidentiality, while at the same time avoiding unnecessary re-interviewing and, potentially, re-traumatisation and secondary victimization. Where such parameters were followed, the practice of limited information sharing was appreciated by trafficked persons:

Upon my arrival in [the capital], I went to [the organisation]. I came there to thank them for my rescue. I talked to [the social worker], I told what I had been through. I didn't have to re-tell anything to

the psychologist in the shelter because my case had been already sent there.... Yes, [this practice is good] but only on the condition of confidentiality.

To have only one person responsible for this in each region of [the centre]. And to do it in such a way that no one learns about [the trafficking] since confidentiality is not quite kept in regions.

I think [sharing case information], yes, it's good. Why not? Because I will not have to re-tell everything again. Of course, I insist on confidentiality. I don't want people in my village to learn about my experience. I am more inclined to speak about my experience here in [the capital] rather than in [the region] or my village where information spreads very quickly.

Specialised assistance for different and complex cases

The assistance framework was initially developed to respond to a prototypical trafficking victim — a young, adult woman trafficked for sexual exploitation. Programmes are generally shelter-based and centred in capitals. However, because of the diversity of victims and trafficking experience in SEE, there is a need to develop appropriate assistance programmes tailored to the specific needs of a diverse set of victims (national and foreign victims, minors and adults, males and females) and emerging forms of trafficking (sexual exploitation, labour, begging, delinquency, adoption). Victims exploited for labour and begging do not necessarily have the same assistance needs as persons trafficked for sexual exploitation and victims themselves identified ways in which their needs were not always thoroughly or sufficiently met within the existing assistance structures. In addition, specialized assistance is often not available for more difficult cases, like victims with disabilities, behaviour disorders, or addictions. Such cases require assistance that falls outside the scope of the normal assistance package and more attention is needed to tailoring services and assistance to such victims, including the development of interviewing skills, appropriate services and sensitized staff (Surtees 2005: 15). Victims noted some of the areas where specialised and tailored support was required.

Assistance to victims with children

Trafficking victims (women and men) with children required different types of assistance which took into account their role as mother (or father) and

the needs of their dependent children. Providing accommodation options for women and their children was an important factor in trafficking victims' decision to accept assistance. One mother and victim said: "[My daughter] is always by my side. And I am grateful to this organisation for letting me be beside her. It is the most important thing for me".

That being said, accommodating women and their children within existing shelter programmes was not always the most comfortable arrangement for mothers, other residents or children.

Sometimes I had arguments with the girls from the shelter, sometimes because of my children who disobeyed me and were crying in the corridor.

One thing that sort of bothers me the most is the child... She still cannot understand what it is all about. But she's a regular child, she likes to play and when she laughs she is a bit loud, like screaming and it is not allowed in the shelter. Maybe that one thing, but the rest is fine. For example, when she is a bit louder or when she screams or does something else which is not allowed. And I can understand it all but I cannot tell her don't scream. And, when I do tell her, I cannot expect her to understand because she is a child. They might not be happy with that. Maybe they don't like it, the fact that she is screaming or that she is laughing loudly.

That often shelters were closed, with little to no freedom of movement, added an additional level of stress. For children, who, as a result, cannot play outside, make friends or attend school, questions need to be asked about the developmental impact, even when all of their basic needs are met. One woman had been in a closed shelter with her daughter for two and half years while custody papers were obtained and legal proceedings pursued. The girl — now ten years old — was not able to attend school or play freely and was being educated on an *ad hoc* and voluntary basis by one of the staff in the shelter. That one third of her life had been in a shelter and the remaining with her mother in a trafficking situation cannot help but have affected her.

For many mothers, custody issues were also of concern and assistance with the legal process was highly valued and much needed. One woman who was later kept as the "wife" of her trafficker explained her inability to return to her home country because of custody issues with her child:

What's the plan? My plan is to have the organisation help me enrol my child in nursery school. Through them it is easier. They know people and all, so I want to get my child into the nursery. I would go home, but since it cannot be that way, I want to get a job, get my child going to nursery and become independent... I would rather go to my mother but since I can't because of the child, I will stay in [this country]... Without [the father's] signature, I cannot go. I have the child with me now but nobody has custody over her. We are waiting for the court to decide.

For women with children, another concern was their ability to care for their children in the long term given limited opportunities for social and economic reintegration. Some women relied on humanitarian assistance to provide food for their children, others talked about not being able to look for work because they had no one to care for their child, still others did not have a permanent place to live. The "normal" obstacles and complexity of assistance and reintegration are amplified in case of parents with dependent children. The provision of assistance to parents necessarily involves a consideration of the needs of their dependent children, which can include not only basic needs but also such things as school books, kindergarten and school fees, medical assistance, etc.

Serious medical and health problems

A number of organisations noted that trafficked persons experience serious and complicated health problems, beyond the "usual" gynaecological concerns related to sexual exploitation, problems which required tailored and, often expensive, medical assistance. One girl, 17 years of age, required specialized medical interventions for tumours in her breasts which developed as a result of beatings sustained while trafficked. In another case, the victim required emergency surgery abroad in response to physical injuries incurred as a result of trafficking:

I was a bit dizzy and I couldn't understand what they were talking about. I understood that there were something too close to my spine and that infection could reach the spinal fluid, which meant that they had to intervene urgently. I still don't know what was the cause of the infection and they said that this might happen again.

Similarly, two women interviewed were HIV positive as a result of their trafficking experience.⁴⁷ In the case of one woman, one of her children had also contracted the disease. From interviews, it was not clear whether the necessary treatment was always available and accessible to HIV positive patients. One respondent was taking medicine for the disease: “I take medicine regularly. I have to do it to the end of my life to prevent the virus from progressing in my organism. I always pray to God for a medicine to be invented to kill this virus”. However, the other respondent, when asked if she receives special treatment to maintain her immune system, replied that she did not, that she simply takes vitamins and eats well. In many countries in the SEE region, it is not always easy to access specialised medical assistance for a range of health problems.

Substance abuse and addiction

Addictions — to alcohol and/or narcotics — also posed a problem for many victims and generally detoxification programmes were not accessible. A number of victims described their addictions as a key issue following their exit from trafficking and some victims continued to abuse drugs or alcohol for some time:

At first, things were hard. When I was with the pimps they gave me medicines that would make me lose my head. And when I got here it was hard to get over them.

I was sick. I couldn't even get out of bed because I was eating nothing and taking only those [narcotic] pills.

Also relevant was substance abuse within the victim's family. For some victims, substance abuse was the reason they initially left home and now posed a serious impediment to their assistance and reintegration.

If my husband could be cured of alcoholism, I would be the happiest woman in the world.

⁴⁷ This is consistent with a small but noteworthy number of HIV positive beneficiaries noted in other research. In Albania, one victim was assisted in 2002 and two assisted in 2004 tested positively for HIV. In BiH, service providers reported that a handful of foreign victims have tested positive for HIV. And, in Moldova, since 2000 IOM has assisted nine HIV+ victims. The issue of HIV/AIDS infection came to the fore in the region when, in 2004, a Ukrainian victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina died of the disease (Surtees 2005: 74, 155, 361).

You see, [my parents] are alcoholics and they were not quite able to analyze the situation, what might happen to me. I don't blame them. Moreover, the [trafficker] paid them for the alcohol.

For victims, who may not have any option but to return to their family, substance abuse within the family may pose significant risks and complications. This underlines the importance of access to substance abuse and detoxification programmes for not only victims but also persons within their immediate environment.

Assistance to the family as a whole

Assistance should ideally take into account the specific family situation of trafficked persons and, wherever possible, seek to address more general family needs. In one case a victim explained that he had accepted assistance precisely because his siblings were in need: “[I accepted assistance] because I thought that my younger brothers and sisters needed that help offered”. Where family problems — whether social or economic — have, in some way, contributed to trafficking, this is particularly pressing.

It is also important to note that problems can and do arise in families — even in the most successful reintegration process — which impedes a victim's recovery. One woman explained how she had started her own small business and was doing well. But an economic problem in her family meant that she suffered setbacks which were only remedied by targeted assistance:

[The organisation] helped me to start my small business, which deals with selling second-hand clothes. That period in my life was an excellent one. The business was better and better the whole year. I am very grateful to them but I didn't keep my word to invest the money in my business. It happened so that my husband's parents fell ill. I needed money for their treatment.

Because assisting organisations were able to respond to the emergency needs of this woman and her family — medical needs as well as some humanitarian support — it was possible for the woman to get her business back on track. Importantly, assisting organisations coordinated the provision of these services to meet her different needs, which, in the end, led to her successful reintegration. Such examples highlight that reintegration is often not only dependent on the victim and that problems faced in the family or community can impede the recovery and reintegration process.

Therefore, options to provide support for victim's families or additional support when a family is in crisis could serve not only to galvanize recovery successes but prevent failed reintegration and, in some cases, re-trafficking.

Long term care for victims who cannot return to their families

Some victims come from home environments which are not conducive to recovery and sustainable reintegration. In a number of cases, victims originated from problematic families where a return home would mean living in an abusive environment, dealing with substance abuse, not having sufficient access to basic needs and/or being re-trafficked. In other cases, victims simply did not have homes to return to. Options for long-term care, including accommodation options, constitutes a serious gap in many countries.

In the case of minors, alternatives were severely constrained and, where longer term care was not available, some victims returned to dangerous situations. One young girl who had been sold by her mother was returned to her (and her abusive stepfather) after a short stay at a shelter: "I would have stayed there for longer, after all [my mother] had done to me... I'm sure I wouldn't have returned home, my stepfather was abusing me, I wouldn't have gone back".

Specialised psychological and psychiatric assistance

The availability of specialised psychological assistance for victims constitutes a gap in service in many countries, particularly outside capital cities. In some countries, because of resource issues, social workers perform psychological counselling with trafficking victims, including those with serious mental health issues. Access to professional psychological and psychiatric assistance is most commonly available in residential programmes, although the type and amount of counselling varies considerably according to the length of time a beneficiary spends at a shelter. Accordingly, counselling provided at longer-term reintegration shelter is more comprehensive than counselling at the shorter-term shelters, which tends to focus more on stabilizing a beneficiary. As most victims stay at shelters for short periods of time, they are generally provided with more basic "stabilization" counselling. When victims return home, the provision of appropriate psychological services is complicated as most specialized counselling services are located in capital cities and most victims originate and return to areas outside the capital. There is a need for longer-term counselling that could be provided by specialized NGOs or trained health care workers in home

communities as a component of reintegration programmes. In addition, some victims have been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, requiring qualified, clinical psychiatric care which is not widely available. Residentially-based psychological or psychiatric programmes are even less common (Surtees 2006b: 80).

Because of the general lack of specialised services, a number of victims were accommodated within shelter alongside victims with mental illness. Not only is this stressful for other victims but also means that the special needs of the “difficult” victim are not addressed. One victim described her experience at the shelter: “Yes, and then they put us up in one house... one girl had some problem in her head. She’s crazy, she can just kill someone”. Another victim explained the situation in the shelter where she stayed:

So this is how those beds were lined up. There were five beds. And there was this girl, this next bed was empty, I was sleeping in this one, [another girl] was here, and [another girl] was there... One beneficiary was mentally disturbed and she was on medication she didn’t want to take. She had hallucinations and was seeing things in her dreams. She often went sleep walking.

However, this same case also highlights the difficult situation faced in many countries where there are inadequate and inappropriate facilities for victims requiring psychiatric or psychological interventions. When, as in this case, the individual lacks family support, there are a few alternatives but to return to the shelter programme: “She was having hallucinations, she left several times and came back. Then again, she didn’t have parents or anyone”. Finding appropriate care options for this profile of beneficiaries is not uncomplicated both in the short and long term.

Assistance for victims with disabilities

Trafficking of persons with disabilities, both mental and physical, has been documented from, to and within SEE.⁴⁸ Services required vary and must

⁴⁸ Victims with disabilities were assisted in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia (FYROM), Moldova, Montenegro, the UN administered territory of Kosovo, Romania and Serbia. For example, in Moldova, among 672 victims assisted by IOM Chisinau between 2001 and 2004, 15 per cent had a mental disability at recruitment, accounting for 9.9 per cent of assisted victims in 2001, 9.3 per cent in 2002, 14.5 per cent in 2003 and 6.3 per cent in 2004. Similarly, a number of victims assisted in 2003 were physically disabled. In Serbia in 2004, one victim trafficked for sexual exploitation (or 8.3 per cent) had a mental disability, while 28.6 per cent

be tailored to individual needs determined on a case of case basis. This generally involves specialized medical services, specialized legal representation, the appointment of a legal guardian for mentally disabled victims, long-term accommodation options, specialized training, employment placement in a protected workplace and long-term case follow-up. Disabled victims may also require assistance in accessing, communicating and advocating with service providers and state agencies.

Currently there are limited options available for persons with disabilities. One woman who had been trafficked for begging was not only blind and slightly hearing impaired but also elderly. For her, options were few and service providers had difficulties accessing the services she required including housing options and a complicated eye surgery to partially restore her sight. Similarly, finding appropriate educational and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is very difficult. One woman faced problems getting stable employment because of her epilepsy:

I also have a serious health problem. I am epileptic and no one really wants to hire me. Even if I hide that, I am fired right after the first fit. I usually have fits when I become nervous... I can't really find a job. I was ready to work in the field for some farmers but not everyone has the courage to hire me when they find out about my disease.

An additional complication is that such specialised assistance is likely to be costly and outside the resources of any one organisation or institution. This is not an issue unique to the SEE region. For example, in Canada, there are very few programmes for abused people with disabilities and there is a general failure of mainstream organisations to accommodate and address the needs of persons with disabilities. There is also a lack of knowledge about the issues faced by abused people with disabilities and problems with the attitudes of service providers *vis-à-vis* this target group (Cooper et al 2004: 35)

Male victims of trafficking

Male victims accounted for a noteworthy minority of assisted victims in 2003 and 2004 in SEE.⁴⁹ However, male victims cannot always be easily

of Serbian victims assisted in 2004 were mentally or physically disabled (Surtees 2005: 256, 344, 371, 501)

⁴⁹ Male victims were assisted in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and the UN administered territory of Kosovo, having been trafficked for labour, begging, delinquency and adoption. For example, in Albania, 70 per cent of victims trafficked

accommodated in the existing assistance models. In part, this is because much assistance is residentially based and specifically tailored to women. Current facilities do not lend themselves to mixed sex accommodation. One respondent, an adult male trafficked to the former Soviet Union, returned home to find his apartment had been occupied and he had no place to stay. Similarly, a 16-year-old male minor trafficked for begging within SEE was temporarily accommodated in the shelter for foreign (female) victims while his documents were secured but, because the shelter was not equipped to accommodate an unaccompanied male victim and no other services were identified, he was sent home unaccompanied by train after only a few days and in spite of the fact that his mother had been involved in his trafficking (Surtees 2005; cf. Surtees 2006b). The lack of assistance for men, therefore, may not only translate into a failure to meet male needs but may even amplify their vulnerability to exploitation and even re-trafficking.

However, even where different forms of assistance were available (and much needed) — for example, medical care, counselling, legal assistance — men were not always inclined to seek it out or accept it.

First of all they find it very difficult psychologically... They don't tell all the details of what they have been through, though some of my colleagues told me absolutely horrible things. For example, many men were exploited physically until their health was almost ruined. But they don't say that and they don't even ask for medical assistance.

And many of them don't go to see their doctors [but are] still suffering from some chronic diseases, having problems with their spine, stomach, hernia.

According to our respondents, it was only in dire situations that men would accept assistance:

Only if there are some serious problems with health or the man has nowhere to stay. As far as I know, men don't like losing time visiting doctors or to be far from families. As I have told you, it is more difficult for them to accept assistance and when it is accepted, it should be immediately offered (until they change their mind) and in a short period of time.

for labour, begging or delinquency in 2003 and 2004 were male, and 47.8 per cent of foreign victims of labour trafficking in Serbia in 2004 were male (Surtees 2005: 13).

In part, this may be because to self-represent as a “victim” may not mesh with a man’s sense of self. To be a man in many communities is to be strong, self-sufficient and able to care not only for oneself but also for one’s family.

Men think that they are stronger and they have to find a way out of a difficult situation by themselves without asking for help.

Many men don’t tell about what happened to them. They are ashamed of the fact that they were tricked and lied to. They would never request assistance from organisations because they will be mocked and laughed at by their relatives. A man must manage his problems by himself.

Decisions about assistance link not only to self-image but also to social perception. Assistance potentially identifies men as failed migrants or trafficked persons to others in the family and/or community, neither of which are socially acceptable. Here again, social constructions of manhood are salient:

When they come home they are glad that they can bring home at least some money. Otherwise, how can they explain their absence? And if they tell their families that they need some money for a treatment — the costs of a treatment are quite high in our country — then their secret can be disclosed.

I did not even believe that people like me [victims of trafficking] are helped... It seemed to me there should not be such organisations which specialize in helping people like me, moreover, men. ... You know, people in our community think the following way: if a man got into such a situation, he is stupid.

In general in our community men are not to complain about anything. A man should be strong, to overcome all of the difficulties with fortitude.

In spite of these biases within the general public, there is, nonetheless, recognition within anti-trafficking circles that men are also vulnerable to trafficking and in need of assistance. And, given that there is increasing recognition that men are also trafficked, it is timely that more attention

be paid to identifying their specific assistance needs. This study found, based on a limited sample of twelve males (adults and minors), that beyond accommodation options, medical assistance was a primary area of need particularly in cases where they had been exploited for labour: “Some of them have acute attacks of diseases and if you are in a foreign country and, moreover, work illegally”. Other victims also manifested psychological scars and traumas. Where men have dependent families, assistance to the family as a whole (as discussed above) is likely also needed. Identifying other needs is an important next step.

Beyond services themselves, male victims also raised issues in terms of how services were provided. Confidentiality was important for the male respondents interviewed in this study and it will be important to consider how best to outreach men and boys exposed to trafficking while ensuring their confidentiality:

It would also be good that the information received at the helpline is confidential. For example, none of the organisations but those which administer the helpline have access to it.

I don't think that men will address a state organisation because they think that this information will easily become public knowledge. The mayor of the village and the police officer will learn about this.

[Assistance should be organised] in such a way that nobody knows. The man himself should go to the place where this assistance is provided. The farther this place is from his home, the more sure you can be that nobody will learn about this. Only in case a man is seriously ill and can't move, then the assistance should be provided at home but no one will be jealous of him.

As important is how best to “sell” and “package” these services to ensure that men will both know about and access them. Advertising services must consider what message will (and will not) be appropriate and accessible to a male audience, given the issues of male responsibility and stigma discussed above. Language is very important in this regard. As the notion of “victim” may not be well received by many men, efforts might be more successful in speaking about “migrants” or “workers”.

I think that after an advertisement or announcement informing that men can be assisted, for example, medical assistance (but there

shouldn't be mentioned psychological assistance because many men are afraid of these words) or other kinds of assistance like legal assistance... I think that many men would agree to receive free medical assistance because many of them who were exploited don't have money for this. The announcement can also be broadcast and the voice which reads the information about the possible assistance for men victims of exploitation (I think the word 'exploitation' should be used because many men don't understand what trafficking is). And if it is possible, even to avoid the word "victim" because men don't like to be victims. This contradicts the image of a real man. It should be the man's voice. I don't think men will trust an announcement read by a woman. This should be done only by a man, maybe even by a man who has such experience. The message should be short and convincing in which the possible assistance is emphasized.

Certainly [use a] man's voice. This inspires trust in men. It is necessary to make a spot in which the sufferer briefly tells about his experience of exploitation. This man can be either a real man who suffered or an actor but not very famous, otherwise it will sound artificial, melodramatic... I don't know...the most successful way is an announcement on TV or radio. But, as I said before, it is vitally important to select the words which will be used in this announcement.

But the [awareness-raising] message should be short and convincing and you shouldn't use such word as 'victim'.

Assistance to older victims

A handful of respondents were older and even elderly — some in their 50s and 60s and one as old as 75 years. Some were trafficked precisely because, as elderly persons, they did not have sufficient income to support themselves and did not have access to assistance from the state. Providing assistance, then, to this group often meant particular attention to economic and accommodation options.

They told me that they would help me to obtain my passport and restore my right to a pension. If it is not possible to live in my house, I hope I will be placed, at least, in a shelter for old people in [the capital].

I think there are many old people who don't enjoy their children's care and they don't watch TV or listen to the radio. Like me they don't know where to go to ask for help.

I have a good relationship with my son... [my son and his wife] look after me. But I feel guilty that I didn't inform him when I was selling my flat. And now I am a hanger-on in his flat and family. There is so little room here.

Other forms of assistance are also likely to be needed by older victims, including often specialised medical assistance, legal assistance and supported living arrangements. In addition to specific forms of assistance, it is also worth considering how trafficking may impact older people differently than younger victims. Little is known about the specific concerns and needs of older trafficking victims and how they experience both their trafficking and post trafficking lives.

Professional capacity, victim treatment and quality of care

It is widely acknowledged that services for trafficked persons should be free, accessible and non-stigmatising and that anti-trafficking actors should be adequately trained and sensitized in working with vulnerable populations, including trafficked persons. And many respondents spoke very highly not only of the quality and scope of assistance that they received but also of their treatment by anti-trafficking personnel. Many stressed how important this was for them in the recovery process.

I'm satisfied with the staff because they are very sensitive to our problems. They take us out, for a walk. I like it because I have everything, because everything is for free. Third, I'm the happiest because of this school. I have never dreamed that I could finish school, to become literate. Not to be ashamed when somebody tells me to put my signature or to read something and I have to tell that I can't.

[I liked] her humanness, simplicity, a sort of a soul mate-hood. For me, in general, it is hard to find a person to trust.

A positive experience is the good attitude of the shelter's staff. They take me into account. There isn't any negative experience.

That being said, other respondents did report instances in which they were not entirely satisfied with the services and treatment they received and flagged some, at times, very serious issues in the provision of services. These included insensitivity of and discrimination by anti-trafficking professionals; differences in professional capacity and conditions of care; and even poor treatment and abuse in care. As a corollary, the lack of monitoring and quality assurance within the anti-trafficking sector plays a role in the above issues.

Insensitivity of and discrimination by anti-trafficking professionals

For many victims, being treated well and not “looked down upon” was central in the recovery process. When talking about what constituted being treated well, many talked about being treated as “one of them”.

It was okay. They were treating us nicely, just as if we were one of them.

And the staff working here in [the organisation], I like them. They don't look at you in a judgmental way, you can always talk to them about everything. They understand you and they explain things to you. They hear you, they tell you how you should do things, they always help.

I didn't feel a difference between us. [This difference], this is the way I am used to.

The flipside was how hurt and offended victims felt when treated differently and insensitively by professionals who were meant to help them;

This one girl was absolutely out of her mind, I can't remember her name. She treated us as if we were lepers. She brought her own cup, her cup of tea and she brought everything of her own and she was all snobbish, horrible.

And you cannot do it like that. I mean, any girl who has been through, I don't know, something bad in her life, likes it when someone comes to her and you make coffee for everyone and you give her one. And she goes, oh, no, no, no, I cannot have coffee out of your cups, I only drink from my own. So just say so. I mean what's the problem, it's probably it. She just didn't know how to act around us.

Yes, right, you could say they didn't treat us as their equals there.
Yes, yes, definitely.

Victims reported this insensitivity and discrimination amongst some professionals groups in particular. Medical professionals were one such group and both victims and service providers reported some particularly striking comments in this vein. One NGO staff related how a medical doctor who was approached about providing medical services was dismissive and insensitive; "I didn't go to medical school to examine prostitutes". Victims related similar experiences:

They took me to their doctor. She asked me, that gynaecologist: "Why you did that?" ... Yes, she made comments. So what can I do, I'm not the only one. Thousands of girls went through that. [I felt] hurt a little bit. You don't have to judge somebody who had to go through that. It was not her job. Her job is to do what she had to do, not to ask questions... She had to receive us because she was connected to that woman from the shelter and we asked for a check-up. She was polite but she made comments.

[The doctor] said pull up your sleeves. I pulled my sleeves so they can check if I was a drug addict. She said: "Okay, pull up your shirt so I can check your stomach". Okay, I pulled up my shirt. Then she started to check my head, to pull my hair. That [police] guy told her: "Okay, it's enough, stop upsetting her. You can see from here that the girl is clean". She said it was her job, she must. He said: "Don't upset her anymore. Don't you see that she is scared? She couldn't eat". I was glad that he took my side... [I felt] terrible. I thought, wait, what I am? An animal, so she can treat me like that?

You can feel that. When that doctor checked me she behaved like she was disgusted to touch me.

In some countries, this insensitivity has led service providers to contract with private (sensitized) doctors, which, while expensive and unsustainable in the long-term affords victims with some reprieve and level of comfort in the immediate.

Importantly, it was not only medical staff who were problematic in this regard. In a number of situations, victims described ill-treatment from legal professionals, often their own legal representatives tasked with represent-

ing them in legal proceedings. One victim described being shouted at and insulted by her lawyer:

He was always shouting at me. He told me what I was to tell at the trial. In case I didn't tell him what he wanted to hear he even yelled at me. Once when we were leaving the trial he even told me that I was good at nothing and he was more inclined to believe the trafficker rather than me.

Insensitivity and discrimination was apparently not only because of trafficking but, in some cases, was also linked to racism. One victim of Roma ethnicity attributed her poor treatment to her ethnicity rather than her trafficked status:

I didn't tell them that I was a victim of trafficking. I needed money in order to obtain a birth certificate for my child. At the mayor's office, they treated me rudely. They laughed at me for not having [approximately five Euros] for the certificate. I felt humiliated.

Another respondent explained how discrimination against her as a person [from an ethnic minority] impacted her ability to access state services:

[The organisation] turned to the mayor's office of the village I was born in asking them to help me or, to be exact, my children. The house I was born in was destroyed long time ago and in its place another house was already built. The mayor was to provide me with some housing instead. I was given an absolutely destroyed house: no windows, doors, roof. Half of this clay house was really destroyed. Only one room was left. I was promised by the mayor to be given some building materials for fixing the house. It took the [organisation's] lawyer great efforts to arrange all these things. When I came to the mayor's office in [my town], the woman started to shout at me and then she closed the door in front of me. Then I heard her arguing with someone on the telephone. She was saying "this [woman from an ethnic minority] wants too much". My lawyer recommended me to go to the [child protection department] which was supposed to provide my child with some assistance. When I came there, I was refused. They said they could not help me at all. They angrily started asking me who had sent me to them and I told about [the assisting organisation]. I even had an argument with

them. I asked them what they were doing and how the state could help. What would have happened to single mothers who were even in a much worse situation than I was. They told me “who made you give birth to so many children?”

In another situation one victim spoke of a general bias against and negative attitude toward vulnerable groups: “I also think that in our state organisations which deal with assisting poor people work people with ill manners. The education that you get is not enough. Your upbringing also matters”. Another observed, “I was frustrated with the state organisations. I wish they were more tactful with trafficking victims”.

More generally, victims reported instances of insensitivity and prejudice on the part of different service providers. As was explored in an earlier section, victims experience a good deal of stigma and discrimination because of how they — as “prostitutes”, “foreigners” and “failed migrants” — were viewed in society. In some cases, victims related incidents in which these social biases were also demonstrated within the assistance framework.⁵⁰ One woman reported problems with a social worker who worked at the shelter she was staying. One of the residents had contracted a disease and this woman was fearful of also contracting it because of the communal living arrangements. When she asked to be tested, the social worker’s reaction was disparaging:

When I found out that this girl was sick, I didn’t know what was wrong with her. I asked a woman working there why didn’t you say so. I’m fine, I have no diseases and I’m supposed to catch something in here and go to [my country]. I want to have my blood tested again... And then I said I wanted to have all the tests done, and she said you weren’t thinking about that when you were sleeping with men... I’m never going to forget it. If a woman works there, she should have a different attitude about that.

⁵⁰ This is not unique to SEE. In a study of reintegration in Cambodia, some service providers also manifested biases against trafficking victims. One NGO worker distinguished three kinds of sex workers — those whose nature it is to be a sex worker, those who are forced against their will, and those who stay or return to sex work because they view it as a way to earn money quickly. According to this NGO-worker, only the second group is willing to change and can be educated successfully to return to her former life, while the other two groups cannot be educated to change their profession (Derks 1998).

Differences in professional capacity and conditions of care

Many anti-trafficking professionals in the region have a high professional capacity and have demonstrated, through their work, a strong competency in assistance and protection work.

Nevertheless, in some programmes, victims felt that the staff did not have the requisite skills and experience to provide them with the support they needed and the services offered were insufficient or lacking in some way:

They are okay but still I did not feel that they could understand me. They are young, inexperienced. I feel that they were there only because they were paid. And I couldn't speak to them.

They said that it would be a house for girls like me just like this one. But it was bad. There were different women on shifts, psychologists they were called... We had the opportunity [to talk to the staff], but we didn't like to talk to them. We just didn't like them. They didn't know how to behave or talk to us. [They said] that we would stay there and they would help us to work. But they didn't... With the staff we had no relationship. They were very restrained. It's like they feared something.

An evaluation of victim assistance in SEE (Surtees 2006a: 24) found variable professional capacity of anti-trafficking NGOs and the need for capacity building amongst many, a point made by NGOs, IOs and donors alike:

Some are excellent and others are not. There is a huge range in the level of competency and the professionalism of NGOs in the field (representative of IO/donor).

This NGO is the oldest NGO dealing with direct assistance [in the country] and is still having problems with the process of real rehabilitation of victims. The counsellors are not fully engaged in victims' rehabilitation and the facility is of closed type. Also, the staff lacks ideas on modalities for victims' education or overall empowerment (representative of IO/donor).

... the direct work with the victims has been left behind. The implementation of professional standards for work with victims of violence has been difficult to achieve (NGO representative).

To stress the implementation of long-term strategies for work with trafficking victims, the professionals need to be supported and trained further, to provide non-stop exchange of information on different levels (NGO representative).

The high stress nature of the work does mean that in some programmes there is a high turnover rate amongst staff, which can impact professional capacity. One victim assisted in the EU was in an assistance programme for a period of years and told of how she had worked with many assistants: “Who remembers them, every five months I had a new one... Every time I had to start from the beginning. They didn’t care at all for you, they knew they were leaving soon”. A result may be that it is less experienced professionals taking on these high stress jobs.

In other professional sectors, capacity was also flagged as an issue. One woman, who sought assistance from the police after escaping from her trafficker, was then sent to have a medical exam as she had only recently been assaulted and raped. However, the doctor was not only rude to her but also did not undertake the requisite medical examination in the case of rape in order that criminal charges could be brought. As the woman explained:

Then they took me to the doctor, to the forensic. But that doctor was an impudent person. If he checked me properly, they would find out that I was raped. I had scratches here... He just checked my bruises. I was very swollen. I had bruises. He even measured the size of those bruises... He checked my neck and arm. He said that everything is alright. The woman, who sat next to him and was typing, told him that I should go to gynaecologist, because I was with many men. He said that is not needed, because it was “already known”.

For some victims, professional skills and commitment were also lacking within the legal and judicial system. One victim, who was forced to marry her trafficker and subsequently suffered domestic violence at his hands, faced problems when she brought divorce proceedings and sued for custody of their daughter. Instead of recognising the gravity of the situation and the extreme violations she had endured, the presiding judge attempted to reconcile the couple:

The judge, because of the child, and the custody, he tried to reconcile us. I said no, because I had given him numerous chances to

get better and he never once used them. And I don't want us to make up. There's a saying — a wolf may change his skin but not his character.

Poor treatment and abuse in care

While for the most part victims reported being accommodated in appropriate facilities, of an adequate and sometimes even superior condition, it merits mention that a number of victims were exposed to poor conditions and even maltreatment while “assisted”. One minor girl trafficked for prostitution was placed in a centre which housed unaccompanied minors and juvenile offenders. While staying there over a period of three weeks she was exposed to violence at the hands of the other minors in the centre, which the staff did nothing to address:

After the guardian left, all the boys started jumping on me, so that I would “go” with them, and if they were catching us in the toilet, they would try to rape us. Then I told the guardian but he said “what would the damage be?” ... [The centre guardian] did nothing about it. And the second day another man came along. He was a good man and punished the other one that did nothing. But it was still for nothing because he didn't keep his word.

This abuse continued over the duration of her stay with the guardian failing to intervene at any point: “I was always afraid and in the evenings, before going to bed, I was awake up until two to three o'clock in the morning because the boys were asking for the key to the room from the guardian and they were opening the door and jumped on us in the beds”. She added, “I was afraid. If the guardian was going out for a while, all the boys would jump on us and he did nothing else but nod his head”. In addition, the guardian himself abused the minors: “The guardian would only sit with his baton and hit us whenever he thought we did something. There was only one of them who had mercy on us, but all the rest hit us if we were not staying put in our chairs, if we talked... no matter what, we would get hit by them”.

Of note is the long term impact of this abuse on this girl who was still deeply traumatised by this experience at the time of the interview. She explained how, for her the conditions of this “assistance” were worse than her experience of trafficking.

Even now, after all of this time, I still have the fear in me. It's still not completely out of me. And then I pray a lot.

It should have been better. They shouldn't beat us. They shouldn't speak badly to the girls. They shouldn't call us into their rooms to "show" us things. They shouldn't make us work or do those sit ups. They had us do push-ups every morning and evening.

It was only due to the incidental intervention of an NGO that the girl was able to leave the programme. As the programme director explained: "In the same case [of the same trafficker] we have other girls in assistance. And the police commissioner asked whether I could also take this girl so that she wouldn't have to stay there". She described coming to this centre for minors where she was collecting this girl to be accommodated in her programme: "There were also small children, five to six year old, and when I went to take the girl I was horrified to see them behind bars... and when we got there they were all kept in one room, as big as this one, ten square metres, all day behind bars".

Sadly, this was not the only respondent interviewed who had been detained in unsafe or inhumane conditions while being "assisted" or "protected". One victim reported being harassed and abused by law enforcement officers working at one government-managed centre:

There was a policewoman there, who screamed at girls. She could even hit them. Inside we had policewomen, whereas outside policemen. One day she permitted one policeman to enter inside. I was shocked by the appearance of a male. Jointly they began to mock and scorn me. That man gave me hints that he supposedly loves me. It was painful. I had a feeling of inferiority, offensive. I hope they took measures [against them].

And one minor victim related her experience in the centre for minors where she was initially "assisted" following her identification:

They used to beat us with a stick. They did not have the courage to hit me because I would have jumped at their throat. They shaved our heads, they said because we had lice. They used to mock us. The food was awful. We could barely eat it. It was meant for pigs and it was so dirty there. Those were not children's rights.... They told me that I was a whore and because of that I have no rights.

The kids that used to beg in the street were beaten so bad that they would wet their beds at night.

Others reported less egregious violations within the assistance framework, perhaps best described as neglect, although ones that nonetheless impacted them:

Once [the organisation] provided me with a gas cylinder. I was supposed to bring a receipt for it. It turned out that it wasn't valid. The social worker started yelling at me. I apologized for forgetting what kind of receipt they needed. They didn't even try to explain.

To tell you the truth, I wanted to run away because of one person working here... She wasn't interested in anything at all. She didn't care. I was taking those pills in the morning and she didn't bring me pills on time, nor my breakfast, nor anything, I could have died.

And this girl, who checks on me five or six times, calls the social worker. And she put her feet up in the armchair and was watching TV and said "What does she needs me for, I'm in pain too. There's no doctor, where am I to find one now?" I'm vomiting, and she is in the kitchen. She closed the door instead of helping me. She didn't care... And this girl came here and started yelling at her: "Do you want the girl to die? And what then? It would be my fault for not telling you. It'll be your fault for not being here beside her". And then she freaked out and called those people, there's no doctor, and then she called those medical staff. And they examined me, and they said that the appendix had perforated for sure. She freaked out and found the doctor immediately and they took me to hospital in [a nearby town].

It was striking that mistreatment and poor conditions of care continue to be an issue not only in SEE but also in the destination countries for the trafficked persons interviewed. Assuring adequate and appropriate care should be of the utmost concern for trafficked persons as well as the socially vulnerable more generally.

Lack of monitoring and quality assurance

An important issue is that currently there are no mechanisms for quality assurance in the provision of trafficking assistance in most countries as well

as, in many countries, in terms of social assistance and protection more generally. There is seldom any regulation of services and, in addition, few checks and balances on how service are implemented. Mechanisms to register a complaint are almost entirely absent and where complaints can be lodged they are often not followed up and addressed. Victims themselves spoke about their lack of power and influence *vis a vis* staff and in terms of the provision of services.

An outstanding question on the issue of quality services is how this quality can be assured. The licensing of service providers and monitoring and regulating the provision of services is essential in this regard. As important are mechanisms for comment and complaint from trafficked persons — both as a mechanism for comment and inputs while in a programme (i.e. client satisfaction surveys) and also as a means of redress in case of problems. While there are many programmes and organisations providing optimal assistance to victims, this is not consistent across the board and more attention is needed to quality assurance.

Assistance as conditional

For some victims, receiving assistance was (or was perceived to be) linked to some conditions. In some situations, victims reported that they felt pressure to cooperate with law enforcement authorities and that referral for assistance was contingent upon this cooperation. Sometimes this was pressure exerted by law enforcement authorities themselves and sometimes by service providers:

Yes, [the police] said if I give testimony, then they would continue assisting me... And I myself was already willing to give testimony because a lawsuit was announced demanding compensation and I wanted to have my passport and money returned to me.

Yes, the [police] said if I wished to be assisted in re-obtaining my passport, I had to give testimony against the traffickers. Otherwise, they would even place me into prison for falsifying documents.

[At the shelter] they didn't offer me any food (I was hungry) and, instantly, that [social worker] began questioning me about what had happened to me [abroad]. It was unpleasant to be tormented with questions. I wanted to go home. But they explained to me that I should stay there several days, in order to give testimony against

the man, who sold us into slavery... Yes, they told me that I had to cooperate with police.

There were also situations where assistance was not conditioned upon cooperation but victims felt what they described as a subtle pressure to be cooperative.

[The policeman] said it would be medical assistance. I would be able to stay there as long as my headache would be treated. He also asked me to go on testifying while undergoing my treatment. I trusted him. From my perspective, he was “a good police officer” who wanted to change something in the world... I did not feel like testifying but I felt obliged.

They wanted to finish their job. I wanted to finish with them quick and so I [gave testimony].

One woman from SEE trafficked to the EU explained that she was only told that she could benefit from assistance after she had agreed to give a statement. While in this situation she was willing to cooperate with law enforcement, assistance was not offered freely and up front:

I told them directly that I want to give a statement so no other girls would go through the same situation. I start the declaration. It took a couple of hours and after that they told me [about assistance]. I thought at the beginning that they were going to deport me, but I after I gave the declaration, they told me that I am going to a shelter and stay there for a while. They did not tell me for how long, until it was necessary.

Attaching conditions to assistance was also seemingly common amongst some religious organisations. One man trafficked to the former Soviet states was eventually identified and assisted there by a religious group which facilitated his return home and referral to a church-based group in his country of origin. Whereas in the destination country he did not feel that assistance was conditional — “they did not ask from me anything. They did not make me go to church or pray or work” — this was not the case with the assisting church in his home country:

The first organisation that helped me was that church in [the capital] where I was referred to by those religious people from [abroad].

When I came to them they told me that if I really became a believer, then they would help me... I understood that they wanted me to regularly attend their prayers and meetings.

Other victims also noted instances in which assistance from religious groups was conditional:

There are many representatives of different religions in [our] villages who attract people and offer help on the condition of converting to their religion. This is not good when you are manipulated by someone or when there are some conditions to accepting assistance. It should be sincere, from the bottom of one's heart.

Of concern is that many victims — because of their acutely vulnerable position — may not be able to resist conditions of assistance.⁵¹ This point was made very clearly by one victim who had been referred to a religious organisation for humanitarian assistance for herself and her daughter:

I had a call from [the social worker] and she said that there was a religious organisation, which offers humanitarian assistance and moral support to people who urgently need it... She also warned me that this organisation was not of [the same religious belief] and the social worker might ask me to go to their service and pray and, maybe, even covert into their religion. I said that this social worker could come to my house and see that I simply couldn't think of religion. But, honestly, I was ready even to renounce my belief for the sake of my daughter.

Not all conditions and parameters for participation in programme are problematic. Where conditions relate to conformity with the national legal

⁵¹ This is not to say that all religious organisations function as such. Other victims reported unconditional assistance from such organisations:

She never spoke about God or something like that. She was listening to me as an ordinary person. I felt sympathy. Although she didn't ask me to tell what had happened to me, I told her everything. I relieved my soul to her. Her soul is so open.

This centre is a religious and they had a great deal of religious books there... They didn't insist on me being or becoming a religious person. The religion lessons were on a voluntary basis. We are not forced to make signs of the cross or to attend church services.

No, absolutely no [conditions for assistance]. I didn't have to convert to their religion. She didn't advise me to go their church in [my home country].

framework or where receiving assistance requires some commitment on the part of the beneficiaries this needn't be problematic. However, it matters very much what conditions are and how they are implemented. It seems that some organisations do have conditions, which are more related to their own objectives than the recovery and well-being of the victim.

Lack of sufficient state assistance and basic service provision

Overall most countries in SEE lack sufficient state funded assistance for trafficked persons.

Most funding for services and assistance is from international donors and much service delivery is through NGOs and international organisations. In spite of this, in some cases victims found state actors working very hard to provide options and support for them but they were constrained by the limited resources of the state. One woman was assisted by a state social worker who helped her get out of prison (she was caught stealing as a means to support her children after returning from trafficking) but could offer few state funded options for she and her children.

This woman didn't know what to do with me. She told me "and where are you going now with the child? I can't deprive you of your parental right". And it was already autumn. I had the third child in my hands. I spent three nights [at the children's orphanage] while she was making inquiries about where she could place me.

She was so kind. I think she is the person who helped me to believe in life again... Being under her protection, my children and I felt safe.

That being said, many returning victims faced problems in accessing even the most basic state services and receiving even minimal state support. One victim who lost his flat to squatters while trafficked abroad explained his dissatisfaction with the state:

I am not satisfied with the state system of protecting people. The state is not able to protect its citizens who become bums because of illegal transactions of their property. During four years of my being away, my flat had been sold seven times. No lawyer can help me.

Other respondents explained how their state pensions and allowances were simply not adequate for basic survival:

My pension is [approximately 22 Euros] a month... but what does this sum mean for a six-member family?

As far as I understand, there are some state assistance programmes for single mothers. But where are they? Where is that assistance? Those who need it don't get it. I think this assistance is used by those who are to provide this assistance. And single mothers receive just a pack of food once a year. And then they themselves must extricate out of their difficulties. They get [approximately six Euros] a month for a child. Is it possible to feed a child having only this sum of money?

Where service were available, accessing services were not without their complications. Bureaucratic procedures were an impediment for many victims. In many cases, the lack of national documents was the first in many obstacles to accessing the services they needed. Victims returning from abroad faced much difficulty in trying to issue passports and national identity papers.

I did not know that besides the state organisations there are NGOs. I thought that if I had a problem I could be helped only in the passport office. When they told me that they could not issue me a passport because I had no permanent residence, I was frustrated. I thought I would not be able to get my passport to the end of my life.

I am dissatisfied with the assistance of the state organisations. If you don't have your registration, you can not receive any help from either the employment office or social protection organisations. You can not even get your passport. As a result, people who really need help cannot receive it because of the bureaucracy.

Similarly, victims who relied on state assistance to support their family explained how they had not been able to collect it because of bureaucratic problems:

[I receive approximately six Euros] per month. However, I haven't received anything for three months. It's because they mixed up my middle name. And I may receive the allowance only at the place of residence, only there, where they know me.

They should take me to a sanatorium, provide me with medical treatment. My son introduced me onto the list of invalids waiting for

free treatment in a sanatorium. And there he was told that we had to wait for five years. I don't know if I will be alive five years from now. Social services used to work much better.

Ask my son how tired we were going from one institution to another... Completing all of those papers, bureaucracy procedures... Indifference, especially from the state organisations ... their unwillingness to clear up someone's troubles.

I told [my son] to place me in a shelter for invalids but he didn't want to at the beginning. Now he wants but it has turned to be a very complicated thing. It is necessary to have so many papers.

Some victims felt that the responsibility for care was not taken seriously by state actors and that they were always redirected to humanitarian organisations to request assistance:

I didn't like only one thing. The [NGO] social worker called a state social worker in my native village and asked them to help me. When I came to this department, they looked at me in a bad way... They asked me why I came to them, what I wanted from them. They made me feel as if I owed them something... [The social worker] asked them to provide me and my child with the necessary help. In fact, the person who was contacted lives in my neighbourhood. Once we met at the market and she told me that they could help me with nothing. I asked this person to give me a certificate that said that I had no income to free me from taxes. My small business is selling goods at the market but I need this document in order not to be fined. She said she could not help me and that I had to go to the person who helped me to launch my small business.

6.4. Summary

Affording adequate and appropriate assistance and protection to trafficked persons is vital in their immediate stabilisation and toward their longer-term recovery and re/integration into society. In spite of differences between the various countries and experiences of trafficking victims some consistent themes and issues emerged when speaking to victims about how they saw, understood and experienced assistance and protection.

Trafficked persons described a range of emotions during assistance and protection. Certainly many emotions were negative — from fear to shock and confusion, from suspicion to stress and shame. However, they equally spoke about how, in this phase, they had positive feelings, most commonly feelings of comfort and safety, a sense of belonging, not feeling alone, relief and gratitude. In many cases, victims reported that negative feelings transitioned over time to more positive feelings once trust and confidence had been established. In addition, emotions were specific not only to certain periods of time but also in response to individual victim's assistance experience.

Issues highlighted by victims about the assistance and protection phase were myriad and diverse, touching on a wide range of related issues. These included problems encountered due to cultural and linguistic barriers between beneficiaries as well as between beneficiaries and staff; some of the concerns and feelings victims had about existing rules and restrictions in assistance programmes; the importance of accessible, adequate and comprehensible information about assistance options both abroad and at home; victim's involvement in the decision-making process about assistance options; victim's access (and sometimes lack of access) to justice; the problems of stigma and discrimination following trafficking; issues of security and safety; the difficulties and complexity of balancing autonomy and dependency in the provision of assistance and services; concerns about the privacy and confidentiality of trafficking victims; how to accommodate the specialised assistance needs of trafficked persons; conditions being attached to the provision of assistance; the lack of state assistance; the complexity of the reintegration process; and how best to ensure professional capacity and quality of care, including adequate assistance options.

7. Some final thoughts and conclusions

The aim of this study has been to provide a picture — from the perspective of trafficked persons — of how the identification, return and assistance processes take place from, to and within SEE. In this regard there have been three organising principles — 1) to understand how the process took place in practice; 2) to learn about how victims felt during and experienced the process and 3) to identify what, for victims, were the critical issues that they faced. Interviews with trafficked persons revealed a great deal of material which can be helpful in how to shape on-going interventions and activities. While the individuals interviewed were generally positive about and grateful for the intervention and support they had received at different stages of their post-trafficking life, they nonetheless also identified areas where they had faced problems and had concerns. These findings are not specific to any one country, organisation or sector. Rather they represent the breadth of issues raised by the victims interviewed for this study — victims assisted in SEE as well as the EU, the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and Turkey by NGOs, the government and international organisations.

One significant finding was that the process does not always run smoothly and according to the range of standards and principles drafted

at the national or international level. There continue to be gaps in the system from identification, through return and during the assistance and protection phase. Interviews revealed some very professional identification procedures as well as the intervention of persons not typically involved in identification, signalling a wide range of potential interlocutors who can and do assist in this process. Identification, in some cases, was sensitive, appropriate and led to or contributed to the victims' sense of safety and well-being and also their willingness to enter the anti-trafficking referral and assistance framework. But, at the same time, there were myriad examples of missed identification opportunities, ones that prolonged trafficking situations and increased the mental and physical impact of exploitation. While many victims were assisted in the return process and returned home safely and with confidence, still others faced unsafe and undignified return experiences, which often involved being interrogated at borders, facing many questions from different authorities, being detained for not possessing legal documents, risking interception by their trafficker and so on. Experiences of assistance were myriad and diverse. The extent and quality of the assistance varied from country to country and victims reported very disparate assistance experiences. Some were assisted in open residential programmes, others in closed facilities. Some programmes were short-term, others were longer-term and reintegration-oriented. For some victims, service at home often followed the provision of assistance in the country where they were identified. However, for victims not identified abroad, assistance in their country of origin was their first encounter with service providers. While assistance was certainly very positive for victims and contributed in significant ways to their stabilisation, recovery and reintegration, they nevertheless identified situations in which they have faced difficulties at some stage of their post-trafficking lives. In comparing and contrasting the different services and interventions, they also had very clear ideas about what had and had not been important in their recovery.

Also significant was that victim's feelings were not always what anti-trafficking actors may have expected or intended. When victims might have been expected to feel relieved and reassured, they were, in fact, fearful and agitated. In cases where feelings of safety and comfort might have been anticipated, victims were suspicious and desperate. That victim's perceptions can be so fundamentally different from what is intended must be seriously considered and evaluated. Negative emotions were not easily or quickly overcome and it became clear in interviews with victims that both

time and very clear demonstrations of reliability and sincerity were needed to overcome victim's fear, suspicion, agitation and desperation. For many victims, agreeing to be identified, returned and assisted was a "leap of faith" and they often did so with much trepidation and concern. It is against this emotional backdrop that anti-trafficking actions and reactions should be shaped.

In terms of issues faced, interviews with victims revealed not only many successful practices but also many fault lines. There were some common themes which emerged throughout the process and which can potentially provide guidance in the steps ahead.

Access to information: At all stages of the process, victims described needing and wanting more information about their options and the process to be followed. Information needs to be sufficiently specific, accessible, comprehensible, age-appropriate, language-specific and culturally appropriate. It also needs to be tailored to individual victims and specific to their trafficking experience as well as their individual profile — whether male or female, foreign or national, adult or minor, etc. Another common issue identified was that time was of importance in the provision of information — that it be given at the appropriate time, provided more than once and that victims were given time to process the information and make decisions accordingly. And very importantly, victims need to be included in the decisions about the full process of anti-trafficking intervention, able to select from the menu of options and opportunities rather than be passively informed about the next steps they are to follow.

Safety and security: Safety and security issues are often handled unevenly in cases of trafficked persons, with some victims subject to strict security protocols, like closed shelters and escorted returns, and others, like many court witnesses, afforded little protection. There appears to be limited attention paid to conducting systematic and mandatory security and risk assessments within SEE as well as further afield. In addition, protocols and procedures for such assessments are underdeveloped and under-implemented. Security should be assessed on a case-by-case basis regularly throughout a victims post-trafficking life, to assess the real risks to victims, if any, and how best to address them. Where security is a problem — as was the case for a number of victims — these risks must be taken seriously and addressed accordingly. At the same time, security concerns should be carefully balanced with the importance of a normal life and longer-term recovery and an excessive

focus on security and safety issues, where they have not been identified, can impede the recovery and reintegration of victims.

Linguistic and cultural barriers: Being able to effectively communicate and personally connect with anti-trafficking actors was a very important element of victims feeling safe and was also central in identification, return and assistance. As such, where language barriers existed (and this was not uncommon), this posed a serious impediment throughout the process and did, at times, also compromise the quality of intervention. Less visible but equally important was how cultural considerations can create barriers in anti-trafficking work. For many victims trafficked abroad, linguistic and cultural barriers impacted their identification and assistance experience in some way. In some cases, victims may not have been identified precisely because of these barriers. In other cases, identification and assistance was complicated by language and cultural chasms between anti-trafficking actors and victims. Bridging these gaps — through translation, multi-lingual staff, cultural mediators, etc. — can assist at all stages of the process, although each “solution” also has limitations such as cost and accessibility, which need to be carefully considered and addressed.

Models of intervention and quality care: The type and quality of interventions — from identification, through return and assistance — were strikingly uneven. Differences in skills, quality of services and the level of professionalism were evident not only between countries but also within countries. Some victims experienced professional, sensitive identification procedures, while others dealt with poorly trained and insensitive identifying actors. Some return procedures followed strict protocols for a safe and dignified return, while others were *ad hoc* and, arguably, even dangerous. Whereas some victims received very high quality, professional service according to appropriate models of care, others did not. Victims themselves questioned some of the models of care being used (i.e. closed vs. open shelters, residential vs. non-residential programmes) as well as the rules and restrictions employed within many programmes. Tied intimately to this issue is the overall lack of monitoring and evaluating of these models and of professional interventions. Ensuring quality interventions at all stages of post-trafficking life is an important issue not only in SEE but for all of the countries considered in the course of this study. While the development of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is an important component of this, it equally requires heightened professional standards and

accountability. Also important is that victim inputs, feedback and evaluation of interventions are part of the development, tailoring and implementation of programmes and policy responses.

Mistreatment and problematic interactions: In different ways and at different stages, some victims reported poor treatment and even mistreatment at the hands of anti-trafficking actors. In other cases, it might be more accurate to speak about negligence, insensitivity or discrimination. While poor treatment is often attributed to law enforcement actors, particularly at initial identification, victims also reported negative treatment during assistance and reintegration, at the hands of different anti-trafficking actors. That cases of abuse of victims while in care were reported is particularly concerning. Poor treatment (even when unintentional) negatively impacts already traumatised and exploited persons, including in terms of their willingness to accept to be identified and assisted. Where mistreatment is intentional, there must be the means to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent future mistreatment. Mechanisms for monitoring and quality assurance are central to this endeavour.

Need for more state supported intervention and assistance: Because countries in SEE lack sufficient state-funded assistance for trafficked persons, many returning victims faced problems in accessing even the most basic services and received only minimal support. While in some cases victims reported state actors working hard to provide options and support for them, they were often constrained by the limited resources of the state. Further, accessing services was often complicated by bureaucratic procedures. Victims require a broader range of state services and less complicated processes for accessing them.

Engagement of victims in the design and implementation of interventions: Discussions with victims yielded not only issues they had faced but often also involved an exploration of what could have been done better, whether at identification, during return or in the context of assistance. Victims were often very clear about what should have happened instead to create positive feelings of safety and trust and to more effectively intervene in their case. This underlines that victims often have a clear idea of their needs and how processes and procedures can be improved. Engaging victims in a discussion of their needs as well as seeking their inputs in terms of the design and implementation of interventions can serve to ensure that

interventions — whether from a legal or social services perspective — are in fact victim-centred and grounded in the lived realities of the range of victims they are intended to support and assist. Systems of intervention and assistance which are designed, implemented and adjusted in a participatory manner are more effective, efficient and ultimately humanistic. In addition, engaging with victims must be an on-going process, affording the possibility for victims to give feedback into programmes and interventions.

Gaps and issues in anti-trafficking interventions and process: There remain some noteworthy gaps and issues in implementation of the full process of identification, return and assistance process for trafficked persons. These include:

- *Identification:* The sometimes inadequate identification skills of identifying actors and missed identification opportunities can lead to re-trafficking or the victim's continued exploitation. Some victims continued to be detained/arrested and interrogated, treated as criminals and offenders (by virtue of their illegal status in the country or being in prostitution) rather than as victims of crime.
- *Return and referral:* In many situations unassisted returns continued which were stressful for victims and also put them in difficult positions with law enforcement and border officials as well as exposed them to continued or re-trafficking. Also in the context of return was the delayed return of foreign trafficking victims, with many being kept in a legal limbo while documents were processed, transportation arrangements made, statements taken and other procedures undertaken. That the return and transportation process appears, to some victims, to mimic trafficking is another issue.
- *Assistance and protection:* In the assistance phase, victims made note of the limited access to justice and their lack of satisfaction with the criminal and judicial process, both in terms of the results and their treatment by legal and judicial actors. For some victims, the lack of justice had real life consequences in terms of possible retribution and many feared returning home to their families and communities. Conditionality of assistance was another issue, with some victims reportedly under pressure to cooperate with law enforcement authorities or told they could only receive assistance from social organisations if they conform to certain conditions. Of concern is that many victims — because of their acutely vulnerable position — may not be

able to resist these conditions. Not knowing where to turn for help and assistance was another issue for many victims. Finally, discussions with victims highlighted the complexity of the reintegration process, involving, as it does, the need to balance the provision of assistance without creating a situation of dependency. Stigma and victim blaming also pose obstacles to reintegration efforts as do more systemic issues such as high unemployment and limited opportunities for victims. Further, reintegration is not a linear process and may involve setbacks for victims, which require different forms of assistance and support in the long-term and beyond the scope of the programme.

- While these points do not exhaust the full range of gaps and issues, they highlight what for victims were some of the more pressing concerns in their cases and afford a starting point for improvements in the TRM process.

Importance of individual case-by-case approach: There is no set formula for how to handle trafficking cases. Just as victims and their experiences are distinct (as demonstrated in the interviews with victims), so are their needs throughout the process of identification, return and assistance. Victims often have different profiles — they are men and women, adults and minors, older persons and younger persons, foreigners and nationals — and exploitation experiences. Victims that are exploited for labour and begging do not necessarily have the same assistance needs as persons trafficked for sexual exploitation and victims themselves identified ways in which their needs were not always thoroughly or sufficiently met within the existing identification, return and assistance framework. That new manifestations and profiles of victims are being identified necessarily requires anti-trafficking actors to be flexible and creative in the face of often quite unique and unusual circumstances. It also requires a flexibility of the system itself, to respond not only to different identification and assistance needs but also to different profiles of victims. Considering each case as unique and responding on an individual case-by-case basis is the only way to accommodate this diversity and complexity. Better understanding the less common forms of trafficking and, by implication, needs of victims, can play a role in equipping anti-trafficking actors. Equally important, however, is that specialized assistance is available for more “difficult” cases, like victims with disabilities, behaviour disorders, addictions, specific health needs, victims with dependents, acute psychological problems, etc.

Sex and gender issues: The issue of sex and gender needs to be considered throughout the whole process, from identification, through return and during assistance. Men and women can both be victims of trafficking and often have different trafficking experiences as well as needs and interests. Assumptions about sex and gender also inform how anti-trafficking measures are undertaken and offered, with women often seen as trafficking victims in need of protection and services and men often overlooked as unlucky migrants after suffering many of the same abuses and violations. Far more attention is needed to how sex and gender inform not only how trafficking plays out but also how anti-trafficking interventions can support victims from both sexes. Attention to socially constructed assumptions about gender and gender roles must be embedded within this exercise and engaging with victims of both sexes can help to uncover how, from their experience, sex and gender impacted their access to and experiences of identification, return and assistance.

Need for more victim-centred research, evaluation and programme design: One of the most important conclusions from the study is that it is only in speaking with and learning from victims that it is possible to fully understand how the identification, return and assistance process is taking place. Trafficked persons are the ones who can best identify and communicate their needs — what they need and want and what can be most helpful and important to them. As such, listening to victims tells much about the work ahead. There is, of course, a need to ensure that victims are not barraged by research and all decisions about participation must be voluntary, based on the provision of full information about the research (what it is for, how it will be used), how anonymity and confidentiality will be guarded and only after having gained informed consent of the victims. Where these parameters are ensured, research can serve to provide invaluable information in the development of anti-trafficking interventions and ensure that the needs of victims are firmly situated at the centre of the discussion of anti-trafficking efforts. It can also serve to potentially empower victims — to put their opinions on equal footing with those of the professionals, which can play an important role in the recovery process. There is a clear need for the inclusion of more victims' voices in research and the formulation of anti-trafficking policy and programmes.

These findings — drawn from the direct experiences of trafficked persons — are valuable in terms of moving forward with anti-trafficking efforts.

It is in response to victims' personal experiences, perceptions and suggestions that the above conclusions and recommendations are made. Trafficked persons' first-hand accounts tell us much about how anti-trafficking mechanisms and procedures are functioning and also provide concrete inputs and suggestions which, it is hoped, will improve anti-trafficking policies and practices.

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