

Anette Brunovskis and Rebecca Surtees

No place like home?

Challenges in family reintegration after trafficking

The Fafo/NEXUS Institute project:
Improving services to trafficked persons



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Acronyms and abbreviations

AT	Anti-trafficking
BiH	Bosnia-Herzegovina
CAFV	Counselling against Family Violence
CoE	Council of Europe
D&E	Different and Equal
EU	European Union
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GO	Governmental organisation
IO	International organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SEE	South Eastern Europe
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN	United Nations
VoT	Victim of trafficking

Summary

When trafficking exploitation ends, victims face a new set of challenges as they return and integrate into their home environment. A critical aspect is victims' relationship and interaction with their family. Family provides not only emotional and social support but also (often vital) economic backstopping. Considering and accommodating family dynamics and relationships in reintegration responses has the potential to contribute substantially to more efficient and appropriate assistance and protection.

Even in the best circumstances and most positive family contexts, the post-trafficking period can involve less than smooth interpersonal relations between victims and their families. One issue is interpersonal tensions – family members feel angry, disappointed or embarrassed about their failed migration, particularly in countries where migration is normative and “success stories” prolific. At a more general level, tension in families is connected with different and mutually unfulfilled expectations that victims and families have of one another – most particularly in terms of emotional and social support and financial benefit.

Many victims felt misunderstood by their family upon return and did not receive the support or reassurance they sought. When victims keep trafficking a secret or where they only tell some persons (as is commonly the case), it is even less likely that their families will be able to understand and react appropriately. Trafficked persons describe a range of negative feelings post-trafficking which manifested in different behaviours like anger, irritability, aggression, sadness and/or depression. As a result, family interactions are often complicated and problematic – in some cases, tense and uncomfortable; in other cases, unhealthy and even dysfunctional.

While trafficking impacts victim's social connections, most severely impacted are victim's intimate relationships – those with partners/spouses and children and, in some cases, parents. These relationships are many victims' main source of economic and social support, thus, tensions in these arenas present both practical and emotional strains.

Children are deeply affected by the circumstances a trafficked mother finds herself in when she returns, in terms of her financial situation, her mental and physical health and her relationship with family and community. Children left behind will not necessarily accept the mother, either because they have not seen her for a long time and may not know or recognise her, or they have developed negative feelings towards her because of what they have been told by others during her absence. Further, many victims feel guilt and sadness for their absence, which is further complicated by the social dynamic whereby their absence breached social expectations of motherhood, particularly when migration fails and they are unable to provide for their children

Some children are born as a result of trafficking, conceived with a client or a trafficker, which can create an enormously complicated situation for the woman in terms of her feelings toward and about the child including issues of attachment. The child may re-

mind them of their trafficking experience; they may also fear the social implications of returning with a child born from trafficking/prostitution. The attitude of the family is very important in terms of how the victim can cope with having a child from trafficking.

In a number of cases, victim's husbands were angry upon their return. Some husbands were described by their wives as "jealous", accusing them of promiscuity and infidelity, in essence blaming them for being trafficked into prostitution. Rebuilding and repairing marital relations in cases of trafficking can be difficult, particularly in environments where prostitution is heavily stigmatised. Some of the anger and frustration between spouses may be a function of failure to live up to their respective gender/social roles – as a faithful wife and present mother and as a protective husband able to support his wife and family.

For many returning trafficking victims, the relationship with parents is central. Many are minors who return to the home and family environment of their parents. Tensions and stress in this environment made for complicated reintegration. Dynamics between "children" and parents can be complicated. Parents who have been unable to care for and protect their child may feel frustration, guilt and shame, not least because of social norms of parental care and family support. Other parents were less supportive or were stressed by the consequences of trafficking – for example, the debt incurred, their failure to return with money, the shame brought to their home and family and so on.

While the person who was trafficked was the primary victim, family members, and not the least children, husbands and parents, may be secondary victims of trafficking, often traumatised by what their family member has experienced. By contrast, in other cases, families have been involved in or had knowledge of their trafficking and prostitution, which can complicate relationships when the victim returns. However, it cannot be assumed that victims who have been pressured by family will chose to break contact with them. It is crucial to take into account the complexities of family relationships (not least emotionally) and particularly when the victim has few other relations or support systems, or limited contact with other family members.

Socio-economic vulnerability amongst trafficking victims is well known and one of the main reasons assistance is provided. Multiple vulnerabilities can create additional strain on the family system, which, in turn, diminishes the ability to function as a safety net and a welfare provider. Tensions potentially heighten the victim's vulnerability as it can lead to family rejection, not serving as a security net and/or not assisting her in a situation of crisis. The two main sources of additional stress on and conflict in families post-trafficking are tied to financial hardship and stigma.

For many trafficking victims, the decision to migrate was generally linked to the need to earn money. However, most returned with little or no money and may also have incurred debt either in order to finance their migration or as a consequence of trafficking. Family members left behind often have clear (and sometimes inflated) expectations about earnings while working abroad. Not fulfilling these expectations can be a source of tension; it can also be a practical problem when family members have spent money in anticipation of future earnings.

Trafficking victims are quite commonly cast as deviant and suffer social sanctions as a consequence of social stigma. Stigma affects trafficking victims regardless of whether the trafficking is known to others or not, although in markedly different ways.

When it is known in a local community that a woman/girl has been trafficked, this can be a precarious, even dangerous, situation. Trafficking victims described different manifestations of stigma and discrimination – insults, verbal abuse and being shunned by friends and neighbours. This often also has direct consequences for other family members in their interactions with the community and the victim. A number of women were rejected by their families after being trafficked.

While there is stigma caused by trafficking into prostitution, it is often difficult to disentangle from other sources of stigma – having a bad reputation in the village, being from an ethnic minority, needing assistance, coming from a “bad” family and so on – making it multilayered and complex. An already stigmatised family will generally lack social capital to draw on when a daughter or wife returns and is associated with prostitution.

When the trafficking is not known, victims often develop cover stories to camouflage what happened and protect themselves. However, small mistakes or inconsistencies can lead to a story being uncovered, rendering their situation very fragile. Moreover, cover stories mean that victims cannot explain actions and behaviours which are linked to or caused by trafficking, which can lead to substantial problems in their interactions and relationships. One challenge for victims is to cope with stress, trauma and depression without having the opportunity to tell those closest to them why they feel this way. At the same time, telling the family (or friends) about trafficking does not always appear to be an alternative; many women were rejected by their families when they learned what had happened.

Based on the above analysis and discussion, the report makes a set of recommendations toward tailoring and enhancing the reintegration response for trafficked persons and their families. Issues of financial situation and how to address stigmatisation can have a great bearing on the victims’ reintegration outcome. Further, the victim’s family situation, including the overall socio-economic situation of the family unit, is important in terms of fostering a supportive environment for the victim. Recommendations, therefore, focus on these main themes.

Family inclusion in assistance

It is important to consider and accommodate the family system as a whole in assistance design, as this can be crucial for service provision to individual victims and their sustainable reintegration. Reasons for and ways of including family in assistance design include:

- **Recognise the social and economic interconnectedness of the family unit.**

The family generally functions as one economic and social unit. Working with the family as a whole can more efficiently improve the victim’s financial and social status and also increase the family’s ability to function as a safety net in the longer term and in response to potential crises or setbacks.

- **Economic support should not amplify vulnerability of trafficked persons.** One challenge is to avoid situations where victims' access to assistance is exploited by other family members, most common amongst dysfunctional and abusive families. Some families have used victims to receive economic/financial support, often taking all or a portion of that which is given to victims and abusing or abandoning them when assistance becomes less or ends. This highlights the importance of considering both the social and economic environment of a returning victim.
- **Develop strategies to support the family while respecting victims' right to privacy.** It is challenging to involve family members in an assistance scheme when they are not aware that the victim has been trafficked. There cannot be a standardised solution for how beneficiaries explain the assistance they receive, but it is important to consider this element when designing and setting up assistance programmes. Service providers can help beneficiaries handle and negotiate this often tricky terrain.
- **Provide different forms of assistance which take into account the needs and situation of different families, constellations and needs.** When assistance is only shelter based, this can cause problems for trafficking victims in terms of relations with their family members. Some trafficked persons are so anxious to return home to their family that they will not consider a shelter option. Moreover, prolonged absences may contribute to a climate of distrust between victim and family, particularly when shelters are closed and secret and contact is restricted. This may be exacerbated when the family does not know what happened to the trafficked person. Also, shelter stays are not an option for victims who must return home and support family members, particularly children. While shelter based assistance can be valuable and necessary, it is crucial to develop efficient mechanisms for non-residential services including local community-based assistance options.

Stigma alleviation

While many trafficking victims suffered from being stigmatised or the fear of being “found out”, many also described factors that mitigated stigma and – over time – improved their relationships with and standing within their local communities. A systematic approach to stigma alleviation can be helpful in minimising adverse outcomes:

- **Identify the different causes of stigma – for different victims, forms of trafficking and in different settings.** Inadequate attention has been paid to identifying the specific contributors to stigma including how this differs from individual to individual, setting to setting as well as according to form of trafficking. The most obvious type of stigma is attached to prostitution, breaching norms of appropriate female sexual and social behaviour. Being a failed migrant is stigmatising in itself, which is also important to bear in mind in terms of responses.

Study is needed into the issue of stigma – both its causes and how it can be addressed

- **Develop and implement stigma alleviation strategies as part of reintegration programmes.** Stigma alleviation strategies used by some of our respondents addressed the stigma of prostitution as well as failed migration. Over time, several managed to significantly improve their situation in their local communities through different strategies:
 - **Being economically successful.** One of the more efficient ways of alleviating stigma was to prove oneself successful in another field, especially by being able to successfully establish and run a small business or get a good, respectable job. This is element of assistance - i.e. economic empowerment and securing one's livelihood – has both economic and social effects, not least in terms of (re)establishing social status.
 - **Returning home with money.** It is worth considering measures that make it possible for a victim to return home with money. Victims who failed to remit money or bring money back with them, faced severe difficulties, both in explaining their absence and in terms of their social role. In addition to the stigma associated with a (possible) association with prostitution, they were also cast as failed migrants or even failed parents.
 - **Stigma mitigation strategies should not infer blame for exploitation.** Many trafficked persons attempt to mitigate stigma by conforming to social conventions. This is also advocated by some assistance organisations which aimed to create “good girls” who conform to norms of acceptable female behaviour. However, it is important that such approaches do not imply that victims behaviour was the cause, even in part, of their violation. “Life skills” training that is presented as learned strategies for coping better in society is one thing; training presented with the aim of “exorcising” flawed personality traits is something entirely different.
- **Consider the time element in efforts to address and mitigate stigma.** Expand the time period after return that victims of trafficking are eligible to talk with service-providers about their experience, as it is difficult for those who keep their trafficking a secret to draw on other sources of emotional support. While the strain may lessen over time, even those who were trafficked several years ago still experienced nightmares, memories or flashbacks. Past traumatic experiences can render a person sensitive at times of (even unrelated) stress. Having the option to contact service providers at a later stage can provide a very important safety valve for trafficked persons.

That being said, it is important to keep in mind the vast array and variation of experiences and needs of trafficked persons. This is by no means a homogenous group with similar trajectories through trafficking, similar priorities or aspirations afterward or even

similar understandings of whether or not they have been victimised. Further, the experiences of assisted trafficking victims may not be consistent with those of unidentified or unassisted victims and, thus, suitable reintegration interventions will necessarily differ. As a consequence, unidentified and unassisted trafficking victims may find that the existing assistance and reintegration models do not fully or even partly meet their needs and, therefore, opt not to access these services. Understanding how to design programmes and policies for this other (less known, less considered) group of trafficked persons and their families requires further understanding of their experiences, situation, needs and aspirations as well as the specific family (and community) dynamics which inform their trafficking risk and reintegration opportunities.

Preface / acknowledgements

In our on-going research we have found the issue of reintegration to be one of the most challenging and complex in terms of the anti-trafficking response. As part of the reintegration of trafficked persons, the role of family is central. Family can serve as an important source of support, comfort and security; it can also serve as a constraining and inhibiting factor. And yet the role of family (and differences amongst family members) is not always or even often a part of the body of research. This paper is intended as a starting point for discussing and exploring this extremely complex terrain, including both the positive and negative effects family relations have on reintegration and, equally, what can be done to better support victims and their families in this recovery and reintegration process. Identifying common points of tension can be useful in providing more targeted assistance to victims of trafficking, thereby decreasing the risk of social vulnerability or even re-trafficking. Awareness of possible future points of conflict in family relationships may provide options for early intervention. Further, understanding that post-trafficking relationships face pressure and potential complications can help to reduce the disappointment and hurt that several former trafficking victims expressed after their reuniting with families, when support was not offered in the form they initially expected or hoped for.

We are grateful that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs identified this as an important issue in the anti-trafficking response and funded this research project. This paper is one in a series of four research papers which address a range of issues and challenges in the assistance framework in the Balkan and FSU region.

This paper is based on fieldwork research conducted in Albania, Serbia and Moldova between 2006 and 2008. During fieldwork we found that challenges in the assistance framework resonated with many service providers as well as trafficked persons and are grateful to all for their generous participation. Anti-trafficking practitioners generously shared information about their programmes and case work, including discussing the challenges and obstacles they face with great candour. These included in Albania – IOM Tirana, Different and Equal (D&E), Tjeter Vision; in Moldova – International Centre for Women’s Rights Protection and Promotion “La Strada”, IOM Chisinau, Interaction, Contact, UNDP, Island of Hope; and in Serbia – Atina, Counseling against Family Violence (CAFV), Anti-trafficking Centre (ATC), IOM Belgrade and the Agency for the Coordination of Assistance to Victims of Trafficking. These organisation also assisted by facilitating access to a wide range of trafficked persons. We are grateful to the trafficked women and girls and persons in street prostitution who were willing to share details of their experiences in an effort to improve conditions and opportunities for other trafficked persons. Their experiences form the foundation of this paper and the research series more generally. Without their courageous and generous participation, this re-

search would not be possible. We hope to have fairly represented their views and experiences.

We have also benefited from the assistance of colleagues. Laura Mitchell was central in data collection, conducting fieldwork in Serbia and Albania in 2006. In Serbia, the Anti Trafficking Centre's team of outreach workers – Jelena Milic, Borislav Djurkovic, Stefan Dimitrijevic and Suzana Vukoje – worked as field assistants, interviewing 20 women, girls and transgender persons in street prostitution in Belgrade, information we would not have been able to collect without their competent assistance. We also want to extend our gratitude to Slavica Stojkovic, Valbona Lenja and Stella Rotaru from the IOM missions in Serbia, Albania and Moldova who went out of their way in helping us organise fieldwork. Further, we have had indispensable support from our team of highly competent translators – Milena Markovic, Ksenija Lazovic, Daniela Hasa, Aljona Thaci, Julian Hasa and Alina Legcobit.

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Anette Brunovskis and Rebecca Surtees,
Fafo (Oslo) and NEXUS (Washington), February 2012

1. Introduction

Assistance to trafficked women and girls has, in many countries, included a strong focus on repatriation and reintegration in families and, where appropriate, the local community. Indeed, in our interviews with trafficked women and girls, many have said: “I just wanted to go home”. However, many also found that the process of “coming home” and re-establishing their lives was far from smooth. In this report, we describe and disentangle the main challenges that trafficked women and girls faced in this situation.

In previous studies on reintegration of trafficking victims, of which there are few, the focus has been mainly on socio-economic factors, such as whether former victims are able to find jobs or secure an income, access accommodation, provide for their children or access education and training. Other priorities included medical and legal assistance, not least to facilitate the prosecution of traffickers (please see literature section for references). This focus is understandable, given the dire circumstances that many trafficked persons find themselves in upon return.

In our interviews with trafficking victims, however, other factors are just as important, most prominently their relationships with their families and close ones. For many, stigma or fear of stigma was an omnipresent factor, both for those who were exposed as victims and ostracised and those who struggled to avoid stigma by keeping their past hidden. And, while our data also reflect the practical and financial difficulties that many continue to struggle with, several respondents focus less on the *practical* aspects of trying to cope with financial problems or poverty and more on the impact that these economic problems had on their *relationships* with others, their family in particular.

The presence or absence of family is a central factor in how reintegration is approached in many countries. Family provides not only emotional and social support but also (often vital) economic backstopping, particularly in environments where it is (socially and/or financially) difficult for a woman to live independently. Family is also relevant in cases of integration – for instance, when victims seek to stay in destination countries, family relationships can – and have been – taken into account when deciding whether someone is eligible for protection or residence.

In our research, family relationships have been a significant factor, both prior to risky migration strategies and in terms of vulnerability to re-trafficking. Strong relationships can serve to protect trafficked persons in cases of economic vulnerability and, equally, can be a mitigating factor in cases of social exclusion. However, when family relationships are weak or negative, they can significantly hinder this process.

Including family dynamics and relationships in reintegration responses is likely, therefore, to contribute substantially to more efficient and appropriate assistance and protection. By implication, failure to take the family into account in interventions misses an important, arguably even pivotal, factor in the reintegration process itself.

Therefore, the focus of this report is on family reintegration, but with particular attention to the different relationships within families. Identifying common points of tension can be useful in providing more targeted assistance to victims of trafficking, thereby decreasing the risk of social vulnerability or even re-trafficking. Awareness of potential conflict points in family relationships may provide options for early intervention and also be built into reintegration processes and responses. Further, understanding that post-trafficking relationships may be tense and complicated (at least at some stage and in response to certain triggers) can reduce the stress and disappointment felt by many former trafficking victims after reuniting with their families, when support is not offered in the form they expected or hoped for.

In this report, chapter 2 provides an overview of terms, definitions and methodology. We then move on to discuss points of tension in reuniting with children, spouses or partners, and with other family members, in chapter 3. In chapter 4 we describe two external factors that add extra strain to family relationships (financial problems and stigma), before discussing the implications for assistance to individual victims as well as their family members, in chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes the paper with concrete and specific recommendations for future programme and policy design and which can serve as a basis for further discussion on how to best support the reintegration of trafficked persons.

2. Terms, definitions and method

Terms and definitions

Data for this report were collected in the context of a previous study of why some trafficking victims decline assistance, and supplemented by later fieldwork for a project on the family environment of returned trafficking victims. The terms and definitions used in this report are based on those from the original projects. Please see Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 24-26.

Human Trafficking

The definition of human trafficking articulated in the *United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*¹ is the seminal definition from which most national definitions are based globally. As the most widely applied definition, it is the basis of the legal definition of trafficking in human beings in the countries where fieldwork was conducted. In the Protocol, trafficking is defined in article 3a as:

[...] recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Further, the Protocol specifies in article 3c that if any of the means listed in article 3a have been used, the consent of the person is not relevant. If the victim is a child (i.e. under 18 years of age), the use of the listed means need not be shown to prove trafficking.

In the three countries of this study, national laws are in conformity with the protocol definition. However, in practice, the implementation of the definition does not always reflect a clearly understood line between trafficked and non-trafficked persons.

The Protocol has been the subject of much debate because of the inherent ambiguities in central terms. The ambiguity of key terms was deliberate, in large part in recogni-

¹ Also known as the Palermo Protocol, this protocol is one of the three protocols which supplements the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 15, 2000.

tion of the need for the definition to be able to accommodate a wide range of potential future unanticipated scenarios of human trafficking. In addition, terms such as “position of vulnerability” and “exploitation” were left noticeably unspecified in large part to accommodate countries with different positions on prostitution - for instance, countries where sex buyers are criminalised, countries where prostitutes risk prosecution and countries where prostitution is legal and considered a form of labour. The explanatory notes go some way in specifying vulnerability as “not having a real and acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse involved,” (Jordan 2002: 7). However, this is not necessarily helpful in demarcating the boundaries of trafficking in practice, as the definition of “real and acceptable alternative” is similarly open to interpretation.

For the purpose of this analysis, we have included women and girls who defined themselves as victims of trafficking as well as some women and girls who did not define themselves as trafficked but where information about their experience strongly indicated trafficking, as defined in the Protocol. For instance, one respondent was a minor when she entered prostitution, having fled abusive conditions at home. She gave more than half of her earnings to a man who also owned the flat she was living in. While she framed this as a survival strategy that enabled her to live independently of her parents, this situation constitutes abuse of a position of vulnerability and can reasonably be seen as a case of human trafficking under the protocol definition. Further, facilitating and profiting from child prostitution is exploitation.

Victim of trafficking

A significant body of literature criticises the use of the term “victim” for people who have been subjected to violence or abuse, referring in particular to women who have been abused by husbands or partners. This literature argues that the term ascribes a passive role to someone who has, in fact, overcome a very difficult or even traumatic experience and, thereby, undermines agency and may confer, some argue, a degree of blame upon the individual. While we appreciate and acknowledge this argument, we feel that the alternative term “trafficking survivor” is insufficient. In many cases it has the potential to mask the realities that the individual has confronted and often continues to face. It generally equates survivorship with removal from trafficking, which is often only the start of a long, complicated and non-linear path to recovery. Further, within both the human rights and criminal law frameworks, the term “victim” is important as it designates the subject of a violation and the necessity for responsibility and redress.

As such, in this study, “victim” denotes someone who has been the victim of a crime and does not refer to the person’s agency or any other characteristics. We also use the term “trafficked person” interchangeably with “trafficking victim”, in the context of our own on-going discussions about appropriate terminology and framing of the issue. That being said, this framing is for the purpose of this report and, in practice, each trafficked individual has the right to characterise herself/himself in the manner of her/his choosing.

Family

We define family as a group of people bound by blood relations or legal union. Within the three countries included in this study, family patterns differ substantially. Moreover, family configurations and obligations also vary within each country – from rural to urban settings and according to different religious, cultural and ethnic affiliation. In most cases, respondents spoke about family in terms of their parents, husbands and children with grandparents, aunts and uncles playing a more ancillary role, depending on the age and situation of the respondent. In a few cases, the relationship and role of cousins was also described as significant.

Identification

For this study, “successful identification” is defined as a situation in which anti-trafficking professionals were able to identify individuals as trafficked (or potentially trafficked) in an appropriate, sensitive and timely fashion, and provide suitable options for referral and assistance at home and/or abroad, depending on the situation.

Assistance

Literature on “anti-trafficking assistance” is generally understood to be formal anti-trafficking assistance, provided by national and international NGOs, IOs, and state bodies. However, it is also important to consider non-trafficking specific assistance, which many trafficked persons also access as part of their recovery and reintegration process. We have also found it useful to separate formal assistance (i.e. provided by organisations and institutions, including community and religious groups) and informal assistance (i.e. provided by family and friends and within the community). Assistance may be structured - i.e. an organised assistance framework - or it may be more informal, *ad hoc* responses to situations of crisis or vulnerability.

All assistance (formal and informal; trafficking specific and more generalised; structured and *ad hoc*) has an important role to play in the recovery and reintegration of trafficked persons. Which assistance is most effective and appropriate depends on a range of individual and socio-economic factors as well as the stage of victims’ post-trafficking experience. Moreover, the different types of assistance are often complimentary and mutually reinforcing; access to different (and complimentary) types of assistance can be important in supporting recovery.

Reintegration

Assistance provided to trafficked persons often has “reintegration” as its long term aim. However, reintegration may mean different things to different people/agencies and in different settings and often it is used interchangeably with terms like “assistance” and “rehabilitation”.

In the context of this study, reintegration refers to the process of recovery and socio-economic inclusion following a trafficking experience. It includes settlement in a safe

and secure environment, access to a reasonable standard of living, mental and physical well-being, opportunities for personal, social and economic development and access to social and emotional support. In many cases, reintegration will involve return to the victim's family and/or community of origin. However, it may also involve integration in a new community and even in a new country, depending on the needs and interests of the trafficked person. A central aspect of successful re/integration is empowerment, supporting victims to develop skills toward independence and self-sufficiency and to be actively involved in their recovery and re/integration (Surtees 2008b: 11). Thus, in laymen's terms, reintegration refers to a broad range of measures over a period of some time that aim to support and assist those who have experienced problems of various kinds because they were trafficked.

At a conceptual level, however, the term reintegration is complicated in several ways:

- Reintegration implies a return to the individual's community/environment of origin, which may not always be the most advisable solution and might, in reality, work against their social inclusion in the long term. For this reason, the concept of reintegration needs to be paired with integration – where victims integrate in a new community in their country of origin or in a new country altogether – if this is what the victim wants and needs.
- The term **re**integration (with emphasis on re-) assumes that the person was socially integrated before s/he was trafficked, and that the reintegration process will restore this situation. However, many of our respondents have, prior to their trafficking, been socially excluded in different ways, not least in terms of their socio-economic status. Exclusion was also related to racism and discrimination, often very pronounced in the case of Roma women and girls. When the individual was not socially integrated prior to trafficking, assumptions of “reintegration” should be carefully considered.
- Reintegration also implies that those who *were* previously integrated or “socially included” prior to being trafficked, have somehow become detached, segregated or excluded as an unavoidable consequence of migration; of the link with prostitution, or both. Again, this may not necessarily be the case. Trafficking victims will generally, as we will return to, go to great lengths to conceal their trafficking experience and trafficking itself may not necessarily change their previous status or level of integration in their community.
- It is generally assumed that trafficking victims need long term “rehabilitation” in order to move on from their experiences. While some victims have certainly suffered extremely grave and long term consequences of trafficking, both physically and psychologically, it is not the case for all. Trafficking occurs along a continuum and the level of abuse/exploitation as well as the impact differs quite substantially along this continuum. Taking a one-size-fits-all approach to the needs of trafficking victims – including assuming that they are

all “damaged” and “traumatised” in some way – will not in their best interest. Indeed, many respondents’ needs centred around very practical issues that would be difficult for anyone to manage. One common example was victims facing rigid, corrupt and opaque bureaucracies when trying to process documents for unregistered children born abroad. This illustrates that the need for interventions or assistance may not primarily stem from the trafficked persons themselves but from the system within which they find themselves. Not all victims of trafficking need extensive interventions and assistance in order to return to and function within society

Given the complexities of the term “reintegration”, it is perhaps more appropriate, in many cases, to talk about measures that promote socio-economic inclusion, all the while bearing in mind that some victims may not *need* help to be included. Using the term reintegration wholesale may also mask the extensive need for creating opportunities for people who were underprivileged and disenfranchised even before they were trafficked. The above points notwithstanding; because reintegration is the most commonly used term in current discourse, this study also uses this framing, albeit with attention to and recognition of all of the caveats and complications outlined above.

Service providers

Organisations and individuals that provide one or more of the range of services and assistance offered to trafficking victims. These may include social workers, psychologists, shelter staff, medical personnel or legal professionals from NGOs, IOs and GOs. Service providers may be specialised in anti-trafficking assistance or may have a more general assistance background. “Service provider” also generally refers to an individual with a professional background and relevant qualifications in assistance (e.g. social work, psychology, medicine, legal aid, etc.). In some situations it may also include persons who provide informal or *ad hoc* assistance to trafficked persons.

Literature

Much of the literature on trafficking focuses on individual victims – their background, trafficking experiences and post-trafficking lives. When the family is described, it is often as part of a general pattern of vulnerability – for example, poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol abuse, single motherhood, etc – and as a trigger and contributor to trafficking. The family becomes invisible or is reduced to “a factor” in a broader picture of individual vulnerability and a potentially complicating factor in the reintegration process. Further, there is limited focus on families in the small body of research on reintegration of and social work with victims of trafficking, albeit with a few exceptions (Bjerkan 2005; Brunovskis & Surtees 2012, 2007; Caouette & Saito 1999; Derks 1998; Surtees 2008a,d&e).

Literature on reintegration (and integration) of individual victims have often been about the overall and general needs of victims (Kootstra & Commandeur 2004; Surtees 2008b&c & 2007; Tdh 2009). More targeted studies have focused on health, economic reintegration and safe migration. Studies on health needs (see, for instance, Zimmerman et al. 2003 & 2006, Gajic-Veljanoski & Stewart 2007) have placed particular weight on the need for mental and sexual/reproductive health services. One study of trafficking for sexual exploitation found that particularly in the first three months after leaving trafficking, psychological health was compromised in a substantial number of women including in terms of presenting with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Zimmerman et al. 2003, 2006). By implication, manifestation of PTSD can make reintegration and reunification with family more difficult, as we will return to. Others have focused on economic opportunities and help with safe migration as important factors in effective reintegration (Kato nd, Lisborg 2009, Lisborg & Plambech 2009, Surtees 2012).

Our own research has found that the family situation of victims is crucial in decisions about assistance and as a support network after trafficking (Brunovskis & Surtees 2012, 2008, 2007). One impediment to accepting often critical assistance is that the form in which it is offered is not compatible with their family situation. Some victims declined services because they had to provide for family members or because they could not be away from dependants with care needs; others because programmes did not include provisions for victim's family members. Other problems arose when service providers failed to provide information about assistance to both victims and their families; this led to suspicion of the programme itself and the returned victim. At the same time, family is the central source of support and a crucial safety net, particularly in countries where state and civil society assistance is weak, which underlines the importance of understanding family dynamics in post-trafficking family reunification and options for recovery and reintegration.

Victims of trafficking often face very complex and complicated situations upon return and the source of these problems are multi-faceted. Some challenges are related to migration, others to poverty. Some are linked to being traumatised, others to stigma. However, in spite of the links with other vulnerable groups, trafficking studies rarely draw on this broader body of knowledge. For this paper we have found it helpful to draw on literature on transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotila & Avila 1997), rape victims and their families (Campbell 2001), stigmatisation (Beals et al. 2009; Corrigan 2004; Link et al. 1991, Link & Phelan 2001; Sallmann 2010), family based systems of care for victims of abuse (Jager et al. 2010) as well as families' role in the reintegration of drug addicts (Gideon 2007) and ex-prisoners (Dodge & Pogrebin 2001). Future studies with trafficking victims would also potentially benefit from other such sources of knowledge.

Method

This research is based on a qualitative design and analysis of interview data from trafficking victims and anti-trafficking service providers in Albania, Serbia and Moldova between 2006 and 2008. We sought to illuminate challenges in post-trafficking family relationships as perceived and presented by our respondents.

These data were collected in the context of two Fafo/NEXUS Institute research collaborations—namely, for the project *Leaving the past behind? When trafficking victims decline assistance*, conducted in Albania, Serbia and Moldova in 2006 and 2007, funded by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs;² and for the project *The family environment of returned trafficking victims in Moldova*, undertaken in 2008 and 2009 in Moldova, under the umbrella of the Project on Informal Child Migration in Europe (N-ICME), funded by the Norwegian Research Council.³

Respondent sampling

Studies of human trafficking involve several methodological and ethical challenges that impose limitations on how the subject can be approached. Research with trafficked persons requires careful attention to security concerns as well as the sensitive nature of the topic, and there are certain limitations as to what is possible (Brunovskis and Surtees 2010). In our case, this meant that it was not possible to interview family members of trafficked persons, given risks of “outing” someone as trafficked. Initially we had hoped to interview family members of trafficked persons as well as persons within their social environment generally, in an effort to better understand the differing perspectives and factors at play. However, this was not possible due to ethical considerations, not least because many trafficking victims do not reveal their trafficking experience to their families and children.⁴ The picture we present of family relationships is, by implication, a limited one, as only one side of the story was available to us. We do, however, maintain that these individuals’ experiences constitute a very valuable starting point for discussing the broader impact of trafficking, including how they experience and understand their relationship to and interactions with family.

It is imperative in research of this kind to avoid subjecting participants to the risk of exposure in local communities. As a consequence, we exclusively selected and approached respondents through a process of referral from service providers. This en-

² The output from this project was the research report *Leaving the past behind? When victims of trafficking decline assistance* (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007) and the article “Agency or illness? The conceptualisation of trafficking victims choices and behaviours in the assistance system” (Brunovskis & Surtees 2008). Please see literature list for full references.

³ The output from this project was two articles; “Untold stories. Biases and selection effects in research with victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation” (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010) and “Coming home: Family reintegration of trafficked women and girls” (Brunovskis & Surtees 2012). Please see literature list for full references.

⁴ The ethical issues associated with this approach are discussed in detail in Brunovskis & Surtees (2010).

sured that potential respondents were contacted and informed about the project by someone known to them. It also had the added advantage that, should any assistance needs surface during the interview; we had referral and assistance options available for the respondent. Similarly, when collecting information from women and transgender persons in street prostitution, we hired local research assistants working as outreach workers with this group through an assistance organisation.

This approach is, however, not without its consequences, as using “gatekeepers” introduces a bias in the types of experiences that are captured (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010, Miller and Bell, 2002, Surtees & Craggs 2011). In this case, it introduces a specific bias in terms of the victims whose experiences and needs are included in the study. As only victims who had received assistance were accessible to us, there is a potential bias in terms of whose experiences are included – e.g. more violent cases or more difficult family settings. Nonetheless, even though family conflict may not be universally present for all trafficking victims, it is an important factor to take into account in social work directed at this group, as this opens for preventive and targeted measures in assistance design. It is, therefore, important to be measured in the conclusions drawn about the assistance needs of all trafficking victims. Nonetheless, while not representative of all assistance needs, this study can provide some useful insights into the assistance needs of many trafficked persons.

We interviewed 43 victims of trafficking, some on multiple occasions. Of 43, 22 were minors at the time of trafficking and 20 were adults. In one case it was not possible to conclusively determine whether she had been a minor when first exploited; she was an adult at the time of the interview. . Following return, all had contact of some kind with their families, although in some cases this contact was unhealthy and eventually severed. Respondents originated from countries in the former Soviet Union (FSU) region (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova) and SE Europe (e.g. Albania, Serbia). They were trafficked to and exploited in a wide range of countries in the Balkans, the European Union (EU), the FSU region and the Middle East—namely, Serbia, Turkey, Italy, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Russia, Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Bulgaria, France, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Poland. The majority were trafficked for sexual exploitation but were recruited with promises of different kinds of work - most commonly service sector jobs (in restaurants and hotels), as domestic workers, and some also in the sex sector. Their conditions while trafficked ranged from brutal to less extreme forms of exploitation and abuse. They exited trafficking through being arrested (sometimes with false papers), being let go by the traffickers (having paid off “debts” or because they became a problem), being helped by a client, through the intervention of an NGO or by literally escaping. Four victims were identified before being exploited, but there were strong indications that the intention was to exploit them sexually. In addition, one woman was exploited for labour, as a domestic worker. In one other case the form of trafficking was not conclusively determined.

In addition, we interviewed 99 key informants. Key informants were primarily service providers. All had knowledge of and experience working within both the individual and family contexts of trafficking victims, and so were uniquely positioned to shed light

on the social/family context. Our respondents in this category included social workers, reintegration assistance providers, psychologists, medical professionals and police.

Interview data and analysis

Data were collected during seven rounds of fieldwork between 2006 and 2008. Interviews typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes but, in some cases, we spent several hours together. Interviews with trafficking victims included several lines of inquiry regarding family relationships: past and present relationships with different family members (parents, husbands, children, siblings, others); experiences of family reunification after trafficking; experiences of family support or lack thereof; disclosure or non-disclosure of having been trafficked and the associated reasons; assistance needs of family members; experiences of assistance to the victim and her family; self-assessed socio-economic situation; and problem perception. It was important to maintain flexibility and sensitivity in terms of wording and inclusion/exclusion of specific questions to allow for the differing emotional impact of discussing sometimes very fraught family relationships and the impact of trafficking. These topics were also mirrored in interviews with key informants and focused both on service providers' specific experiences in their case work as well as general experiences with assistance provision to victims and their families.

Highly qualified translators interpreted between local languages and English, spoken by the researchers. Interviews were either recorded with the respondents' permission and later transcribed verbatim, or transcribed based on notes. Working with these transcriptions, we then identified how trafficking victims described relationships with different categories of family members (i.e. parents, husbands, children, siblings, others), and sources of conflict, as well as factors that had exacerbated or mitigated conflict. For service provider interviews we additionally identified practices used in working with victims and families, resulting in the analysis presented in the remainder of this report

3. Family relationships and interactions after trafficking

When trafficking exploitation ends, victims very often face a new set of challenges as they return home and integrate into their home environment. A critical aspect is victims' relationship and interaction with their family. Family is the central social unit in Albania, Moldova and Serbia and, as such, family members can (and do) play a crucial role in the successful reintegration of trafficking victims. Studies on the reintegration of other vulnerable groups have found that families and spouses had a considerable potential for easing the transition back into society. At the same time, however, family can also have a negative influence when relationships are "low quality" and/or they are not guided and supported properly (Gideon 2007). As Horowitz et al (1998: 125) argue of marital relations and mental health, the same intimate ties that provide social support can also be the source of problems, conflict and distress; the family can also be a negative support agent.

Our focus is on the tensions and complications that victims face in the family environment after trafficking. This does not mean that this is the full or only version of what happens when trafficking victims return home. We have met many trafficked persons who have received love and support upon return (i.e. whose families accepted them home without question, helped them through the different stages of recovery; in no way judged or blamed them) and who, as a consequence, feel deep gratitude to their parents, husbands or siblings for their help and support at this difficult time.

However, this paper focuses on tensions and problems because awareness of these potential problems and fault lines can be important information for those who provide services as well as develop programmes and policies for trafficking victims. For instance, it is important to be aware that relationships may become (sometimes dangerously) strained over time, even when reunification was initially smooth. Being aware of this risk allows practitioners to discuss this with victims prior to their return to their family home – e.g. what they expect from their families and relatives, possible stressors and negotiating techniques and, equally important, their strategies and plans in case reuniting with family becomes problematic over time. This finding also means that service providers are aware of the importance of providing victims with all the necessary information about available assistance should problems emerge at a later stage.

There has been a tendency in trafficking literature to focus on "dysfunctional families" as a major cause of trafficking vulnerability and an impediment to reintegration. While a troubled family background can contribute to vulnerability, even "good families" face difficulties. While trafficking victims who decline assistance often do so because they are able to draw on family support, these relationships can also be fraught with friction and difficulties and some victims who initially decline assistance do find

their way back into the assistance framework precisely because of complications in the family environment.

Further, some of the problems that occur, especially after trafficking, can also be tied to other factors, similar to those experienced by returned migrants. For instance, trafficking victims, like returned migrants, may find it difficult to re-establish relationships with children or spouses in the post-trafficking phase. For both trafficked persons and migrants, long separations, especially when there has been limited contact, can be disruptive and complicate (and even fracture) relationships. Similarly, pressure to remit and return home with money affects both migrants (particularly failed migrants) and trafficked persons. Thus, while we will focus on how trafficking victims describe and experience their relationships with family after returning home, these patterns may also be shared with other vulnerable groups and/or with migrants generally.

In our experience, the family emerges as a central theme in the reintegration process, revealing a much more complex picture of the family setting both as a factor pre-trafficking and following return. Certainly one aspect is interpersonal tensions. Part of this dynamic is that family members feel angry, disappointed or embarrassed about their failed migration. In countries where migration is normative and “success stories” prolific, to be an unsuccessful migrant (or a trafficking victim) is potentially embarrassing and even stigmatising (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 123-34; Surtees 2007: 195-200). At a more general level, tension in families post-trafficking appears to be connected with different expectations – what families expect of the victim and vice versa – that are difficult to fulfil and, therefore, commonly become sources of tension and even conflict.

In some cases these tensions and problems preceded trafficking, will not have been resolved during the victim’s absence and may be amplified in the often highly stressful post-trafficking period. However, there are also many victims whose family relations prior to trafficking were positive and healthy (the desire to help ones’ family led them to migrate) but who experience different stressors upon return. That is, even in the best circumstances and most positive family contexts, the post-trafficking period can involve less than smooth interpersonal relations between victims and their families. This is often tied, at least in part, to the mutually unfulfilled expectations that victims and families have of each other.

Expectations and disappointments

When trafficking ends, victims often face a new set of challenges as they return home and try to integrate into their home environment. A critical aspect is victims’ relationship and interaction with their closest family members. At a general level, family problems post-trafficking appear to be connected with different expectations – what families expect of the victim and vice versa – that are difficult to fulfil and, therefore, become sources of tension and conflict. This appears to be particularly acute in cases where family members have taken care of the victim’s child or children in her absence. The quote

below from “Ana”⁵ represents a fairly typical account of a complicated mother (grandmother)/daughter relationship after the daughter had been trafficked:

When I escaped from the people who trafficked me, I called my mother, who was taking care of my son while I was away. I could not bring myself to tell her what had happened; that I had been trafficked. I said that I was coming home but that I had some health problems. I had been severely injured before I escaped and could not walk; I had been in a hospital for a long time. She started to berate me, asking me what on earth I was up to in Turkey: “You went there to earn money and yet, you are not providing for your child! Your child has nothing to put on, no shoes, the winter has come and gone and he went to school in shoes with holes in them!” I started to cry and tried explaining to her; “Mama, I am ill, I can't walk, I have been very badly injured.” My mother didn't believe me, and she put down the phone. I tried to call her again, but she didn't understand me. When I did come home in the end, it was not long before my parents started to put pressure on me: “What are you thinking about doing in the future; when will you start to work?” and so on. After a month or so I got a job, but it was probably a bit too early, because I ended up injuring myself again and needed more surgery. Money is always an issue. At the moment I am not on speaking terms with my mother because of money. I am so hurt that she will not help me the same way that that she has helped my sister – in a way she seems to expect me to help her, and I don't see how I can – I have nothing, only debts that are growing day by day because of the interest. I wish we could have the relationship we had in the past. Since I came from Turkey everything seems to have changed. As if I'm speaking to a stranger.⁶

“Ana's” experience of reunion and relationships with her family after trafficking is not uncommon; it illustrates many victims' relationships and interactions with their closest family members following their return. Ana was hurt and frustrated that her mother does not understand her; her mother was upset and disappointed that Ana had failed to take care of her child and bring home money as promised. The experience of trafficking, which Ana could not bring herself to tell her mother about, has driven a wedge between them, as have their mutual worries about money and the future. Even when Ana eventually revealed her trafficking experience, she was not initially believed nor understood by her family and her revelation was insufficient to mitigate the stress and tension between mother and daughter.

⁵ All names have been changed to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of our respondents.

⁶ This quote is compiled and edited from information from an interview with a woman in her thirties, who had returned home several years ago after having been trafficked.

When the family fails to meet the victim's hopes or expectations of support

Many victims felt misunderstood by their family upon return and did not receive the support or reassurance they sought. When victims keep their experience a secret (or at least some aspects of their experience a secret) or where they only tell some persons (a mother or sister but not others), it is even less likely that family will be able to understand and react appropriately.

Even when family members were aware of the “real story”, some victims felt that they did not pay adequate attention to the many problems and traumas they had endured. In Ana's case, she faced much hurt and frustration as a result of her family's lack of understanding. As she explained, they did not seem to appreciate her problems in spite of having sustained serious injuries while abroad. Moreover, when she did finally share details of her exploitation, she was not believed by her family:

So once we happened to have dinner with my family and we were sitting, me and my three sisters, and my third sister, we were exchanging our complaints, because she had [bad back problems]. So we were talking about how difficult it is to dress and to bend, to put on shoes for instance. And I told her how difficult it is for me to do these trivial things, and she said: Why are you complaining so much? I have the same problems as you and I don't need any operations but you are constantly complaining”. And I got a bit offended by the fact that my own sister doesn't understand me. And then at that moment I decided to tell them the truth and what I had been through. They didn't believe me. They told me that I read too many books and saw too many horror movies. I think that even today they don't believe some of the things that happened to me.

Resentment over this lack of understanding is particularly acute when the motivation for migration was, at least in part, to support the family, a not uncommon motivation amongst many trafficked persons. Some felt anger and resentment that their family did not protect them from the trafficking and had even pressured them (subtly or overtly) to work abroad.

In some cases victims experienced a great deal of support and understanding from one or all of their family members. However, it was not uncommon that this initial euphoria and relief following a victim's return eventually gave way to day to day tensions and that patience for and understanding of victims' problems and stressed behaviours also subsided. It was also fairly common for victims to decline assistance in the initial phase immediately after exiting trafficking, wishing to immediately return home. However, many found that, after a while, family was not the supportive environment they needed and that relationships were strained. One young woman who initially returned to her family got so tired of quarrelling and fighting that she decided, against her family's will, to go to a shelter. Another stayed at home for about four months during which time the conflict level escalated to the point where her parents beat her in a bid to pressure her to get married. These are two of several cases where the victims, after facing problems at home, returned for assistance at a later stage, ranging from days to weeks or months (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 55-56).

Victims who are stressed, angry and acting out; the aftermath of trauma

The return home following a trafficking experience is often characterised by a good deal of stress and anxiety. Trafficked persons describe a range of negative feelings – from fear to shock and confusion, from suspicion to stress and shame. These feelings manifested in different behaviours – like anger, irritability, aggression, sadness and/or depressions (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 79-81; Surtees 2007: 145; Zimmerman et al. 2006: 3, 12). One woman's description of her first days of assistance are illustrative:

...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 (Surtees 2007: 145).

Given high levels of stress and anxiety in this period, it is perhaps not surprising that interactions between trafficked persons and their families are often complicated and problematic – in some cases, tense and uncomfortable; in other cases, unhealthy and even dysfunctional. Problems may arise when victims return to live with their families or even when the contact is less intense and regular. The impact of victims' stressed behaviour for family and friends is important to consider, as explained by one social worker:

When a woman comes back she had a traumatic experience, her behaviour, emotions, relationships change, and very often they don't understand. And she will not tell what happened, she is crying all the time, and she cannot prevent from aggressive manifestations, or she is smoking all the time, drinking coffee and alcohol, staying in bars all the time, changing men, these are like feedbacks or reactions or symptoms of severe PTSD, and the relatives don't understand and try to figure out why she is like that. So what would I think of my child or my wife if she comes back with a lot of gynaecological problems and she will not tell me what has happened, she is crying all the time or very aggressive, something bad has happened but maybe did something wrong, she came with a deportation, or without documents, she is not answering the phone or leaves the house for several days and I have to look for her, she is not a good person anymore. This may be why the society sometimes has such a reaction to these women.

Significantly, while this stress can (and often does) abate over time, it is not generally something which is resolved easily or quickly, even with assistance and support of professionals. Many trafficked persons spoke of on-going pressure and anxiety; others described "relapses" in that trauma was revisited and became acute at different stages of their post-trafficking life, some many years after exploitation. One woman 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" (Surtees 2007: 138).

In some cases, victims fear retribution from their traffickers and being frightened and nervous may manifest in problematic behaviour. Again, the fact that trafficking for sexual exploitation is so stigmatised and associated with shame complicates relationships further, which we will return to below. While psychological problems or high stress levels can be difficult for family members to cope with in general, this is even harder when they do not know or understand the source of the stress, tension and negative behaviours.

Re-establishing relationships – reconnecting with children, husbands and parents

While trafficking will impact victim's social connections, perhaps most severely impacted are victim's intimate relationships – those with partners/spouses and children and, in some cases, parents.

This was a very difficult topic to approach with the vast majority of our respondents. These relationships are, after all, many victims' main source of economic and social support and tensions in this arena present both practical and emotional strains. Significantly, tensions in some types of intimate relationships were more painful than others. While several respondents were open about problematic relationships with parents and, to a lesser degree, husbands, problems in relationships with children were extremely sensitive. Social expectations around being a *good* mother play a role. And emotional bonds between mother and child can be particularly strong and, moreover, fraught as a consequence of trafficking trauma and separation.

Children left behind

The relationship between a returning trafficked mother and her children can be very complicated and tense. Children may have been left behind with relatives or others when their parent(s) migrated and, in the case of trafficking, may have had none or very limited contact during the separation. Children were deeply affected by the circumstances a trafficked mother found herself in when she returned, in terms of her financial situation, her mental and physical health and her relationship with family and community. Her recovery, including the extent to which she is able to successfully reconnect with her child(ren), will be crucial in shaping the lives of these children.

Not all family members may see the decision to migrate as the right one. Some family members felt abandoned and angry about the separation, an issue which is perhaps especially relevant in the case of children (and spouses). Where children have been left behind or a trafficked person went without the "consent" or "approval" of their chil-

dren, feelings of anger and abandonment may be particularly pronounced. This was further exacerbated when mothers returned home stressed and/or physically unwell and, as a result, were not behaving in the most positive or constructive ways in terms of relationships with others.

One social worker explained how, in her experience, this complicated terrain played out in many cases:

What I learned from victims, especially those who left their children to work around the time the children were five or six years old, is that when the family situation was not good enough - often they are already vulnerable - the woman left [and was trafficked]. Often, the situation would be this: She is not calling home, the relatives were looking for her or maybe not, and meanwhile the child was being told stories: “Your mother left you”, “she is a prostitute or a bad person”, “everyone in the village knows what she does”. So, she comes back, quite aggressive, quite unstable emotionally and you, as a child, see that she fights with your father and all the while you think: “She left me”. She yells at you or she behaves strangely and that is why children start not accepting their mothers. Meaning, they are not willing to talk, to listen to them, not having them as a parental authority, they put her aside. The woman feels it and she becomes even more pushy, aggressive, not understanding – “the child is bad, he was raised bad, he doesn’t listen to me, he is not supporting me and I am doing all my best to fit in here”.

Children did not necessarily accept the returning mother, either because they had not seen her for a long time and did not even know or recognise her, or they had developed negative feelings towards her as a consequence of what they were told by others during her absence. One social worker explained a common pattern in terms of children’s reactions to their mothers return:

Another problem is for women with children who were not at home for a very long time and the relationship is disturbed because the children are either told that your mother is bad, she was a prostitute, she left you. Or the children were very small and do not perceive this woman as their mother. And the mother cannot really [do anything] with her anger, [her] emotional state.

Linked intimately with this, many victims suffered feelings of guilt and sadness for their absence, particularly having left children behind. This is further complicated by the social dynamic whereby their absence breach social expectations of motherhood, particularly when migration failed and they were not able to provide for their children.⁷ Victims, therefore, struggled to re-establish themselves as “good mothers” and compensated for their absence and failure to provide for their children by trying to earn their love in other ways. It was not uncommon that returning mothers found it difficult

⁷ When migration is successful, improved living standards may mitigate the mother’s absence and recast her as a good mother. However, returning home to children left behind is, nevertheless, fraught with complications not least in terms of the interpersonal dynamics.

to set boundaries and say “no” to children’s wishes, even when it is impossible to fulfil their requests. Another social worker described the situation of one beneficiary who was struggling with these dynamics, having left her small daughter with her parents when she migrated:

“Tatiana” was away for a long time. She left when the child was three to [a foreign country] to work, she went to [another country] and then she was trafficked to [another country]. And there she was for about six months. She had guilt for the fact that she was not paying attention to her when she was small and that she missed out on a large portion of her childhood. And this would be an example of how they can construct this relationship with their children. Because of this feeling of guilt, she tries not to punish the daughter, to allow her to do anything, to buy her a good mobile phone, she says, “I better do it, because I was not there when she was small and she needed me”. And now “Tatiana” sometimes complains that her daughter is not listening to her.

In these cases, one of the main problems was the lack of contact between mother/child and mother/the child’s temporary caregiver. With growing migration, new models of transnational motherhood/parenthood develop, along with strategies for long distance care provision. For instance, mothers may redefine care from physical presence to the ability to provide financially for their children. One common strategy for upholding the mother role is to stay in contact by phone on a regular basis or send packages with presents and necessities (Hondagneu-Sotila & Avila 1997). While most people would still prefer day-to-day care of their children, long-distance contact can contribute to preserving the parent-child relationship and also frame the absence as a sacrifice the mother makes for her child, rather than as abandonment.

In the case of trafficking, many victims were not able to maintain contact of any kind. Returning with money might have compensated, at least in part, for the absence, redefining the absence as a form of caregiving. Returning with no money, however, meant that there was a greater likelihood that absence was defined as abandonment, especially as most victims did not divulge that they were trafficked and, thus, could not justify why they did not call or bring home money. This undermined women’s legitimacy as mother and carer, framing them instead as selfish, cold or callous. For example, in the case of Ana (above) her mother was furious that Ana had not sent money home and that Ana’s child had to go to school with holes in his shoes in the middle of winter. In the eyes of Ana’s mother, not only had Ana been absent but she was also neglectful because she failed to provide financially for her child.

Children born as a result of trafficking

Some children were born as a result of trafficking, conceived with a client or a trafficker, which created an enormously complicated situation for the woman in terms of her feelings toward and about the child. It also complicated relations with husbands and, where

the marriage survived, between the husband and the child and potentially also with other siblings.

When children were born as a consequence of trafficking, some mothers face problems of attaching to the child.⁸ The child reminded them of their trafficking experience; they were also fearful of the social implications of returning home with a child born from their trafficking/prostitution, as services providers explained of some beneficiaries:

She was at the point of abandoning one child that always reminded her of the traffickers and the violence but eventually she accepted the child. They live together and seem quite happy.

The broader family environment also played a role in terms of the child's acceptance, as one social worker explained:

I don't know any case where the victim returned with a child and the child was accepted by the husband. So, for example, in the case with the two children who were left here in [the country], and the two children born during trafficking, the third child was, according to the mother, the child of the father. Because when she left, she was pregnant. And still the father does not accept the child and provides no help. At the beginning it was quite difficult for us to move on as we were afraid of the children that stayed here, the reaction to them over the mother. But when the children from here learned that the mother was about to abandon one of the children they found a common language and they started taking care of each other

In this case it was the two older children who had been left behind who played a pivotal role in the mother accepting the two younger children she had given birth to while trafficked. The attitude of the family is most likely very important in terms of how the victim can cope with having a child from trafficking. Another respondent had a child while trafficked and was torn about what to do. She called her sister, who just told her to pick up her child and come home. The sister, who provided care for other family members in need as well, was a very supportive and positive presence in our respondent's life. This woman also described how her other children helped her learn to love this youngest child, something she initially struggled with.

Rebuilding intimate relationships with husbands

While children left behind felt their mother's absence acutely, feelings of abandonment were equally be an issue for other family members. In a number of cases, victim's hus-

⁸ Service providers reported that the majority of trafficked women who become pregnant as a result of trafficking requested termination services. Many trafficked women who kept the child did so because they did not have access to such services within the legally permissible time frame. Past research also bears out this assertion, with many trafficked women reporting that they want to access abortion services in cases when they become pregnant while trafficked (Zimmerman et al 2006: 68; see also Zimmerman et al. 2003).

bands expressed feelings of anger which seems, in some cases, to be a function of their fear and resentment for having been left alone during the period of trafficking. One woman explained how she almost declined assistance because her husband did not want her to “leave again”:

He didn't let me go [to the residential assistance centre]. He said that's enough, you've already been [away]. He meant Turkey... So he let us go but it was difficult for him. He called [the centre] every day. Here he did not even eat or drink for a month.

Such reactions – and women's not uncommon acceptance of them – were striking, not least because in many cases it was the need to support one's family (including sometimes an unemployed husband) that led women to be trafficked. For instance, the woman above migrated because her husband was chronically un- or underemployed and thus responsibility for the care and schooling of their three children and her ailing mother-in-law fell largely, if not exclusively, to her.

In other cases, tensions and problems were linked to the woman's sexual exploitation. Some husbands were described by their wives as “jealous”, accusing them of promiscuity and infidelity, in essence blaming them for being trafficked into prostitution. One social worker described an instance in which a trafficked woman participating in a retreat organised by the assistance organisation was threatened by her husband who was convinced she was having an affair:

We had a woman who was called by her husband the last day, and he said that I know you have found someone else and when you come back I will beat you. So she was very scared to go back, so that is why we had to call him and explain what happened.

Mostly men think this way: They don't have a good attitude to women who go abroad to work, and they say that if she goes abroad, maybe she works as a prostitute there. Even if the woman that returns is not trafficked, it may still lead to divorce.

It is also not always clear from the start whether a relationship can sustain the trauma of trafficking in the longer term. Some women chose to tell husbands or boyfriends that they had been trafficked and the men were seemingly able to deal with this information and be supportive. However, not uncommonly, men would use this against the woman at a later stage, for example during a time of conflict. Needless to say, women in those instances felt very vulnerable and betrayed at having their traumatic experience used against them.

Rebuilding and repairing marital relations in cases of trafficking can be difficult, particularly in environments where prostitution is heavily stigmatised. It has occurred to us that some of the anger and frustration between spouses may also be a function of the failure to live up to their respective gender/social roles – as a faithful wife and present mother and as a protective husband able to support his wife and family. This means that there are several, complicated layers to negotiate when trying to re-establish a relation-

ship, related to migration, to sexual abuse, to gender roles and expectations and norms of parenthood.

There may also be issues and challenges in terms of relationships and marriages that follow a trafficking experience. As already noted, many trafficking victims chose not to share their trafficking experience with all (or at least some) of their family members. When women enter relationships after trafficking and following their recovery, they may be particularly unlikely and unwilling to reveal their trafficking past. For many trafficking victims part of recovery and reintegration is putting trafficking behind them and they do not wish to introduce this complicated information into new and future relationships. One woman we interviewed declined to be assisted largely because of her desire to keep her trafficking a secret from her new husband.

Parents and their trafficked children

For many returning trafficking victims their relationship with their parents is central. In some cases this is because returning children are minors and return to the home and family environment of their parents. In these cases, victims' sense of home and family centred around their parents (and often also siblings) and tensions and stress in this environment made for complicated reintegration.

In our sample, it was also the case that returning "children" were adults, some with children of their own but who, nonetheless, required the social and economic support of their parents and returned to live in their homes, not uncommonly with their own children. In a number of instances it was the mother or grandparents who had looked after their children in their absence.

Many trafficked persons do not reveal that they have been trafficked, as noted earlier. But in some cases it was with their parents (and only their parents) that they shared this experience. Most commonly, it was mothers who were confidantes; sisters were also not uncommonly confided in. The case of "Diana" is illustrative. When trafficked it was her mother who essentially "found" her – contacting assistance organisations and authorities in her bid to locate her missing daughter. It was also her mother with whom she spoke and from whom she received support after her return. Neither her father nor her new husband knew what had happened to her. Her mother's support was the core of her recovery and reintegration, to the extent that she declined assistance because this support was, for her, sufficient.

Nonetheless, not all returns and relations were so smooth. Dynamics between children (as trafficked persons) and their parents were complicated by the shame that many parents felt over what had happened. Guilt was another common sentiment. For parents who have cared for and protected their child, to have failed in this instance was devastating. Parents who were generally unable to care for and protect their child also felt frustration, guilt and shame, not least because of social norms of parental care and family support. Other parents were less supportive or were stressed by the consequences of trafficking – for example, the debt incurred, the child's failure to return with money, the shame of prostitution brought to their home and family and so on.

Parents' role in decisions surrounding trafficking was not always neutral. Some overtly encouraged, even pressured, children to migrate and some may even have known about the trafficking situation (or likelihood) of prostitution. Where trafficked persons were "encouraged" or pressured by dependents to migrate (and then were trafficked), they may have feelings of blame and resentment (Surtees 2008a: 16-17). They may equally feel anger when they feel that they have not been adequately protected.

Other parents' role in trafficking vulnerability was more subtle, when the child sought to ameliorate the family's condition. A number of women accepted work abroad out of filial duty, to help support family members who were facing a difficult situation – for instance, one family was displaced by conflict and had no source of income, another victim's mother was disabled and unable to support her family.

Reactions and dynamics between parent and children will vary (and vary increasingly over time), not least according to whether the child is an adult or a child. What is consistent is that in negotiating some of the fault lines in relationships between parents and children, there are entry points for improved assistance toward family reintegration.

Families as victims, families as villains

What is often forgotten in discussions about trafficking is that while the person who was trafficked was the primary victim, family members, and not least children, husbands and parents, may be secondary victims of trafficking. Literature on rape reveals that husbands and partners, as well as friends and family members of rape victims, may be adversely affected by the assault. One issue is that it can be difficult for people close to a rape victim to fully grasp how she has been affected and how she is coping (Campbell 2001), which can lead to a breakdown in communication and tension in relationships. Further, research on rape has found that many male partners of rape victims felt isolated, confused, angry and powerless as a consequence of their partners' rape (Campbell 2001). These findings are very much in line with our own observations of women trafficked for sexual exploitation, as discussed above.

Families' of trafficking victims were, in our experience, deeply affected by the experience, certainly disoriented and shocked, arguably sometimes also traumatised. Different family members manifested different and perhaps even peculiar behaviours as a consequence. In one case, the mother of a seriously ill returned trafficking victim was adamant that the family not seek out or accept assistance for their daughter for fear of being identified as trafficked (meaning, in her mind, as a prostitute) and, therefore, stigmatised in the local community. The father was less concerned about this social fall out and eventually sought out medical care for the daughter in spite of her and her mothers' resistance. Certainly fear of stigma is a powerful force for many victims and their families. But we have also wondered whether some of the mother's (arguably irrational) behaviour was also a function of the shock and trauma she felt as a consequence of her daughter's exploitation (and her inability to protect her from it). Certainly we have found that many trafficking victims faced difficulty in processing information and

making decisions about assistance in the initial aftermath of trafficking (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007, Surtees 2007) and it may be that their loved ones face similar cognitive barriers.

In some cases, it may be valuable to draw on comparisons of partners of women in prostitution. In some cases, spouses, partners and family members knew that the individual was entering prostitution, which had great bearing on how the relationship unfolded upon return. Stigma attached to prostitution is significant but stigma attached to husbands or partners knowing about and perhaps condoning or even encouraging prostitution may also be significant and yet is hardly ever mentioned.

This is a topic that is very difficult to address in interviews with trafficking victims and yet a necessary and important one in terms of appreciating reintegration options and constraints. As we have discussed elsewhere, former victims (at least those in the assistance framework) will often not admit when they knowingly entered prostitution (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010). In the countries where our research was conducted women face varying, although, in some cases, very strict norms regarding sexuality and there is strong stigma attached to prostitution in particular. In terms of men, the ideal husband should take care of, provide for and protect his wife (and family). Therefore, for a husband to knowingly let his wife (and often the mother of his children) enter prostitution or even pressure her (subtly or overtly), seriously breaches male behavioural norms. If she has been exploited and subjected to violence as a consequence, the husband has failed abysmally in his role as “protector”. In light of this, it is no wonder that victims do not easily discuss their partners’ involvement in decisions to enter prostitution. However, in some cases there were hints that the husband might have known. One woman said that she and her husband had mutually decided that she would go abroad to “dance”. Not having any type of education or training as a dancer it was likely that they had agreed to striptease or something similar, although she did not specify. She described her husband as supportive when she returned after having been trafficked but also that neither one of them ever addressed what had happened to her, which had been extremely traumatic.

Service providers also described family members actively encouraging, or even pressuring, victims to enter prostitution. One brother told his sister, who had formerly been trafficked, to go back into prostitution abroad, as he had neither the space nor the money to provide for her and her children. Situations like these, of course, complicate relationships when the victim returns. However, it cannot be assumed that victims who have been pressured by family will chose to breach contact with them. It is crucial to take into account the complexities in family relationships, particularly where the victim has few other relations or support systems, or limited contact with other family members. One young woman, “Emma” was trafficked into prostitution by her mother but was adamant that she did not want to press charges nor did she want to sever contact. Her argument was that she was, after all, her mother, no matter what she had done. The young woman’s father and sister had died several years prior and she had no other family with whom she had contact. The service providers that worked with her felt that the relationship with her mother was unhealthy and potentially harmful for the young wom-

an but had few options other than to counsel her in negotiating and managing a (less harmful and risky) relationship with her mother.⁹

Further, family members' involvement in a spouse or daughter's trafficking may be more complicated than is sometimes presented. While Emma was trafficked into prostitution by her mother at a very young age, this was not always the case. In many cases there are structural circumstances that may seem to make sending a child away for work a rational decision, generally with the intention of improving the life of the child and the family as a whole. Situations where women or girls entered prostitution were extremely complicated and also an expression of the situation they and their families were in. One of our respondents, for instance, entered prostitution, at least partially, to pay for vital medication for her father. It is not unlikely that the father knew how his medication was paid for.

These findings have implications in terms of assistance and in terms of which relationships should be continued or severed in the reintegration process. Both the relationships and the situations that victims are in may be extremely complex and trafficked persons must be the primary decision makers in this process.

Further, one needs to have a clear picture of what the consequences of breaking with family would be in terms of (social and economic) support. Many "source" countries for trafficking have very limited state social welfare options and underdeveloped civil society, which means that there is generally little to no safety net in cases where victims cannot rely on family support. In practice this means that even an imperfect or problematic family may offer a vital (albeit not uncomplicated) safety net when compared with having no family relations at all.

⁹ While it may seem self-evident that it should be the young woman's decision whether or not to maintain contact with her mother, victims' right to make autonomous decisions is not always a given in this sector (see also Brunovskis & Surtees 2008). In past research we have found instances where service providers in both countries of origin and destination have essentially forced victims to break contact with relatives they deem "exploitative". While well-intentioned, the potential for transgressions and violation of victims' right to self-determination is substantial when decisions are taken on their behalf and against their stated wishes, regardless of how incomprehensible or distressing these choices may be to others.

4. Multiple adversities and their impact on relationships

Family resilience is the ability of a family to successfully cope with adversity (Black & Lobo 2008: 33). As discussed above, respondents faced many strains in terms of family resilience in the post-trafficking phase, both in cases when women had divulged their trafficking experiences and when they had not. In addition, conflicts were also exacerbated by other adversities, sometimes related to trafficking itself. Unrelated and pre-existing challenges in the family could place considerable strain on the family's ability to cope.

The majority of respondents faced other problems than those that could be ascribed to trafficking. In discussing decisions related to accepting or declining assistance, we found, in several cases, that, while their trafficking was what qualified them for assistance, it was not necessarily the main reason they sought assistance. Socio-economic vulnerability amongst trafficking victims is well known and one of the main reasons assistance is provided¹⁰. While these vulnerabilities are important in themselves, we also find that vulnerabilities can become mutually-reinforcing. Multiple vulnerabilities can create additional strain on the family system, which, in turn, diminishes the ability to function as a safety net and a welfare provider. In short, financial difficulties commonly increase conflict in the family. The trafficking victim may be perceived as a reason for the difficulties, for instance by having failed at migration, while the victim may feel that the family's pre-existing financial problems were precisely what led to her exploitation. Tensions potentially heighten the victim's vulnerability as it can lead to the family rejecting her altogether, not serving as a security net or not assisting her in a situation of crisis.

The two main types of adversities our respondents described as influencing family relationships were their financial situation and stigma attached to having been trafficked or associated with prostitution. In the following section we discuss these factors in more depth.

¹⁰ However, as we have discussed in past publications, there is a strong selection effect of particularly vulnerable victims into assistance schemes, which is also the main sampling arena for trafficking victims for research (see for instance Brunovskis & Surtees 2007, 2010, Surtees & Craggs 2011, Surtees 2012).

Financial hardship: Loss of expected income and one more mouth to feed

In the countries included in this study, particularly Albania and Moldova, poverty and financial hardship is commonplace. For many trafficking victims, the decision to migrate was generally linked to the need to earn money, for themselves, their children and/or other dependants, something they have in common with thousands of migrants from their respective countries.¹¹

However, most migrants who become victims of trafficking return with generally little or no money. Further, many incurred debt either in order to finance their migration or as a consequence of trafficking. Some debt was owed within the individual's family or social network; other debt was accessed through private institutions or money lenders, which involved high interest rates. As a result, the family's financial situation can be even more precarious than when the woman left, which, in turn, is a source of stress for both the victim and family. One young woman borrowed more than 4000 Euros from family acquaintances to migrate to Italy but ended up trafficked to another country. In spite of her good relationship with her family, she was stressed by her family's worry about the debt as neither she nor they had any way of paying the money back. Another woman was required to pay 10 per cent interest per month to a private moneylender, which fast became an impossible situation with constantly increasing debt.

Trafficked persons may also face problems explaining to their families why they have not managed to earn and save money. Family members left behind often have clear (and sometimes inflated) expectations about earnings from working abroad. Not fulfilling these expectations, even when the reason was having been a victim of the crime of trafficking, can be a source of tension. It can also be a practical problem when family members have spent money in anticipation of future earnings. This is even more pressing when family members have been left to care for an individual's children and must, in the absence of remittances, assume financial responsibility for the children's care. When children had special needs, these costs became very high. One woman migrated to earn money to pay for her daughter's medical needs – she has a chronic health problem that requires treatment every three to six months. The cost of treatment fell to the grandparents who looked after her daughter in her absence.

In another instance, an already tense relationship between mother and daughter was exacerbated by the daughter's inability to send money home for the care of her children, as explained by service providers working with the family:

I can say that it was an old conflict as the mother abuses alcohol, but the conflict sharpened when the victim of trafficking came back because the mother would say, "You came being a burden to our family and your children are a burden to our family".

¹¹ Children with migrant parents reported the following reasons for their parents' migration: poverty, unemployment and lack of financial means to support the family; lack of financial means to build a house of complete renovations; the need to repay loans; parents wish to offer children a better education/future; illness of a family member; and conflict between parents (CRIC 2006: 37-8).

So when the victim of trafficking left she was away for three years. The children were taken care of by grandparents. But I have to say that the grandparents were stressed too. They are old people. They had just their own money, little money, so they were expecting the victim of trafficking to give some money for raising the children. They also did not get any money from the father of the children who had left for [abroad] to work.

In short, the financial situation facing victims and their families can be very difficult and cause considerable strain and, in some cases, the returning victim was seen as an additional burden; arguably “one more mouth to feed”. One woman – “Ludmila” – described how her sister was of enormous support to her but she always avoided meeting her brother-in-law who she felt was worried that she would “take” from them:

I didn't tell him anything, he is such a cold person. When I go to [my sister] and I know that he is about to come, I try to leave and leave the impression that I haven't even been there. So it seems to me – my sister has not said anything to me, but – that he thinks that I have come to take something from them.

Such feelings may be particularly acute in situations where, following return, the individual is not able to work and contribute in some way to the family income. In one particularly striking situation, a victim who required surgery for an injury sustained while trafficked, felt so pressured by her family that she returned to work prematurely, which impaired her recovery and meant she needed additional surgery and treatment:

After the operation I had to stay in bed for months. And one month and a half I had to use a wheel chair. I stayed in bed for one month and the parents started to become impatient; they were asking what are you thinking about doing in the future, when are you going to start working? Then just after a month and a half of staying at home I decided to find a place to work. I came to the capital, I found a job as a shop assistance in a grocery shop. It was very difficult at the beginning I was walking with crutches, I was lucky to meet this woman because she knew me and I think she felt sorry for me more, that's why she employed me. I worked there four months, as I had to work hard and to walk, sometimes I didn't manage to take the crutches; I was slow, so I had to walk without them. There was a pressure on the leg because there was a steel block in the leg. Some months later I needed already another operation. I was operated in the ambulance/emergency hospital. I had then again to stay at home until I recover, but I didn't, I decided to start working again. Then again, the leg suffered from the hard work, and again I needed an operation.

There may also be financial frustrations which function in the reverse – where women have sent money home and are not satisfied with how it was used, how children were cared for or whether it was saved. In one study of women returning to Thailand, frustrations centred around families' failure to invest the money they had sent home in ways that could offer a sustainable future and that no one understood, or wanted to under-

stand, the damage inflicted by their sexual exploitation (Caouette & Saito 1999, Kelly 2002).

It is possible to address some of these concerns through targeted assistance. We have encountered several examples where timely support, for instance in setting up businesses or covering medical expenses, worked to mitigate tension and ease family reintegration. In such cases, not only was the victim not an extra financial burden but she may indirectly become a source of income and a better future for the family through the assistance that she was able to access. This, in turn, raised her status in the family. One woman explained her father's satisfaction about her pig farming business and its role in supporting the family:

My parents are elderly and there are six children in my family. [But with this help] he felt that he could revive life again, to help me re-establish my life. He said it was okay [to receive the business assistance] and was even enthusiastic.

Question: And were your parents satisfied with the [business] services you received?

Yes, my father was very satisfied, because now he has pigs, he has different tools and food for the pigs and he is finally optimistic about the future.

The success of this strategy to better the family environment does, however, seem to depend on a reasonably supportive relationship to begin with. There were also accounts of assisted victims who were exploited by their families in that they used the victim as an avenue for gaining financial and material goods. In these cases, assistance did not lead to positive dynamics within the family, as one social worker explained:

In this case, the trafficking victim was reintegrated in the family in the village, she found a job, so thanks to such [assistance] organisations, quite a number of things were given to her. As long as the parents were brought some food products and material things, as long as she gave them the money that she earned, all was good, but this was only for a short time. As soon as the income stopped, the arguments began.

In cases like this, it may be that material assistance can contribute to upholding unhealthy family relationships, rather than providing a positive way forward. This dynamic is of particular concern in the case of children and young adults who may be less able to walk away from family members who exploit the situation in this way in that they may be emotionally dependent, legally obligated to remain at home or financially unable to live independently of their family. Thus, the objective of many individual's migration – to earn money to support their families – is undermined when they are trapped in ways that strain, complicate and harm their family relationships when they are reunited.

Stigma – social sanctions and the loneliness of secrecy

As the previous section described, financial problems caused or exacerbated by the experience of being trafficked can be one tangible and clear source of strain within families. Stigma, often more subtle, is the other major source of tension.

We have consistently found that one of the greatest fears of women trafficked into prostitution is that their experience will become known to their families, friends and communities. While some choose to divulge what has happened to them, the majority will not.¹² Many fear stigma and discrimination and even harassment, abuse or violence. Given the general social attitude to trafficking victims in many countries of origin, this may indeed be a wise decision. Over the past decade, anti-trafficking organisations have worked to influence public opinion about trafficking – through information campaigns, community meetings, lectures at schools and so on. More specifically, efforts have sought to decrease the stigma and discrimination associated with trafficking which, in many environments, is considered tantamount to prostitution. Unfortunately, it is not clear how successful such efforts have been and no impact evaluations have been undertaken to assess the efficacy (and also the potential unintended consequences) of this approach. One organisation that has been working on anti-trafficking for many years reported meagre success in sensitising the population at large:

At the beginning of this year we had a social campaign on raising awareness on victims of trafficking. And before that we did some research. It was really striking, or shocking, for us to see how people see victims of trafficking. Comments were “Bad person”, “everyone knows why she left, what she did”, “I wouldn’t help”, “no one from my family would ever be a victim of trafficking”... So this general attitude is also what is making women not apply for any help.

Victims of trafficking are often cast as deviant and suffer social sanctions and the consequences of social stigma. Goffman, in his classic account of stigma, describes two different ways that stigma can affect an individual: being *discredited* and being *discreditable* as someone who is perceived to be socially deviant – that is, someone who does not conform with social norms and behaviours. In the first instance (the “discredited”), the “differentness” or so called “deviant” attribute of the person is known or evident to the people around them, which means that they will have to deal directly with negative reactions, stigma and discrimination in society. In the second case (“the discreditable”), the “deviance” is neither known nor immediately recognisable to their wider social environment, which means the individual will go to great lengths to ensure that their deviance does not become known, in order to avoid the social sanctions associated with stigma (Goffman 1963: 14). This distinction between “discredited” and “discreditable” – that is, known and unknown “deviance” – is directly transferable to the different situations that our respondents described with respect to stigmatisation. Whether their

¹² Even in cases where victims do share their experience, they will often only tell one trusted person – for instance, a sister or their mother.

trafficking was known or not known involved different consequences in interactions with family members and society more generally. In the first instance, it underpinned all social interactions, sometimes very difficult and stressful relationships. It is therefore not surprising that returning trafficking victims who, fearing stigma from family or community, may hide his/her trafficking experience, keeping it a secret from even his or her closest relationships. However in so doing, they shield themselves but in a lonely isolation that can seriously impede their personal recovery. It is striking how significant a factor stigmatisation – or the potential for stigmatisation – can become in the lives of formerly trafficked persons, as is discussed in more detail below.

The “discredited” trafficking victim – “They shouted things at me in the street”

When a trafficked person is “discredited” – meaning her trafficking experience is known to her social surroundings – this can be a precarious, even dangerous, situation. Many trafficking victims described various forms of stigma and discrimination – insults, verbal abuse and being shunned by friends and neighbours. In an extreme situation described by one service provider, a trafficked woman, exploited in prostitution abroad for four years, was violently raped when her experience became publicly known:

She went to a party in the village, and some men there took her outside and raped her. They said: “You were abroad and did this for money – why not do it for us free of charge!” She came here very depressed. So stigmatisation is a very serious problem.

Further, when trafficking is known to the community this often also has direct consequences for other family members. “Rosa” was trafficked after fleeing an abusive husband. When she returned to her family after an initial shelter stay she faced an untenable situation; her family beat her and told her that there was only a place for her in the family if she was dead. Her divorce from her husband was a shame for the family, as was her (forced) prostitution. The family wanted to get rid of her because they were afraid that their own reputation would be tainted by her “misdeeds” (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 56). In this case the family chose to reject Rosa as the bearer of the stigma in order to avoid “contamination” of the whole family.

However, not all family members accept stigmatisation of and discrimination against their loved ones, as evidenced by the approach taken by the husband of “Alina”, a trafficked woman who was verbally abused and insulted by neighbours and former friends:

Now, they see my husband, and the way he can protect me, and they are simply afraid. For example, recently a man called me a bad word and my husband immediately hit him. My husband didn’t notice this abuse that I was going through before, because he was drinking. But now he sees it, and for instance in this case, he was standing at the gate and he was shouting, “I will not allow you to insult my wife!”

Even in cases when stigma is not necessarily transferred to other individual family members, children in particular may suffer as a consequence of their mothers' stigmatisation, through overhearing jibes or witnessing attacks, as one trafficked woman explained:

The [neighbours] were very abusive and aggressive and I was always with my child. And when they were abusive and aggressive and shouted at me, my daughter heard these things.

Some people deliberately and maliciously informed children that their mothers had been in prostitution or was a bad person. This, in some instances, lead children to try to protect their mothers, a heavy responsibility for any child but especially when they are very young. One 8-year-old girl insisted that her mother let her take up martial arts: "She is not a fighting or aggressive type, but when she sees me crying [when people abuse me], she is ready to hit back", said her mother.

A number of women were rejected by their families after being trafficked. According to service providers, a very strong factor in this was the reaction of neighbours and acquaintances to the trafficking victim. If the local community condemned the women, families were often strongly influenced and pressured to break contact, as one service worker explained:

It's connected to the mentality of the people. Even if the parents are trying to be responsible for their children, they also have to take into account what the neighbours say when their daughters come back from abroad.

This dynamic seems to be especially complicated when trafficked persons have siblings and even cousins whose status and opportunities – including the prospect of getting married or finding work – can be severely and negatively influenced by stigma of their family member.

Several respondents came from families that were stigmatised in the local community before being trafficked and had suffered negative attitudes because of discrimination against their parents and being from "bad families". One woman explained how community attitudes to her post-trafficking were not inconsistent with how she had been perceived and treated beforehand:

We have always been a bit separate from the rest of the village, living across the railway tracks. [...] My mother always found someone she didn't like. People say that mother did so many bad things to other people, it was like a curse. But now the curse is on us (the family).

In practice, then, stigma caused by trafficking into prostitution is difficult to disentangle from other sources of stigma – having a bad reputation in the village, being from an ethnic minority, needing assistance, coming from a "bad" family and so on – making it multilayered and complex (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007: 56, 123-34; Derks 1998: 43; Surtees 2008b: 17-21; Surtees 2007: 195-200). An already stigmatised family will generally

lack social capital to draw on when a daughter or wife returns and is associated with prostitution.

Thus, stigma often occurs when trafficking experiences become known to family and community and can be further compounded when trafficked persons already suffer stigma of some kind. Recognising this complexity is central in how stigma can potentially be mitigated in the reintegration process.

The “discreditable” trafficking victim – “I try not to make close friends who could find out”

Becoming known in the local community as a prostitute can obviously have grave consequences and create situations that are very difficult to handle. This, again, is precisely why many victims go to great lengths to conceal what happened to them. But even when their story is a secret, stigma (or rather the fear of stigma, of being discredited) significantly affects their lives.

When a trafficking victim is discreditable – she alone or just a few people know about her trafficking – she will seek to hide what has happened. Victims develop cover stories in order to camouflage trafficking, thereby protecting themselves. But this is not an easy solution – they often live in constant fear that someone will find out what happened and small mistakes or inconsistencies in their story can lead to trafficking being uncovered. Thus, their day to day situation and relationships are potentially very fragile. Moreover, cover stories mean that victims cannot explain actions and behaviours which are linked to or caused by trafficking, which can lead to substantial problems and misunderstandings in their interactions and relationship. One challenge for victims is to cope with stress, trauma and depression without having the opportunity to tell those closest to them why they feel and act this way. This can lead to a breakdown in communication and resentment on both sides. At the same time, in many cases telling one’s family does not appear to be an alternative, as many women are rejected by their families when they learn what had happened.

Victims of trafficking sometimes chose to take on another stigmatised identity rather than that of trafficking – for example, telling family and friends that they were arrested and imprisoned abroad as irregular migrants. Having been in prison explains why they had not earned any money and, likewise, accounts for long absences and perhaps even some of the stress after their return. There is an uncomfortable irony that it is preferable to present oneself as someone who has broken the law than as a victim of crime. However, in a highly migratory society with limited opportunities for legal migration, being arrested and imprisoned as an irregular can also be constructed as “a bit of bad luck”. This stands in contrast to being trafficked, which is generally understood as the same as prostitution, breaching norms and ideals of women’s behaviour and sexuality.

Fear of being discredited also profoundly influences the choices victims make in terms of friendships and relationships. Having to keep such a secret can be challenging in terms of relationships with others, as one woman explained:

To tell you the truth, I try not to form such close friendships that I would tell them about what happened to me.

In her case, only her sister knew what had happened to her. She chose not to get close to anyone, keeping her distance from co-workers and former acquaintances, so as not to reach the point in relationships where questions might be asked and confidences shared.

Having this burdensome secret can also strongly influence decisions made about pre-existing relationships. One respondent chose to have very limited contact with her mother, as she did not trust that her mother would keep her secret should she find out what had happened:

My mother knows nothing. She knows that I am here [in this assistance programme], but not what happened before. My father knows a bit – that I study here, that's all. If my mother finds out about my past, not only my town will know, but all of [my country]. If my father finds out, he will tell my mother. It's a chain reaction. That is why I must keep silent.

It can be very stressful to keep a secret like this, especially when the consequences of the truth coming out are perceived as very grave. This is a major source of stress for many victims. A case worker explained how several women and girls she worked with felt exposed or judged even in situations where people around them could not possibly know what had happened to them:

We had a group who were internally trafficked, they used to work together, and they are still together [as a group, now in assistance]. When we had discussions with these adolescents, and we asked them about negative consequences of being trafficked, the first thing they said was that when they were walking in the street, they felt that people thought they were prostitutes. Maybe people did not even realise, but they thought that they understood. So this will have this problem for a long time, at least as long as one members of this group remembers, then she will remind the others of what they were doing.

Having someone else know about the trafficking experience may, thus, lead to a feeling of lessened control and of potential exposure.

Disclosure or non-disclosure?

Having a big secret with potentially destructive consequences is a great strain for many trafficked persons. Having to guard a secret to protect oneself from stigmatisation can be very stressful. However, it is questionable if this is an effective strategy, at least in all situations and in the longer term. While relatively little is known about the mental and physical consequences of concealing one's stigmatising identity, available information suggests that disclosure is associated with well-being (Beals et al. 2009: 868). For example, health professionals working with persons with mental illness often recommend coping strategies like secrecy and withdrawal/avoidance as means of avoiding stigma

and yet research has found that these mechanisms do not necessarily moderate the negative consequences of stigmatisation (Link et al 1991).¹³

There are indications that social support is an important factor in determining whether disclosure leads to well-being (Beals et al. 2009: 868). If the stigmatised person has a strong and supportive personal network, community reactions are generally less important. One woman was defiantly up-front about having been trafficked, telling us that her family knew everything and supported her and she did not care what anyone else had to say. In another instance, a young girl returned home pregnant, something that could potentially have caused a lot of problems including being rejected by her family. But her family was so happy to have her back safely and accepted the pregnancy. The family described their plans for an extension to their house to make room for their daughter and her baby. When people in the village started to spread rumours about the girl, saying that she had seduced a neighbour's husband, her mother dismissed this as ridiculous and focused on taking care of her daughter and future grandchild.

If a stigmatised identity is disclosed it is, therefore, important that trafficked persons have social support on which they can draw. This can be challenging. Some husbands felt threatened or doubted their wife's fidelity, as previously discussed. Following up cases and educating family members about trafficking and what has happened to the victim may, in some instances, help and many service providers often do quite intensive family counselling and mediation. However, there is no getting around the fact that prostitution or any kind of association with prostitution is highly stigmatised in the countries of our study and brings a raft of complications in social interactions.

This tension is a complicated for service providers to manage. On the one hand, it is important to support the position that victims of trafficking should not be ashamed, blamed or ostracised. On the other hand, openness may create problems for trafficking victims when facing societal norms and sanction. Secrecy may contribute to victim blaming; openness may lead to harassment and even violence.

One organisation in the SEE region has supported the formation of a group of former trafficking victims. The intention is to support their empowerment and offer them a voice in the discussion about trafficking and trafficking responses, something that is in itself commendable. Far too many decisions and discussions about trafficking and anti-trafficking interventions take place without the input of trafficked persons. However, openness about trafficking and visibility of trafficking victims is complicated. At one fundraising event where the group provided information about the organisation, representatives felt uncomfortable with the behaviour of some who visited the booth. Similarly, they expressed concern about too much visibility as trafficking victims. Having first made leaflets that identified the organisation as being for victims of trafficking, they then reconsidered the wording and also amended contact information, over concerns about exposing members in such a direct way. There is a complicated contradiction in working to empowering former victims while still conveying the message that what has happened to them needs to be kept secret.

¹³ That being said, disclosure is not beneficial for everyone, which requires understanding factors that mediate the association between disclosure and well-being (Beals et al. 2009: 868).

Many communities and families may not afford the best environment for trafficking victims to disclose what they have been through. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, it can be very stressful to keep such a secret and constantly fear being discredited.

Having some kind of outlet for support can be an important safety valve for coping with stigma or the fear of stigma. This is the experience of being heard and accepted and not judged by what Goffman (1963: 28) refers to as “the wise”, someone who knows about, is sympathetic to, and accepts the stigmatised condition. In our research we are always concerned about the impact that the interview has on victims and, as a matter of practice, ask our respondents how it feels to be interviewed on such a personal and difficult topic by us, who are, in most cases, strangers to them. Experiences and reactions vary, of course, but the majority expressed some form of relief in being able to talk to someone about their experiences in a safe environment, something which may be, at least partly, attributed to this dynamic. Most commonly the role of “the wise” is filled by service providers who often stay in contact with trafficked persons beyond the official period of assistance. This, however, presupposes that the organisation has the time and resources to maintain contact with and provide support to victims who need it. Many organisations work in a high pressure environment and the option of “being there” for former beneficiaries may be limited. Many service workers reported being stretched very thin with their normal duties at work, sacrificing their free time and family life for beneficiaries. In this context it is not surprising that some victims have felt wounded and abandoned when their need for emotional support was not met, as one victim explained:

I can't say that they didn't help me at all, but sometimes when I came to their office, they were looking at me as if they were asking, “What are you doing here?” They used to tell me that we are one family, and I was not even looking for them to *give* me anything, only some advice.

There is a need to recognise the important role played by service providers in knowing about and talking through victims' trafficking experiences. This function of “safety valve” in the reintegration process needs not only to be understood conceptually in terms of how services and work responsibilities are designed but also needs to be reflected in funding to assistance providers and the period of time envisaged for sustainable and successful reintegration.¹⁴

Stigma as a barrier to services

It is not only the availability of reintegration services and support which are at issue but also the willingness of trafficked persons to access these services. Research into stigma

¹⁴ For example, a group of reintegration organisations in the Balkans, funded by the King Baudouin Foundation, have, after many years of working and discussion, articulated a timeline for reintegration which spans three years. While some cases may be considered “successfully reintegrated” at an earlier stage, this 36 month time frame is considered the average (Surtees 2010).

has found that it can and does function as a barrier to accessing needed services. In the public health field, for example, stigma and (fear of) discrimination lead to delay in presentation to the health services, prolonged risk of transmission, poor treatment adherence and increased risk of disability and drug resistance (Heijnders & van der Meijnd: 3). An unwillingness to accept services may be a function of their lack of trust which results from stigma and discrimination that they have (or expect to) experience (Sallmann 2010: 157; see also Jager & Carolan 2010: 273-5).

Service providers need to be aware of how stigma affects trafficked persons in terms of accessing (or declining) services. We have found in past research, for example, that key contributors in decisions to decline trafficking assistance were a lack of trust in the assistance offered (or assistance providers) as well as fear of stigma in their families and communities (Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). In one very dramatic case discussed above, stigma played a role in one mother's decision to not seek out or accept assistance for her gravely ill daughter who had returned from trafficking abroad.

In some cases the barrier is because of what Corrigan (2004) calls "public stigma", whereby victims avoid services due to the risk or experience of being discriminated against. This links up with family dynamics where experiences of stigma by family members (or fear of that stigma) may lead some trafficked persons to avoid services. Equally relevant is "self-stigma" whereby negative social attitudes are internalised in ways that harm the individual's self esteem and induce feelings of shame, all of which has the potential to lead individuals to avoid services (Corrigan 2004: 614-616; Sallmann 2010: 147, 150). Similarly, Link & Phelan (2001) argue that once a stigmatised status becomes a part of the individual's worldview and sense of self, it affects the ways in which the person interacts with the world. In practical terms this can mean expecting and accepting discrimination and abuse or feeling that they are not entitled to or worthy of assistance.

How stigma can serve as a barrier to services is of utmost importance in terms of the design of reintegration programmes in the anti-trafficking sector. As important is a discussion of how this stigma can be overcome, thus facilitating access to appropriate and effective reintegration support.

5. Conclusion

There is a need to expand the focus of assistance, both practically and conceptually, to take into account their families and family situations. There is no doubt that the impact of human trafficking is most central for trafficked persons themselves. They are the primary victims. At the same time, family members – whether children, spouses, parents or siblings – are often profoundly affected by the trafficking of their family member. When the family knows what has happened (which is far from always the case) parents, spouses or children may be significantly traumatised by what their family member has suffered. When the family does not know about the trafficking, the victim's stressed (and even aggressive) behaviours can be confusing and hurtful and lead to conflict and tension within the family. Moreover, the often significant economic fallout of trafficking negatively impacts the family, either through debt incurred or failure to earn money.

Further, family members can (and often do) play a crucial role in the successful reintegration of trafficking victims but they can also be a hindrance in recovery if relationships become too difficult. In a study of recovering drug addicts, Gideon (2007) found that while families and spouses had a considerable potential for easing the transition back into society, they could also have a negative influence when relationships are “low quality” and/or they are not guided and supported properly. Among the problems faced were conflicts and mutual disappointments, very much in line with what we have observed between trafficking victims and their families. Thus, to fail to take the family into account in interventions is to miss an important, arguably even pivotal, factor in the reintegration process itself.

As families in this context often function as economic units in some form, addressing the financial needs of families as a whole may go a long way towards mitigating tension between formerly trafficked women and their relatives. Further, we have, in many cases, seen that success in another field, for instance in terms of economic security can be an important factor in alleviating stigma in local communities. It is, therefore, important to take into account a former trafficking victim's family situation (both in terms of how it can support and undermine reintegration efforts) and, moreover, to consider interventions and assistance which might target the family unit as a whole.

That being said, in all anti-trafficking work it is crucial to keep in mind the vast array and variation of experiences and needs of trafficked persons. This is by no means a homogenous group with similar trajectories through trafficking, similar priorities or aspirations afterward or even similar understandings of whether or not they have been victimised. As we have discussed elsewhere, the experiences of trafficking victims accessed through assistance organisations may not be consistent with those of unidentified or unassisted victims and, thus, suitable reintegration interventions will necessarily differ.

Our sample of respondents is not representative of all trafficking victims. Those who seek out assistance are more likely to fit within the “classic” understanding of trafficking

(Brunovskis & Surtees 2007). This group appears to be more likely to have been subjected to violence, coercion and seclusion, and the dividing line between being trafficked and a “post-trafficking” life may, therefore, be relatively clear. Other studies have pointed to more fluid boundaries where women may be exploited in prostitution and, thus, can be considered trafficked, while still moving in and out of different stages of coercion and freedom over time (Skilbrei & Tveit 2008, Jacobsen & Skilbrei 2010). In these cases, transitions between trafficking and post-trafficking life are less clear and relationships with families and local communities may be negotiated in a different way. As a consequence, unidentified and unassisted trafficking victims may find that the existing assistance and reintegration models do not (fully or even partly) meet their needs and, therefore, opt not to access these services. Understanding how to design programmes and policies for this (less known, less considered) group of trafficked persons requires a better understanding of their experiences, situation, needs and aspirations as well as the specific family (and community) dynamics which inform both trafficking risk and reintegration opportunities.

6. Policy and programming recommendations

Many of the assistance needs of trafficked persons are not unique. In fact, when asked about the primary problems in their post-trafficking lives, many trafficked persons described issues that were unrelated to the trafficking *per se* but rather were part of a general pattern of poverty and social vulnerability. Similarly, when we have interviewed people who have never been trafficked, but who received assistance within various social assistance programmes – for instance, single mothers, returned migrants – the similarities between their challenges and those of trafficking victims are often striking. Domestic violence victims also share many assistance needs with trafficking victims, as do irregular migrants. General recommendations for assisting trafficking victims are, therefore, similar to those of other vulnerable groups. For example, there is a need for different levels of interventions, with both low-threshold assistance and options for longer term support as well as for individually tailored assistance. There is also a need for transparency and predictability as well as self-determination in assistance decisions.

Nonetheless, there are certain issues which, while not unique to trafficking victims, are certainly more pronounced when compared with other groups. And particularly in relation to family reintegration, the issues of financial situation and of how to address stigmatisation can have a great bearing on the victims' reintegration outcome. The following recommendations, therefore, focus on these two main themes.

Include family needs and situation in reintegration policies and programmes

As we have discussed above, the direct consequences of trafficking for a victim may only be part of their problems. There are also indirect implications involving the entire family. In our interviews, victims who had children invariably said that the needs of their children – for instance, in terms of health care – were the main reason they sought help, needs that were unrelated to trafficking¹⁵. Equally, some respondents sought shelter accommodation because they feared for the safety of their families if they stayed at home with them. In still other cases, victims only sought assistance when relationships with family became too difficult. Others experienced substantial improvement in their well-being and living standards when family was included in assistance, whether through

¹⁵ However, it must also be remembered that norms and expectations tied to motherhood may make it more acceptable to seek help for children rather than for oneself. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the needs of family members were important motivating factors for many victims in seeking assistance.

business programmes or through medical assistance or other specific needs. For instance, for one woman, the key assistance she received was access to an alcohol treatment programme for her alcoholic husband as well as counselling which encouraged her husband to accept and successfully complete this programme.

Similarly, consider the example of family counselling and mediation as a potential strategy in the reintegration process. Family members can be traumatised following the trafficking of a family member. One young woman had been through a terrible ordeal in a country with limited human rights credentials, which ended in her arrest and subsequent serious illness while in detention including being handcuffed to her prison hospital bed. When her family found out where she was, they struggled for a long time against bureaucracy and corruption to have her returned home. It was clearly a frustrating and frightening experience for the family as well the victim. The young woman told us that the whole family had benefited from psychological assistance and the opportunity to work through this difficult time in their lives together with professional guidance. Others told us of symptoms of significant stress manifesting in their husbands and children. This is a poignant reminder that family members may strongly benefit from counselling or family mediation as well other forms of services.

This underlines the importance of looking at the family system as a whole in assistance design, as this can be crucial in the provision of assistance to the individual victim and their sustainable reintegration. Some reasons for and ways of including the family in assistance design are outlined below.

Recognise the social and economic interconnectedness of the family unit

An important reason to include the whole family in an assistance plan is that, in many instances, the family household functions as one economic and social unit. Working with the family as a whole can more efficiently improve the victim's financial and social status and also increase the family's ability to function as a safety net in the longer term and in response to potential crises or setbacks.

Economic support should not amplify vulnerability of trafficked persons

One challenge is to avoid situations where victims' access to assistance is exploited by other family members, most common amongst dysfunctional and abusive families. Key informants had seen this happen in certain cases, where, for instance, parents were seemingly supportive and sympathetic as long as the former victim received assistance that she shared with them, only to sever contact or become abusive and hostile when the assistance ceased. This highlights the importance of considering both social and economic aspects of a returning victim's situation.

Develop strategies to support the family while respecting victims' right to privacy

It is challenging to involve family members in an assistance scheme when they are not aware that the victim has been trafficked. We have previously argued the importance of providing non-identifying assistance as a means of reaching and supporting an increased number of trafficking victims who may fear that assistance will “out” them to their families and communities (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007). Nevertheless, this is a difficult task, as beneficiaries are often asked why they receive assistance when others within the community also have (sometimes acute) assistance needs but are not able to access this support. Some respondents solved this by saying, for instance, that they were assisted under a programme for single mothers or unemployed women. However this may not be sufficiently opaque or camouflaging in all cases. There cannot be a standardised solution for how all beneficiaries explain the assistance they receive, but it is a point to consider when setting up assistance and an issue that service providers should help beneficiaries anticipate and handle.

Provide different forms of assistance which take into account the needs and situation of different families, constellations and needs

When available assistance is only shelter based, this can cause problems for trafficking victims. Some trafficked persons are so anxious to return home to their family that they will not consider a shelter option and will, therefore, in places where all assistance is shelter based go unassisted. Moreover, prolonged absences at a shelter may contribute to a climate of distrust between victim and family, particularly when shelters are closed and secret and contact (even by phone) is restricted. This may be exacerbated when the family does not know (or fully know) what happened to the trafficked person and so cannot understand the need for this continued separation. Also, shelter stays are not an option for victims who must return home and support family members, particularly children. While shelter based assistance can be valuable and necessary, particularly in cases where the victim has suffered substantial injuries or is subjected to security threats, it is crucial to develop efficient mechanisms for non-residential services and local community-based assistance options, something that is largely missing in several of the locations where our respondents came from.

Build stigma alleviation into reintegration programmes

Many of our respondents described being stigmatised and discriminated against because of trafficking. Several felt that one of the most difficult consequences of having been trafficked was the fallout from being stigmatised or the fear of being “found out” in the future. However, for several of those who had been harassed when their trafficking experience became known, there were also factors that mitigated stigma and – over time – improved their relationships with and standing within their local communities. These stories provide useful insight into possible strategies for stigma management amongst

trafficking victims and in the design of reintegration responses. A systematic approach to stigma alleviation can be helpful in minimising adverse outcomes.

Develop and implement stigma alleviation strategies as part of reintegration programmes

Stigma alleviation strategies used by some of our respondents addressed the stigma of prostitution as well as failed migration. Over time, several managed to significantly improve their situation in their local communities. The following outlines some factors which, in different situations, served to reduce, address or prevent stigmatisation of re-integrating trafficking victims:

- **Being economically successful.** One of the more efficient ways of alleviating stigma was to prove oneself successful in another field, especially by being able to successfully establish and run a small business or get a good, respectable job. This is element of assistance - i.e. economic empowerment and securing one's livelihood – has both economic and social effects, not least in terms of (re)establishing social status. One woman suffered terrible abuse in her village as a result of the community knowing about her trafficking into prostitution. However, this changed when she was able to start a viable second-hand clothes shop and began to do well financially. Those who had formerly shouted insults at her became her regular customers, as if nothing had happened.
- **Returning home with money.** It is worth considering measures that make it possible for a victim to return home with money. As discussed above, victims, and particularly mothers, who failed to remit money or bring money back with them, faced severe difficulties, both in explaining their absence and in terms of their social role. In addition to the stigma associated with a (possible) association with prostitution, they were also cast as failed migrants or even failed parents.
- **Stigma mitigation strategies should not infer blame for exploitation.** Many trafficked persons attempted to mitigate stigma by conforming to social conventions of female behaviour. This was also a deeply ingrained strategy amongst some assistance organisations – for example, to address prostitution stigma by encouraging a change in the woman's appearance and behaviour which may be perceived as too crude, too provocative, too profane, etc. In some cases, service providers seemingly aimed to create “good girls” who not only conform to, but perhaps even surpass, norms for acceptable female behaviour. This is a not uncomplicated strategy, not least because it risks implying to trafficked women and girls that they are somehow to blame for their exploitation and need to change. On the other hand, assistance providers must work pragmatically within their local social context and its (sometimes

very narrow) social constraints. What is critical is how such messages are framed and presented to former victims. “Life skills” training that is presented as learned strategies for coping better in society is one thing; training presented with the aim of “exorcising” flawed personality traits is something entirely different.

Identify the different causes of stigma – for different victims, forms of trafficking and in different settings

The most obvious type of stigma is attached to prostitution, breaching norms of appropriate female sexual and social behaviour. In addition, research with women in prostitution finds that an important element in entering prostitution was to be able to provide a better life, not only for themselves, but for their families. The element of successfully providing for a child, even through stigmatised activity, may, therefore, be construed as a sacrifice made by the woman. Rationalisations for a mother’s absence may be constructed after the fact, so to speak. If she is successful in providing for her child(ren) by migrating, the absence may be construed as a sacrifice that she makes for them. Being unsuccessful, on the other hand, increases the likelihood that the absence is seen as abandonment. Further, central to trafficking victims’ stories is also the migration element. In the vast majority of trafficking cases, economic migration was, in one form or another, part of the original plan. And being a failed migrant is stigmatising in itself which is also important to bear in mind in terms of responses. As such, many trafficked persons suffer multiple sites of stigma which each have their own triggers and, equally, their own solutions. Inadequate attention has been paid to identifying the specific contributors to stigma including how this differs from individual to individual, setting to setting as well as according to form of trafficking. is needed into the issue of stigma – both its causes and how it can be addressed.

Consider the time element in efforts to address and mitigate stigma

Expand the time period after return that victims of trafficking are eligible to talk with service-providers about their experience. It is crucial to remember the impact that even the potential for stigmatisation can have on a former victim and the strain of having to keep such a secret. Several respondents expressed relief at being able to talk to someone outside of their day to day life, as they were forced to keep quiet about what was often a very traumatising experience. While the strain may lessen over time, even those who were trafficked several years ago still experienced nightmares, memories or flashbacks. Past traumatic experiences can render a person sensitive at times of (even unrelated) stress. Having the option to contact service providers at a later stage, even if only for advice or as a way of unburdening worries, can provide an important safety valve for trafficked persons, even to the point of avoiding a serious setback or failure in reintegration.

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