

VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING REINTEGRATION, A SOCIAL CHALLENGE IN WESTERN BALKANS REGION. THE ROLE OF NON PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: This paper will be focused on the community reintegration of the victim's of trafficking and the concrete engagement of NGOs as service providers. The applicable legal and policy frameworks concerning the reintegration of trafficked children and adults are considerate as a crucial instrument to evaluate human rights implementation. The international, regional and national laws and policies places the fundamental rights of individual trafficking victims and their families at the heart of any reintegration intervention.

As every country and community context is different, the paper offer a general context on the circumstances of different types of trafficking victims, and on the experiences of each individual affected.

This target passed through a sensitive situation which asked for qualified and sustainable services. For many years the NGOs are the basic providers of social services, health services, education, sheltering and other. The NGOs in the Western Balkans especially in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, are the promoters of initiatives and new services for victims of trafficking as the qualified providers.

The knowledge, expertise and recognized good practice in community reintegration being implemented by the organizations from the four countries, as well as other institutions and organizations that they work with, will be emphasized in this paper.

From a qualitative point of view, it will be oriented towards measuring the expectations of family support service providers, taking into account the legal changes in the context of strengthening family support services.

Part of the analysis will be the secondary data that will be obtained from the study of international good practices, study of the national legal framework and strategies, action plans, and the legal amendments of the following period.

The reports and publications of public institutions, NGOs operating in the field of family services in Albania and other countries are part of the methodology.

This theoretical study of all experiences and perceptions on these services will provide a solid basis on their knowledge, highlighting the need to increase the number of services provided, familiarity with changes and staff improvements, legal plans, action plans, (re) structuring of service-providing institutions, provision of new services, difficulties encountered during the implementation of the legal framework in practice, and problems faced by families in relation to service-providing institutions, as part of target groups.

Keywords: trafficking victims, Western Balkan states, service providers, national legal framework, community reintegration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trafficking of human beings in the Balkans is a result of sexual exploitation, various forms of forced labor, forced begging, and criminal activities. People who are trafficked are frequently trafficked for more than one of these exploitative purposes. The nature and impact of exploitation necessarily inform what services are needed by a victim, including in what volume and for what period of time. Efforts to provide effective and productive services are one of the priorities of non-profit organizations in the Balkan region. But this task is difficult. They must confront the challenges of this phenomenon in a systematic manner and devise comprehensive strategies for intervention or to support positive, preventive, and reintegration behaviors in victims of trafficking or at risk of trafficking. Various trainings and studies attempted to assist organizations, but not only them, in promoting high-quality community reintegration services for victims of human trafficking. Concentrated on the reintegration of trafficked children and adults, the professionals involved in specific reintegration programs and interventions tried to increase their capacities in developing training materials on the issue of reintegration and contribute to the enhancement of existing laws, policies, and practices concerning the reintegration of trafficking victims. The process of community-based reintegration of each individual trafficking victim takes into account the factors and circumstances in which victims of trafficking find themselves, as well as the challenges and difficulties they or their families face. Reintegration is perceived as a very dynamic, continuous, comprehensive process that requires the intervention and cooperation of all social factors and actors in order to create a normal and comfortable environment for the individual victim, in his or her family, within the community. Reintegration refers to the process of recovery and economic and social inclusion following a trafficking experience. It includes settlement in a stable and safe

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 support²⁶.

This will be achieved through a) the empowerment and support of trafficking victims to develop skills toward independence and self-sufficiency and to be actively involved in their own recovery and reintegration; and b) institutional collaboration among public and local institutions, national and international organizations, police, courts, independent experts, and any other decision-making structure as crucial authorities in determining the fulfillment of the reintegration process of trafficking victims. The process of reintegration involves different pathways depending on each trafficking victim's individual, family, and community situation, as well as the structural issues at play.

As a process that takes from 0 to 36 months, it requires the experts' continuous monitoring of the victims (female or male, young or children) and their intervention with relevant and effective services as needed. This real and concrete needs assessment is given in several dimensions: personal (of the victims); family (the relationship victim-family of origin or the new family); community (existing or new environment); and structural (social and institutional). Institutional intervention (public institutions or NGOs) through services aims to provide service on time and quality as well as create sustainability and success in the future. Familiarity with the challenges that a trafficking victim goes through in the personal, family, social, and structural dimensions, their concretization with real examples, gives an important overview for professionals and para-professionals.

Reintegration services are comprehensive, high-quality, and accessible to victims of human trafficking only if providers are aware of the phenomenon and its difficulties and consequences for the victim's personal wellness, social life, and economic well-being. How does this phenomenon affect the life of a minor victim, and how much care should the responsible institutions take in handling the case? A well-structured intervention plan will assess the reintegration needs and outcomes, the community-based services for reintegration, the funds for reintegration services, and monitoring and quality assurance. Quality services are the direct result of experience and case management by para-professionals and professionals. The legal and ethical requirements on reintegration interventions can be used not only by NGOs qualified for the reintegration of trafficking victims in the Balkans, but by any professional working in the field of anti-trafficking reintegration, whether from the government or civil society, from a range of different fields including social work, psychology, medicine, law enforcement, law and so on.

2. THE PROFILE OF NGOs AS SERVICE PROVIDERS

The organizations had more than 20 years of experience in the field of human rights (women, vulnerable groups, children, families, victims of trafficking, etc.). Focused on services with a multidisciplinary approach or oriented towards a specific target, they aim to rehabilitate and reintegrate their beneficiaries into the community. With a well-defined structure and an operational staff (72.1% full-time, 13.4% part-time, and volunteers at 14.5%), the organizations tried to fulfill all their objectives²⁷. The necessity of well-defined standards by law and public institutions, the increasing demands for basic and new services, and the diversity of each service give this component an important value in the organization's performance. The impossibility of recruiting new staff depends on the limited budget available to them. Most of this budget is provided by international donors (75–85%), less by central government grants (15–24%) and only 1% by local governments. This financial resource varies between organizations and countries in the Balkan region. The funds for projects are coming from international donors (75% for SOS Niksic Montenegro and 24% from the central government. In Albania, it is the same situation. UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes cover almost 90% of services (Nisma Arsis and Diverse and Equal organization). The other part is composed of contributions in-kind and services, through collaboration with partners at the central and local level. The situation of Kosovo organizations is different. The central government is totally involved financially in the support of services (SDSF-Kosovo), followed by funds generated through projects with foreign donors and a smaller part from the local budget. For the MVPT Center, central government funds are

²⁶ Surtees, R. (2008) Re/integration of trafficked persons. How can our work be more effective. Brussels: KBF & Washington, DC: NEXUS Institute.

²⁷ Part of this article are materials and studies elaborated in collaboration with NGO Terre des Hommes Albania and Kosovo. Partner organizations in Balkan Region: Nisma ARSIS and Different and Equal in Albania, Open Gate / La Strada in Macedonia, SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence in Niksic in Montenegro, Hope and Homes for Children, and Center for Protection of Victims and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings (PVPT) in Kosovo were part of this survey which make present the real situation of service providers and their efforts on reintegration in the community of the victims of trafficking, according to their scope. Surtees, Rebecca and Di Maio, Maria Antonia (2018) *Community reintegration of trafficking victims. A handbook for practitioners*. Tirana, Albania: Terre des hommes.

the basic income, followed by local and foreign donors. For Open Gate/La Strada, North Macedonia, the services rely entirely on funds generated by foreign donors and the central government.

The resource heterogeneity permits them to follow their activities and to improve their services. The funds are not enough to fulfill their mission. The financial support provided by the central government for most of them is minimal, often non-existent. In other cases (the Kosovo case), it did not cover the entire calendar year, affecting directly the sustainability of their services. In other cases, the budget is drastically reduced, thereby risking the continuity of the projects and the services. The organizations depended on donors' funds to cover all their necessities and their beneficiaries' needs. The allocated funds by the local government cover a minimum part of their budget, or in other cases, this recourse is missing.

The limited budget directly affects the quality and quantity of provided services and the number of beneficiaries.

The cooperation with local governments (municipalities and prefectures) consisted not only of providing direct services but also of preventing the phenomenon through awareness campaigns against human trafficking in human beings²⁸. Local institutions in the social field provide services in partnership with local NGOs and private service providers²⁹. The collaboration with the private sector was a short-term one, which affected even the success of the service itself.

The organizations that are involved with trafficking issues and providing services for their victims search for partnerships with the government, international organizations, businesses, and media. The state is responsible for ensuring active measures to prevent, identify, investigate, prosecute, and protect against violence. On the other hand, NGOs maintain an important position in combating VAW/TiP through running support services and shelters. At the local level, collaboration exists with local police departments for the reporting and prevention of violence, as well as with other NGOs on different project activities.

The involvement of NGOs with the support of donors and international organizations in providing the services that should be provided by the state or other central institutions, the lack of a special program or budget item for the reintegration of victims affects the number of services provided and the assistance beneficiaries receive. Social services at the central or local level in Kosovo's case are not supported by a specific grant³⁰.

According to SOS Niksic, reintegration and re-socialization of victims appear to be sensitive problems, as there are still no systematic and long-term programs. This segment requires a more organized involvement of the social protection system, the employment service, educational institutions, the business sector, etc., and the creation of special programs within them. There is also still insufficient cooperation of all professionals involved in direct assistance to the victim. The victim is left to fend for himself after leaving the shelter, and this leads to a renewed risk of becoming a victim. Regardless of the need, no elaborated plans for these programs have been created in Montenegro so far, on the basis of which it would be possible to withdraw funds in advance and prepare individual programs for reintegration and resocialization.

3. THE REINTEGRATION SERVICES FOR THE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

Trafficking victims have differing short- and long-term physical, psychological, emotional, and social needs, which require comprehensive services and a holistic approach to reintegration. Services need to respond to and address each victim's individual needs. Services must be available to victims of all forms of trafficking, including males and females, adults and children. Different services may be required for different profiles of trafficking victims, and those services need to be culturally sensitive and appropriate. Adaptations may be needed in the handling of cases when assisting male victims, child victims of different ages, victims of different forms of trafficking exploitation, foreign national victims, and so on. Particular attention is needed to ensure that reintegration support addresses the specific and distinct needs of children, including children at different ages and stages of development, and that the services are provided in an appropriate and accessible way for them and are centred on each child's needs and best interests³¹.

Services and support are often needed by the families of trafficking victims—that is, "secondary beneficiaries." This may include members of a victim's immediate nuclear family (i.e., spouse and children for adult victims; parents and siblings for child victims) or, in some cases, also the more extended family, when a victim is reintegrating with extended family – for example, parents and parents-in-law of adult victims; grandparents; aunts, uncles, cousins, and

²⁸ Referred to ARSIS Initiative Albania

²⁹ Referred to Different and Equal Albania

³⁰ Referred to SDSF-Kosovo

³¹ Child Protection Working Group (2014) *Inter Agency Guidelines for Case Management & Child Protection*. Global Protection Cluster, EC Humanitarian Aid and USAID.

siblings. Also, community-based reintegration efforts must also leverage the support needed by these family members.

Successful reintegration is measured by specific outcomes, which should consider the needs and necessities of the victim and the specific service responses to these needs. This ensemble of elements constitutes the most important part of our survey.

A: Safe and affordable accommodation and care options.

The needs assessment of victims of trafficking in safe and affordable accommodation is considered a priority. The options for whether this accommodation will be provided by organizations, the victim's family or other public institutions are assessed according to the concrete cases and real opportunities available to service providers.

In order to achieve the expected results, service providers take into account several factors, such as:

Assessment of immediate and long-term housing needs based on case assessment, monitoring, the victim's personal, professional, and family situation, economic capacities, and networking between public and private partners and NGOs. According to the organizations, they provide an assessment of the victim's short- and long-term housing needs, which is funded by donors or the public budget.

Risk assessment is an important component in ensuring the viability and effectiveness of victim services. Organizations are inclined towards a detailed risk assessment for services realized with donors and public funds. 60% of cases show that the activities of the organizations are based on cooperation with public institutions (3 out of 5 organizations mentioned above accepted this cooperation).

Shelter accommodation (long and short-term): provided by all organizations for victims of trafficking, including minors. This service is based on funds generated by projects with foreign donors and public funds. To make it possible, the organization cooperates with other partners, such as public institutions (60% of the time).

Protected living settings (e.g. transition houses, group houses): About 80% of organizations provide the service (4 out of 5), 20% of them provide the service based on cooperation between NGOs and public institutions (two out of five), and their services are funded by donors and public institutions.

Semi-independent living options: a non-common service provided by organizations using donor and public funds in collaboration with other NGOs.

Subsidized or social housing is made possible thanks to the funds guaranteed by donors and public funds and through collaboration with public institutions.

Independent living options, on their own, with family or partner, are part of a needs assessment made by experts in the field. With funds generated by donors, there are two organizations that invest in this direction, and thanks to the cooperation with other NGOs, the expected result is possible, creating independent opportunities in the victim's life³². Other organizations that do not provide such a service declare that there are other organizations with whom they cooperate. Their beneficiaries will be reported to the partner organization for this service.

B: Legal assistance and issues

Among the important services provided to victims of trafficking or those at risk of trafficking is legal support, which, in order to be successful and effective, must consider several components: assessment of the victim's legal and administrative needs; information (written and verbal) about rights as a trafficking victim, including documents, registration, access to services; support in accessing documents, services, and entitlements; guidance to victims on how to navigate the administrative process; support in processing identity documents; civil and birth registration services (for victims and family/dependents); access to temporary and permanent residency permits; counseling and advice on legal and administrative issues. Partner organizations value legal support as a very important element for the community's reintegration of victims. Apart from one of them³³, all other organizations provide the most adequate and professional legal support for their beneficiaries. 60% of the services are funded by various domestic and foreign³⁴ donors, 33.4% by public funds, and 6.6% are not provided by partner organizations. there exists a good collaboration that guarantees the quality and efficiency of services. The cooperation rate between organizations and public institutions was 44.5%, followed by other partner organizations' rate of 8.9%. A considered percentage (46.6%) is provided entirely by organizations with their own logistical capacities and human resources³⁵.

³² Only Arsis Initiative declared this kind of collaboration.

³³ The MVPT Center does not provide the following services: civil services or birth registration (for victims and family/dependents); access to temporary and permanent residence permits; assistance in obtaining documentation and services; or meeting administrative criteria.

³⁴ The MVPT Center guarantees legal support at the rate of 22.2% from donors and 44.4% from public funds. The ARSIS initiative received 22.2% from public funds and 77.8% from donors. SDSF provides 100% of the legal services with public funds, and the organizations La Strada/Open Gate and SOS Niksic rely on donor funds at 100%.

³⁵ The association SOS Niksic and SDSF Kosovo lack on giving an answer

C: Education and training opportunities

Education and training opportunities may be possible with the contribution of all actors involved in this field. In order to achieve long-term and sustainable results, the services must be comprehensive and diverse, according to the needs assessment for each case. Training and education are an important pillar of the activities of all partner organizations. They provide 89% of these services. The organization states that due to its importance, such a service should be left to public institutions to take care of and guarantee its quality. The coverage of these activities with funds shows that donors supported 74.8% of them, 12.7% of activities are supported by public sources, and the rest, 9.1%, are supported by other sources, like donations, collaborations among organizations or collaborations between organizations and public institutions, gifts, or private businesses³⁶. In order to provide the highest quality service, the organizations considered it very important to cooperate with public institutions, providing 14.5% of services for victims and those at risk of trafficking. Because vocational education and training may be provided by public state institutions according to standards and guarantees employment and reintegration opportunities for this target group, the partner organizations guide their beneficiaries to attend the public educational curricula. The collaboration with the public education system was very useful for most of the organizations. 25.5% of the service is provided only by public institutions, for example, in the case of formal education (at any level) by the beneficiaries. The cooperation with partner organizations that provide services and vocational training and education programs amounts to 23.6% of all services. In the case of unanswered questions by 36.4%³⁷, it is intended that the organizations provide such a service and ensure its success based on their own capacities³⁸.

D: Possibilities for professional/employment

Providing professional or employment opportunities for VoT is one of the biggest challenges for organizations. It was difficult for them to guarantee fair and legal employment for their beneficiaries. Due to: the economic difficulties of organizations and beneficiaries because the courses and practices are expensive; the lack of job offers in the professions studied by beneficiaries; the labor market's reduction of opportunities for new professions; inconsistency between the job offer and the beneficiaries' demand; lack of financial support for private initiative and small businesses; support with business plans for victims by companies or central and local public institutions; low wages and undeclared work, which severely affect this service, 72% of services were offered successfully by the organizations, versus 28% of cases when these services were missing.

E: Economic well-being.

The services related to economic stability and well-being require commitment and interaction in several areas and actors. Their efficiency, combined in theoretical and practical terms, builds and strengthens the intellectual capacity of beneficiaries, such as: information sessions and education on economic support, services, etc., or information and education sessions about economic subsidies, training in financial management and household budgeting, counseling and preparation, as well as job placement services, business development, including grants or loans, income-generating activities, support to access subsidies, and support for vulnerable people and victims of trafficking.

The organizations stated their services focused on economic well-being and stability are the crucial parts of their activities. This sustainable standard guarantees the social integration of victims and those at risk of trafficking, offering them a safe future. The organizations provide almost 76.7% of the services in the field of economic welfare and 23.3%³⁹ of those services are not provided by them. The services not provided by our partner organizations consist of business development programs, including grants or loans (three out of five organizations do not provide this service). The income-generating activities are not part of programs prepared by partner organizations (two of five do not provide this service), and subsidy and assistance support for vulnerable and trafficking victims, as well as training in financial management and household budgeting, are not provided by one organization out of five of them. The inability to provide these services shows that the organizations do not have all the material and human

³⁶ 3.7% is part of those activities which are not offered by organizations like SOS Niksic.

³⁷ SOS Niksic and SDSF Kosovo have not responded.

³⁸ Considering that the SOS Niksic organization has declared a gap in covering all services for vocational training and education of victims of trafficking, it was announced that services such as: *support to enroll in the education system, access to educational support, and educational materials (e.g. books, uniforms, school supplies)* are provided by the Ministry of Education in Montenegro

³⁹ Only SOS Niksic offers two services among six in the field of economic welfare, like: *employment, including counseling and training, and information and education sessions on economic subsidies, services, etc.* Open Gate/La Strada, among six services, does not offer two of them (*business development, including grants or loans and income-generating activities*). Arsis Initiative does not offer one of them (*business development including grants or loans*).

capacities to guarantee the entire cycle of services in order to achieve the economic well-being of their beneficiaries. This gap may be created because the organizations are focused on other priorities or their outcomes may be achieved more easily. Most parts of these services were funded by domestic and foreign donors at a rate of 76.7%. There is a lack of funding and financial support from the public budget for these services, and the rate of 23.3% is not covered with services by the organizations.

F: Physical health

Community reintegration of victims of trafficking or those at risk of trafficking cannot be achieved unless their physical well-being is guaranteed. The organizations considered this the primary task to achieve a total reintegration of the victims. The diverse services tend to cover all the needs and expectations of the victims. The organizations know the aggravated physical condition of the victims, so they try to provide quality, general, and periodic services. They monitor, periodically and permanently, the victim's health and try to solve their problems. This way of caring creates a special connection between victims and professionals and helps them establish bridges of cooperation and trust that will be strengthened over time. The victim begins to feel more relaxed, protected and calm, as well as welcome in a new place away from violence and stigma. 43.6% of services are provided as a contribution of funds generated by various donors; 36.4% are generated by public funds; 9.1% are part of unspecified financial sources; and the rate of 10.9% is services uncovered by organizations.

G: Emotional well-being

An important component, in addition to physical well-being, is also the mental one. They include all the support services provided for the mental well-being of the victim. Personal and social well-being seeks the victim's complete and long-term rehabilitation, as well as the establishment of social relationships with friends and society, but also with family and relatives. This service requires not only intervention and assistance to the beneficiary's mental status, but also her family environment and members, which causes this phenomenon to affect and harm not only the victim, but also the family and society. This commitment is part of the objectives of all organizations. They aim to provide the most adequate, quality, general, and sustainable service. These services are provided by 92.8% of all organizations.

4. THE SERVICE PROVIDERS CHALLENGES

The reduced capacity of shelters and their location are not suitable for long-term accommodation. The financial sustainability of NGOs causes lack of permanent services. Difficulties with fulfillment of administrative procedures for the social bonus delivered by the municipality. The pandemic situation of Covid-19 limited some of the organization's activities to delivering them through online platforms. The NGOs are oriented towards offering basic legal rights counseling to the victims. The challenge is that the organizations do not always have sufficient means to cover the expenses for the issuance of documents or to have the legal experts' expertise. The NGOs cannot reach the victims that need this kind of support that are not involved in their program. The coordination among responsible structures for following, managing and offering services for victims is missing. There are difficulties in following administrative procedures and implementing the legal benefits recognized for the victims. Not all schools are ready to accept child trafficking. Difficulties to persuade the parents/family of the victim about the importance of education as one of the key elements for further progress and reintegration. There are insufficient finances for supporting the victims in vocational training. The coordination among local institutions is missing, but in general, the professionals try bringing the victims back to the school. The lack of information services on the education process and institutions; the bad quality of courses which don't offer secure employment. Families prohibit victims from going back to schools because of stigma, or victims don't feel safe in the schools or public institutions, lack of interest in the victims, and lack of documentation for the victims to be registered in the public schools. The problems of persuading the victims to take the step toward their independence and strengthening self-confidence, self-affirmation, identifying one's capacities and affinities. Many of the existing state programs for vulnerable persons are not suitable for victims. The organization's activity is based on the principle of confidentiality, protecting the victim's data and stories. It is difficult to find the perfect job for the victim. Another challenge is to convince the employer in the private sector to offer a job to a victim for a long time even after the financial subventions are finished. Business starts up and entering the market is difficult to achieve. The employment offices offer a job in restricted sectors of the market which don't provide sustainability for the economic well being of the victims. Lack of functional structures for alternative work and lack of will to be part of programs in the employment sector.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study highlighted the problems that NGOs face every day in guaranteeing and meeting the needs of victims of trafficking, adults and children in different countries of the Balkan region. Networking has given them the opportunity to collaborate, harmonize procedures, increase the number of beneficiaries, exchange staff and good

practices, provide a standardized service, be closer and closer to the groups in need, respect the legal framework in force in the countries where they operate, as well as to integrate in it the requirements of international acts. What stands out is the fact that all NGOs, part of our study, even though they are in different countries and focused on different targets (some to provide services for children, others for adults and women / girls), again share among themselves the same problems related to the lack of funds, which help to create the, sustainability of the services provided; cooperation with businesses in financial support and with the direct support in providing assistance for the employment of victims as an opportunity for their sustainable reintegration into social life; the support from the local government with administrative and financial services for their target as well as the promotion of values and social solidarity. These necessities testify to the need for intervention required by civil society to prevent the victims of trafficking from stigmatization and their reintegration into the social life where they belong to.

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