

Back to square one?

Remigration of Bulgarian women after exploitation in the prostitution sector in the Netherlands

This master thesis has been prepared in collaboration with La Strada International, La Strada Netherlands (CoMensha) and La Strada Bulgaria (Animus Association).



**This is a summary of the thesis written by Ms. Loes Kersten, entitled “Terug bij af? Remigratie van Bulgaarse vrouwen na uitbuiting in de Nederlandse prostitutiesector”.
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Introduction

Regardless of the numerous researches that have been conducted during the past years on the issue of trafficking in human beings, so far little is known about what happens to women who have left or escaped a situation of human trafficking and who decided voluntary - or involuntary - to return to their countries of origin.¹ In order to obtain a better understanding of their situation, a research has been done in 2007 about remigration of Bulgarian women, who were trafficked to the Netherlands and registered (and assisted) by La Strada Netherlands ('Coordination Centre for Human Trafficking' / CoMensha).²

The aim of this research was twofold: firstly to describe the process of remigration of Bulgarian women who (un)voluntarily return from the Netherlands to Bulgaria after having been exploited in prostitution.³ Secondly, to gain a better understanding of the aspects that influence the remigration process at different levels: that of the individual (micro), the family and direct environment of a trafficked person (meso) and the macro structural level of Bulgaria as a society.

1. Research methods and restrictions

In order to meet these aims, different research methods have been used. First 151 files of Bulgarian victims who were registered at La Strada Netherlands in the years 2003 to 2006 have been analyzed.⁴ This study was extended by a comparative file analysis at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) in the Netherlands and at Animus Association Foundation (AAF), the La Strada partner in Bulgaria to which part of the trafficked persons were referred.

Since the file analysis is based only on trafficked persons who have been registered, this is a very selective group; it is expected that annually more persons are trafficked to the Netherlands than those identified and supported (and thus registered). It follows that victims who did not encounter police and/or NGOs during their stay in the Netherlands or upon their return to Bulgaria, have not been included in the analysis of this research.

Additionally to the file analysis, interviews were held with ten Bulgarian sex workers, several Bulgarian victims of human trafficking (n=4) and several professionals who are involved with the return and reintegration of Bulgarian victims or the wellbeing of sex workers (n=22).

¹ Since there was only one male found as a victim of human trafficking in this research, this study takes only women into account.

² La Strada is a European network of nine non governmental organisations (NGOs) that raise awareness about human trafficking and are active on prevention, assistance to trafficked persons and aims to establish independent NGOs in Central- and Eastern Europe. Except for CoMensha, all other La Strada partners are seated in Central- and Eastern European countries. This research was done in cooperation with La Strada Netherlands/CoMensha and La Strada International, based in the Netherlands. Animus Association Foundation (AAF), the La Strada partner in Bulgaria, guided the fieldwork in Bulgaria.

³ While human trafficking is not restricted to the prostitution sector, the women in this study have been exploited in prostitution mainly.

⁴ See figure 1 in the Appendix for the share of Bulgarian women among victims announced to CoMensha in the Netherlands. Of the 196 files, 151 were suitable for analysis.

Contact with one trafficked woman was made through the Dutch police and the other three girls were inhabitants of a boarding school in Bulgaria and had been trafficked in Bulgaria and one of them abroad.⁵

In the professional field mainly social workers have been interviewed, because of their direct contact with sex workers in general and victims of trafficking in particular. Although the interviews conducted with the police, a lawyer and (journalistic) researchers led to other perspectives on the topic, the results mostly reflect ideas and facts based on experience in assistance and social work.

An important obstacle in data collection was the language; file analysis in Bulgaria took place thanks to translation by a volunteer working at AAF. Interviews in Bulgaria were done in English when possible, sometimes with help of a translator. Not being able to communicate directly with some respondents has most probably led to loss of information.

Nevertheless, by combining different methods and resources the study results do contribute in getting more insights in return and reintegration of trafficked persons from the Netherlands to Bulgaria.

2. Main findings

2.1 Lacking information

It is essential to point out that there is a major lack of information about the process of remigration of Bulgarian trafficked women. The information available is spread out over several involved organisations in the Netherlands and Bulgaria and there is no central overview about the circumstances or situation of the persons during their return and the situation after return. In the Netherlands, registration and research is mostly focussing on what is happening within the Dutch borders, rather than looking across borders. However to obtain better insight, a full picture is needed.

2.2 Remigration of victims?

The studied files showed that one third of the trafficked women who returned to Bulgaria have later again returned to the Netherlands. The term 'remigration' is therefore not completely applicable, because obviously many women do not settle down in Bulgaria. Many are in search of new opportunities. This makes return only a temporary situation within the process of migration. This increased mobility also became visible in conversations with Bulgarian sex workers on the streets of Sofia. These conversations created an image of the active 'agencies' that make conscious choices and travel abroad to improve living conditions. Some women did not encounter any problems, neither faced exploitation during their stay abroad where they temporarily worked as a sex worker. Moreover - although these women claimed to have worked voluntarily - some of them have been forced in the past to work in the sex industry, as minors. This shows how hard it is to draw a line between 'voluntary sex workers', and those enrolled with force and can be defined as 'trafficked persons': the reality is much more complicated than a

⁵ These girls had ended up in this school after they had violated the law and the judge had decided they had to be 're-socialized'. Many of the girls in this school have been sex workers and the offences they committed are often related to this.

division into those two category groups. Since governments and NGOs often base their ideas and assistance on the profile of a 'victim', some women who do not consider themselves victims can be excluded from support while they might need it or receive help which is not adapted to them.

2.3 The process of return

The group of 151 Bulgarian women in the file analysis contained cases of women who stayed in the Netherlands or were deported to Bulgaria (n=58) and cases of women who returned voluntarily to Bulgaria (n=69).⁶ Therefore not only characteristics of the whole group could be analyzed, but also comparison could be made between these two groups that showed some remarkable results. In general the studied files and explored case-studies show very different stories; every woman has her own past, her own experiences, one being more traumatic than the other. The attitudes of the returnees varies from persons asking for help to persons not considering themselves a victim of human trafficking at all. That is why remigration and reintegration can entail something very different for each person. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions about the process of remigration, and how it should ideally be organized.

2.3.1 The situation in the Netherlands: police intervention and B9

That being said, some patterns became visible during the file analysis. First of all, in most cases the human trafficking situation in the Netherlands was ended by police intervention, whereby a lot of women reported their situation directly to the police. However, police intervention and the making of a report was less common among the women who have returned voluntarily to Bulgaria, compared to the women who have stayed in the Netherlands or have been deported. The study clearly shows that distrust in the police, feelings of loyalty towards the offender and not seeing any benefit in reporting the case to the police, can influence the decision whether or not to make a statement to the police, both in the Netherlands and in Bulgaria. Among the women who returned to Bulgaria voluntarily, there were more women who came out of the trafficking situation without any police intervention, in comparison with those women that stayed in the Netherlands or were deported. Among the returned women there were also more cases where people had been in contact with assisting NGOs in the Netherlands, compared to the other group of women. Assistance in the Netherlands is complicated because of a lack of space in shelters for victims of human trafficking, but sometimes also because of conflicting interests of the police, the victim and the assisting shelter.

For the studied group, it was possible to gain a temporary residence permit in the Netherlands, according to regulations of the so-called B9 regulation (which is an article of the Dutch alien law), only if they pressed charges.⁷ The authorities would like trafficked persons to contribute to police investigation and the prosecution of the suspect(s), but this is not always compatible with the trafficked persons' interests. Recent developments have led the Dutch government to allow for this temporary residence permit in the Netherlands regardless of the participation in a police investigation. Other ways of cooperation with the police are now also sufficient in order to gain a temporary residence permit based on the B9 regulation. Generally a trafficked person has more chance to gain a permanent residence permit, based on this B9 regulation, when her report to the

⁶ Of the other 24 persons this is unknown, see figure 2 in the Appendix.

⁷ A three-month reflection period is offered initially, during which persons can decide whether or not to press charges.

police leads to a conviction. Permanent residence permits are also granted much more easily under the B9 Regulation when the victim's statement leads to prosecution with a verdict but without conviction, if at that moment the woman has been in the Netherlands for at least three years. But although protection by the Dutch government of victims of trafficking has improved by these recent developments, the Bulgarian women in this research could not yet profit from this revision in legislation. Several Bulgarian women gained a temporary residence permit in the Netherlands because of their report to the police, but it turned out to be very difficult for them to receive a permanent residence permit. Some were able to prove that in case of returning to Bulgaria they would not have the chance to lead a normal life, that their safety was endangered (e.g. by possible reprisals of traffickers) and that the Bulgarian government would not offer them the necessary protection. This ensured them of a permanent residence permit based on humanitarian grounds. For the rest of these women, there were only a few options; to gain a residence permit in the Netherlands on other grounds than B9 (e.g. marriage with a Dutch citizen or on medical grounds), staying in the Netherlands illegally with a risk of deportation, going to another country to stay there legally (with a residence permit) or illegally, or returning to Bulgaria 'voluntarily' with or without the help of an assisting organisation, like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) or NGOs. This last scenario, the return will be described more extensively below.

2.3.2 IOM assisting remigration

Of all the Bulgarian women registered in the files of La Strada Netherlands/CoMensha, more than half returned to Bulgaria assisted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). They returned 'voluntarily', even though there often was not much other choice since their temporary residence to stay in the Netherlands had expired and many preferred to return instead of staying illegally. Family appeared to be an important factor in the choice whether to return to Bulgaria or not. Some women wanted to return only temporarily to visit their family or to pick up their children, others went back permanently to settle with a husband and children. The women who stayed in the Netherlands on the other hand were more often involved in relationships with Dutch men and/or had children with Dutch men. Most women returned within three months after they were registered at La Strada Netherlands/CoMensha. Many were relatively young at this moment, 47% being younger than 24 and 70% being younger than 30-years old.

Figure 1.1: Age of victim at the moment of return/ deportation

	Frequency	Percentage %	Valid percentage %
0 to 17	9	11	14
18 to 23	21	26	33
24 to 29	15	19	23
30 and older	19	24	30
Unknown	17	21	-
Total	81	100	100

Source: files of Bulgarian women announced to CoMensha as a victim of human trafficking in the period 2003 – 2006

The assistance offered by the IOM consisted mostly of guidance during the trip, providing plane tickets and financial support. Since the assistance in the Netherlands was mostly provided by IOM, the support upon arrival in Bulgaria was also mostly taken care of by the local IOM

partner. Cooperation and coordination between different assisting organisations is not coordinated very well both in the Netherlands and in Bulgaria. Therefore the persons researched did not always get a complete offer of possible assistance before and upon return, although this infrastructure is currently being improved.

2.3.3 Assistance in Bulgaria upon arrival

The assistance in Bulgaria is concentrated in Sofia, the capital, and is mainly focused on crisis intervention. After crisis intervention, many victims return to the countryside where they come from, which leads to a lack of assistance on the long term for this group. Another obstacle is that shelters demand criteria that often do not meet the multi-dimensional profile of a victim, a finding that has been observed by Surtees as well (2007). From the gathered data it turns out to be hard to find shelter for women who are ill, have serious psychological complaints or who have children.

Both in Bulgaria and the Netherlands the perception of the women themselves can collide with the perception that assisting organisations have of them. For example, a woman who does not regard herself as a victim of human trafficking and who is feeling solidarity towards her pimp breaks the rules of a shelter and the rules for receiving protection when she contacts this pimp. She can be excluded from assistance and protection, even though there can be psychological causes for her behaviour she might need help for. Excluding her from assistance can put her back in dangerous situations, the pimp sometimes being the only person she can 'count on' in this case.

2.3.4 Risks during the process of remigration

Although on paper 'safety and security' are given priority, in 98% of the cases the studied files of La Strada Netherlands/CoMensha do not mention anything about risk analysis before return. In some instances risks were known and among the women who came back to the Netherlands after return, there were some cases of repeated victimization. But in general there is only little information available about the dangers these women actually encountered after return. This is partly due to the fact that most women do not seek any assistance once they are back. Sometimes they do, but do not find long-term assistance, especially if they go to the countryside. This is why it remains unknown whether these women, or their families, have encountered any dangers. Even in cases where organisations in Bulgaria do have information, there is hardly any feedback coming back to the Netherlands about possible risks.

Another finding, however, is that even if a risk analysis was done and possible dangers have been foreseen, it is hard to prevent these dangers turning into actual events. The role of the Bulgarian government in assisting and protecting victims of human trafficking is limited. What is perhaps even more important is that involved NGOs and authorities can point out risks for the woman at return, which are not considered as risks by the person herself. In the studied cases there was one case about a minor who was assisted by AAF upon return and who wanted to go back to her family, despite advice of the Dutch and Bulgarian authorities who suspected her mother had something to do with the situation this girl had ended up in. Another example is the case of a minor who pointed out herself that her family was dangerous, since they sold her to people in the Netherlands in the first place. There was however a lack of proof to prosecute her family and to give this girl special protection by the government. Nevertheless different organisations tried to

protect her, but despite their advice, she contacted her former trafficker and handed out her address that was supposed to be secret. These examples show that some victims do not always perceive the risks as authorities and NGOs do, or they do but break safety rules anyway. They are only holding on to the little certainties and people they have, even if these people have put them into danger in the first place.

2.4 Aspects influencing the remigration process

The lack of information caused by the lack of long term assistance, the lack of feedback and coordination between organisations and the fact that many women find their own way and in many cases do not even settle down in Bulgaria, made it hard to get access to (information on) those women, even when they had stayed in Bulgaria. This makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions about reintegration in Bulgaria on the long term. Nevertheless, based on the few interviews with victims of trafficking, the studied cases in Bulgaria and secondary information from people who are professionally involved with returning victims, some questions could be answered.

An important finding about the aspects influencing the process of remigration is that certain circumstances that initially (partly) caused a situation of human trafficking often have not changed upon return. This is consistent with findings in other research (Van Eimeren, 2004; Kootstra & Commandeur, 2004; Surtees, 2007). The cases concerned in the research illustrated women who have encountered many problems during their lives, of which human trafficking is only one aspect, either a cause or result. A number of women had to survive on their own since their childhood and sometimes worked in Bulgarian prostitution before becoming victims of human trafficking in the Netherlands. After being 'saved' in the Netherlands, these women received the label of being a trafficked person. After being through all that – what these persons encountered in their past - it is not surprising they prefer to stay in the Netherlands. Upon return they might encounter the same circumstances that made them vulnerable for human trafficking in the first place. If these circumstances do not change there is risk for repeated victimization (Hakkert & Opperhuis, 1996).

It will now be explained which factors or circumstances on three different levels (micro, meso and macro) were found to have an important influence on these women becoming involved in human trafficking and thereby influencing the possibility of reintegration after return. An important note is that these factors are very interrelated and can cause victimization in certain combinations. Many of the problems that can lead to human trafficking and which can still be of influence after return, are rooted in factors at macro level, like gender inequality, discrimination (e.g. on the labour market), unemployment, poverty and a lack of future perspective. These factors are strongly related to the political, cultural and economic changes which occurred all over Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, since the fall of communism and have restricted chances for many women. The increased poverty affects women more than men and mainly women were therefore willing to accept informal jobs, under bad circumstances, and sometimes prostitution, in some cases abroad. The transition also increased the marginal position of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, especially Roma. At the same time the political and economic instability during the transition fed organized crime. Traffickers gratefully used the fact that women were looking for a better future. Exploiting these women can be considered as a lucrative way out of a frustrating social economic situation. This combination of the increased insecure position of

women and their motives on the one hand and the expanding organized crime making use of these women and of rising of corruption on the other hand, can partly explain the high number of Bulgarian women being registered as victims of human trafficking in the Netherlands, as shown in figure 1 of the Appendix.

The described developments on the national level since the transition led to a change in (different kinds of) access to opportunities and chances on the individual level. This is, among other things, related to employment in the area where you live, the social-economic position of your family, access to education and work experience. All these factors contribute to your access to opportunities.

Looking at the places of origin of the Bulgarian women registered at La Strada Netherlands/CoMensha clearly shows that the largest share is from the North East of Bulgaria, a region where unemployment is high and where perspectives are poor (IOM, 2003).⁸ Of the 28 districts of Bulgaria, 24 are represented by this group, of which Varna (12%), Pleven (9%), Targovishte (9%) and Sliven (7%) are most common. Many women are from districts around large cities with a large prostitution network such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Bourgas, the last two mainly in summer because of their touristic beach resorts. Regions where some ethnic minorities are concentrated are also well represented: Sliven, Pleven, and Lovech which are known to be home regions for certain Roma groups and Targovishte being the home region for a number of Turkish-Bulgarian women of the research group. This could point out that there is a link between regions of origin and human trafficking. This could partly be explained by prostitution networks and present ethnic minorities, but is most probably related to a combination of several factors, unemployment and poverty being important ones.

Poverty turns out to be an important reason to accept work at the margins of the labour market and this sometimes means work in prostitution. From the studied cases of women and the stories of the ones spoken with, the ones who initially 'chose' work in prostitution seemed to have lost control over their work and the circumstances at a certain point. Others were minors, which also created a situation of exploitation and/or trafficking. Other women ended up in prostitution by bad luck, through lies and deception and sometimes by force, often via initial offers to work in a hotel, restaurant or catering industry.

Many women did not want, or did not accept to enter prostitution despite the economical or other constraints. In the studied cases, however, there were also other factors working against them, on the level of the individual (micro) and/or the direct environment like family (meso). Many women have problematic family histories, where abuse and violence are common. Family and friends, who are trusted and who people depend on, misuse this position and have made some women vulnerable for human trafficking. Especially minors, who are emotionally and financially very dependent on others, are vulnerable this way. A number of women have been abused by a member of their families and seem to end up in situations of abuse or exploitation more easily. Some women grew up on the streets since childhood because of problems with family or because they did not have family to rely on, which made them vulnerable as well. Growing up in governmental institutions, like orphanages, does not necessarily lead to a better situation: traffickers sometimes recruit girls directly from these institutions and within these houses cases of abuse are well-known as well. Bad circumstances in these institutions sometimes lead to minors looking for a way out, prostitution being one of them. When girls turn 18 and leave such

⁸ See figure 3 in the Appendix.

institutions they become possible victims for human trafficking because they do not receive enough support, are not well looked after and do not have the skills to lead an independent life.

2.4.1 Reintegration

In many studied cases the women returned home, where they encountered the same circumstances that had contributed to their trafficking situation in the first place. This restricted their chances as much as before they ended up in Dutch prostitution. Poverty remained and problems within families, or family being absent, had not changed over time. Sometimes women could rely on another family member, but the lack of long term assistance leads to a lack of possibilities for the ones who cannot. It is hard to protect minors from their own parents. Moreover, minor or not, it is hard to prevent a woman to return to her family if she wants to. Family members are often the only ones they can 'rely on' and despite problems, they remain family.

It is difficult to change something about the marginal position the women are in, especially in some Roma subcultures that don't give priority to education and labour and have values that clash with those of the dominant culture in Bulgaria. Some women of certain Roma communities have never been part of the Bulgarian society; the reintegration process seems therefore self-contradictory: reintegration in what? They are sometimes not wanted anymore in the community they were once part of because of their experience in prostitution, which they are blamed for. Further they might not fit in these communities anymore, after having lived for years in a Western country.⁹ They often lack means to find their way in the Bulgarian society and they can still be confronted with discrimination of Roma which can block their access to a 'normal' life.

Involved social workers and psychologists therefore do not think there is a high chance of reintegration in the Bulgarian society for women who return to a situation that was not very healthy in the first place. Quoting one of the interviewed psychologists:

'many have not integrated before, so they can not really be reintegrated'.

Moreover, these vulnerable women sometimes have to deal with very traumatic experiences and have lived a very different life abroad, which can make it even harder to settle down back 'home'. Most of the women in this research were exploited in prostitution, sometimes by physical force, psychological manipulation, or both. The situation was being maintained in studied cases by bringing a woman into social isolation, using violence, making her dependent on drugs or threatening her. These traumatic experiences can lead to psychological and physical disorders that make reintegration even more difficult.

It is hard for the Bulgarian assisting organisations to improve the situation of these women. The lack of long term and specialized assistance by the Bulgarian government, particularly outside the big cities, makes it even harder. Sometimes the pattern can be minimized by vocational training, but it remains hard to get people back within the 'acceptable margins' of the society if they always have lived at the periphery of its boundaries. This sometimes leads to professionals of assisting organisations adjusting their expectations of the extent of how much they can contribute to reintegration of victims of human trafficking.

⁹ The length of stay of the Bulgarian women in the Netherlands is shown in figure 4 of the Appendix.

2.5 A 'career' in prostitution

Some women want never to be involved in prostitution again, whilst others say that it remains a possibility in case there is a financial need for it. A minor victim who was 'freed' of her pimp by the police explained that this pimp can still influence her life and there's a chance she'll work for him again if he threatens her family or out of financial need. A woman will solve her problems with the present means and it is exactly the wish for a good job and gaining income that is hard to fulfil after return of victims (Kootstra & Commandeur, 2004).

It is also known that some women cooperate actively with traffickers in recruiting other women for prostitution, after they have been exploited in prostitution themselves. Although the gathered data of this research do not show such a 'career move', there is a remarkably high number of women among Bulgarian suspects of human trafficking in the Netherlands (NRM, 2007 & 2008). This could be a sign that 'promotion' like this is common in a Bulgarian organisation of human trafficking. At least return to Bulgaria does not necessarily mean that contacts with traffickers and pimps have ended.

3. Recommendations

Since the researcher does not have any practical experience in assisting victims of human trafficking, only some general recommendations based on the main findings of this research shall be made.

3.1 Information position of assisting organisations and authorities

The lack of information about the situation of returned victims leads to the impossibility of critically evaluating return policies. This lack of information could partly be solved by sharing the present information and providing insight in the information certain parties have to other involved NGOs and authorities in the Netherlands and Bulgaria. Moreover, Dutch organisations and authorities could more actively request information after return.

The lack of information is also a consequence of women who choose their own path, without assistance. If women do not feel the need to maintain contact on the long term with assisting organisations or other involved parties, their wish should be respected. But if women are willing to share their experience it could be useful to care more actively for their situation, also on the longer term. This might not necessarily be of direct benefit for these women, but based on their experiences upon return, assistance and return policies can be improved.

Since it is unclear whether information about safety during and after return is absent or just not registered in the files of La Strada Netherlands/CoMensha, more research about risk analysis is needed. This information is important to prepare the return in the most secure way and to be able to evaluate after return how protection could be improved. Easy access to this kind of information is also important in case a woman is applying for a permanent residence permit in the Netherlands and needs to prove which risks are expected if she would return.

3.2 Cooperation and coordination of possible assistance

Both in the Netherlands and in Bulgaria there are many possibilities for assistance, which are not

being used to the fullest. Trafficked persons should be provided with a complete offer of possibilities in assistance. Therefore, more cooperation is needed between different (governmental and non governmental) organizations both in Bulgaria and the Netherlands and a better coordination of the options in assistance during the process of return and reintegration. Small assisting initiatives (not specific for victims of human trafficking) in the countryside should also be considered.

3.3 Filling the gap of long term assistance

Mainly on the countryside, in areas where many victims come from and where the risk for human trafficking is high, more specialized psychological, social and financial support is needed for the longer term. Organisations focusing on crisis intervention, like Animus Association Foundation (AAF), could then more easily refer women to these local organisations.

3.4 Assistance adjusted to the diverse profile of a ‘victim’

Programs focusing on supporting trafficked persons before, during and after return have to be more flexible, taking into account the individual needs and diversity of these persons who have specific problems and who do not always consider themselves as victims. Adjusting the support to the needs of individuals and trying to connect to their cultural background might improve their position and chances of reintegration.

3.5 More attention for the interest of the victim

The current emphasis on offenders in the approach of human trafficking should be adjusted to paying more attention to the victim’s interest regardless of her cooperation with police investigation and prosecution of suspects. Protection of victims of trafficking by the Bulgarian government should not be dependent on the victims’ willingness to this kind of cooperation. In the Netherlands the links between this cooperation on the one hand and assistance and gaining a temporary residence permit on the other hand (by the B9 regulation) has recently been loosened. Further research is needed to properly evaluate the effects of this development.

3.6 The Netherlands, Bulgaria and the EU

After the return of victims, the problem of human trafficking might seem to be out of reach for the Dutch authorities and other actors involved. However, such an approach does not suit the mobility of this phenomenon. Since Bulgaria became EU member, there is room for improvement and a collective approach to the human trafficking issue should be adopted. After all also the Netherlands has to ensure that the (human) rights of those persons, who were severely exploited in the Netherlands are protected after return. Monitoring after return is therefore partly a responsibility of the country of destination.

The most logical ‘solution’ to the problems causing (re-)victimization and blocking reintegration would be to improve the structures and chances which are currently limited for some women and thereby bringing them outside the margins of society. The Bulgarian government has the responsibility to care for its people and should support existing projects fighting root causes of human trafficking, such as poverty and discrimination. Better investment and a greater political

involvement by the Bulgarian government in the supply of support, protection and shelter of human trafficking victims is recommended. Especially for the long term there is a need for shelter, work and money to help these women finding their own way.

Special attention is needed for minors, especially the ones growing up in problematic families, lacking a supportive environment and/or growing up in governmental institutions. Besides an improvement of the circumstances in these institutions, which is an ongoing process, further development of the foster care system could be an option.

In all these recommendations the Netherlands and the European Union, through dedicated governmental structures, could contribute through both investment and by applying pressure on the Bulgarian government. The existing pressure on fighting organized crime, corruption and discrimination of ethnic minorities and on reforming the juridical system should be maintained and maybe even strengthened.

Furthermore, the EU has an active position in improving rights and opportunities for Bulgarian migrants at the European labour market. At the moment this position is not equal in all EU countries, compared to other EU citizens. In some EU countries work restrictions have been lifted already, but in the Netherlands the restrictions will be lifted in 2012 at the latest. Lifting these restrictions earlier would improve the opportunity of Bulgarian citizens for paid employment in the Netherlands.

3.7 More research

This study has answered some questions about remigration of trafficked persons from the Netherlands to Bulgaria. Nevertheless many questions remain unanswered. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed, also about other countries of origin and destination, to be able to gain more insight in the return of trafficked persons, their (social and economical) situation on the longer term and their mobility in migrating again.

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5. Appendix

Figure 1: number of trafficked persons reported to CoMensha and percentage of Bulgarians

Year	number	Number of Bulgarians	Percentage of Bulgarians %
2003	257	47	18%
2004	405	55	14%
2005	424	52	12%
2006	579	42	7%
Total	1667	196	12%

Source: Annual reports of CoMensha of 2003 - 2007

Figure 2: Number of Bulgarian trafficked persons that returned voluntarily or have been deported according to the CoMensha files

	Frequency	Percentage %	Valid percentage %
Voluntary return	68	45	54
Deportation	12	8	10
Voluntary return and deportation	1	1	1
Going to be deported	1	1	1
Staying in the Netherlands	45	30	35
Unknown	24	16	-
Total	151	100	100

Source: files of Bulgarian women announced to CoMensha as trafficked persons in the period 2003 – 2007

Figure 3: Home region in Bulgaria

Region	Frequency	Percentage %	Valid percentage %
Northeast	30	20	29
North central	28	19	27
South central	20	13	19
Southeast	12	8	12
Southwest	11	7	11
Northwest	2	1	2
Unknown	48	32	-
Total	151	100	100

Source: files of Bulgarian women announced to CoMensha as trafficked persons in the period 2003 – 2007

Figure 4: Period of stay in the Netherlands before return/ deportation

	Frequency	Percentage %	Valid percentage %
< 1 month	5	6	11
1 - 3 months	13	16	28
3 - 6 months	7	9	15
6 - 12 months	5	6	11
1 - 2 years	10	12	22
2 - 3 years	2	3	4
> 3 years	4	5	9
Unknown	35	43	-
Total	81	100	100

Source: files of Bulgarian women announced to CoMensha as trafficked persons in the period 2003 – 2007