

The needs of third country national victims of trafficking transitioning from shelter to independent living



## a world I can trust

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#### Produced by:

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#### Financially supported by:

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### contents

#### **Introduction 3**

#### Methodology 4

Factors influencing needs

#### Moving out of the shelter 6

#### Steps to a healthy social life 8

The parting
Understanding cultural differences
Lack of social connection
Barriers to social inclusion
Factors facilitating social inclusion

#### Health and well-being 11

Psychological support barriers
Developing an individual life plan
Dealing with the consequences of trauma
The notions of mental and emotional well-being
The use of the public health system and self-care services

#### Language 14

#### Public services and administration 14

#### Safety and security 15

#### Housing 16

Safe house-hunting Household management

#### **Economic inclusion 17**

Job search Skills building Getting acquainted with labor laws and workers' rights Time management Mobility

Financial assistance, financial independence and money management 21

Child-care and family welfare 21

Clients with "no needs" 22

**Conclusions 24** 

## introduction

The needs of victims of trafficking in human beings (VoT's) are complex and require comprehensive services and treatment ranging from emergency to short- and longer-term care.

The majority of EU Member States have a well-established victim support system in place, offering first response and short-term assistance. However, assistance must be extended in the long run to address the unmet needs of survivors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the needs of third country national victims of human trafficking in their transition from institutional care, whether residential or outpatient care, to independent living.

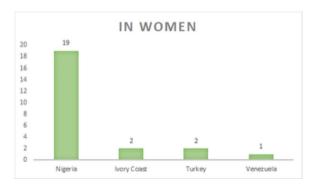
The research has been carried out by the five victim support organizations from Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain. The aim is to provide victim support organizations and service providers with insight about the needs of survivors to strengthen social work interventions, in this delicate phase of transition, through a gender- and culturally sensitive perspective.

#### Methodology

Interviews with client victims of human trafficking, literature review and focus groups with social workers, psychologists and other professionals have been used as methods of data collection. The focus group discussions highlighted weaknesses, strengths and opportunities in the service and support provided to victims. Clients played a participatory role in informing the needs assessment through 54 semi-structured interviews conducted between December 2019 and February 2020.

This sample of adult participants, exposed to different types of victimization and exploitation, comprises:

- 40 women victims of sexual exploitation: 24 single women, 5 of whom were pregnant, and 14 mothers with children).
- 14 men victims of forced labor.

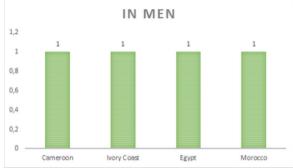




The sample comprises 27 clients still assisted in shelters (23 women and 4 men, indicated with the abbreviation "IN") and 27 clients who have moved out of the shelter (17 women and 10 men, referred to as "OUT").

The research relied primarily on empirical evidence collected through focus groups and interviews. Unless references to literature are given in the text and footnotes, all observations made by social workers can be referred to the focus groups, whereas data and information about the victims of trafficking is derived from the interviews.





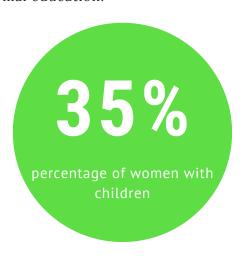


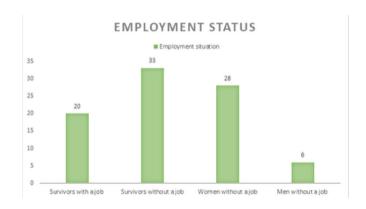
The average age is 29. The most represented countries of origin are Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Cameroon, Pakistan, Morocco and Venezuela.

From a comparison among the different national systems, the first difficulty appears to arise from the attempt to come to a common definition of "transition". For the purpose of the present research, the authors use the term transition to indicate a process where the person receives support towards independence. This phase can start either in the care facility or outside, according to the services and resources available locally.

The difference in the services offered in the shelters and out of residential care results in different levels of autonomy, and different needs. Thus, considering that survivors show different levels of self-reliance, that their psychological, emotional and cognitive needs depend to a large extent on the type of support they received, clients' needs have been recorded in their continuity from the IN to the OUT phase.

Among the interviewees, 16 clients have a job, 6 are doing an internship, 29 are unemployed. Clients have on average 9 years of formal education.

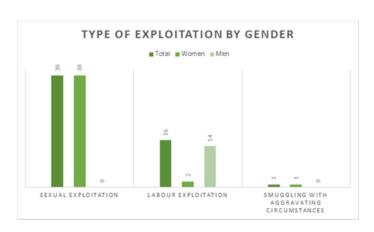




#### Factors influencing needs

An analysis of the interviews revealed that individual needs can vary considerably based on factors such as:

- gender,
- characteristics of the migratory path and type of exploitation,
- level of empowerment,
- personality traits such as motivation, adaptability, problem-solving and analytical skills.
- mental state and psychological condition resulting from the trauma,
- time spent in the care facilities,
- characteristics of the host community in terms of employment opportunities, social and cultural prospects for integration and social inclusion, and services offered by antitrafficking organizations and public administration agencies.



#### Moving out of the shelter

Transitioning to independent living is a challenging phase where the person needs constant support while entering a far more unstable and complex reality. Often clients miss the round-the-clock assistance they enjoyed in the shelter once they move out.

Clients who have moved out often report having felt overwhelmed by anxiety when they suddenly found themselves on their own. Many mentioned that the change is very abrupt and drastic.

"I felt ready, but also sad. It felt like I was in the middle of a road and had to keep going." (Belgium)

"[I need] a guide who can walk me through pretty much everything because the struggle is intense. I need someone to talk to and someone who listens. That's all I need. "
(Germany)

Many women in the shelter reported feeling ready to be on their own. Most men outside also said that when they left the care facility they felt ready and were looking forward to living independently. However, despite all the preparation, after some time the majority came to realize how difficult living alone can be and that they still needed support.

I've always been very independent, so when I left the shelter I had mixed feelings: I was sad and at the same time I wanted to go, [...] to make my own decisions, to travel (although I don't have the time), to be free from the obligation of sharing so many things about my life and my personal space with other people". (Spain)

Some clients, especially young girls in the shelter, stated that the mere thought of being on their own was intimidating. One of the reasons is that when people think about living on their own, they tend to focus on everything they have to do all at once. As a result, they feel overwhelmed and helpless. Social workers emphasize how such feelings must be seen as a natural part of the path to self-reliance. At the same time, tools and activities must be put in place and practiced from the very first days in the shelter, so as to gradually pave the way towards empowerment. Some young women reported feeling happy about their regained independence once out of shelter stay, despite the concerns and fears they had experienced in the first place.

"As long as I stay in the support program, there are many social workers around me, ready to help when I am not feeling well, and this makes me feel like I've got everything I need. When I picture myself living on my own, I am afraid to face what's coming." (Italy)

Some clients raised the issue of the length of time spent in residential care. They emphasized that some people may need to stay in the shelter longer than others. Such differences depend on multiple factors such as form and length of exploitation, age, life history, family situation, origin, level of education, etc.

Single mothers, in particular, need more time and help to achieve a sustainable level of autonomy. In addition to the typical challenges associated with parenthood, they pointed out to the need to have a social network and flexibility at work to juggle family and work responsibilities.

"I thought I was going to stay longer in the shelter. It was too short a time for me. I went to live on my own too soon. I got all the support I needed. I learned how to make an appointment, save money, and pay the bills. I learned how to take care of myself, for example, when I'm feeling under stress, and how to be in control of my emotions and reactions. However, I would have liked to stay longer in the shelter to get more support, because it was difficult in the beginning." (Belgium)

"I do not feel I am ready yet. I need more time to work on my recovery process. Above all, I am afraid that they tell me to leave the shelter without notice and don't give me time enough to find a place elsewhere. Maybe if I have more information about how long I can be in the shelter and on how to rent an apartment, I wouldn't feel so anxious about it." (Spain)

A co-national can have a very positive influence on a person living in the shelter or in the transition phase. The co-national could be a survivor of trafficking her/himself, a migrant, who has achieved a good level of socio-economic inclusion, a cultural mediator or a volunteer with a migrant background. Some clients outside the shelter have highlighted how helpful it has been for them to meet a fellow national with a successful experience of integration. These people are a resource for achieving self-reliance.

"Luckily, I met a cultural mediator from Ivory Coast who's been living in Italy for a long time. He pushed me to make an effort to learn things, from the very beginning (...) When I left the shelter I had many questions about the way things work in Italy.

I was lucky to have him. I trusted him. He helped me understand things a lot. I think it would be helpful if clients could meet other survivors to see how they succeeded in becoming independent and understand that they have to listen to what the social workers say, because those are all important lessons to learn for when they will be on their own." (Italy)

The support fellow nationals as peers can bring to a victim can make a valuable contribution to the work of social workers. Very often the words of a well-trusted conational can motivate a client much more than those of a social worker, because the relationship is one of equality; a conational "has been there" and can more easily relate to and connect with the client. A peer can also embody an example of success story, shedding light on the difficulties ahead of the road, without discouraging the client, but rather giving them hope that a successful outcome is attainable.

"At first I hated the idea of having to learn all those things. I thought I knew everything! (laughs) I just felt the pressure of finding a job and helping my family and I thought it was enough to go on. How naive I was! I understood the things you (the social worker) tried to teach me only when I was alone in my flat. At that point I finally saw things clearly. I often went back to the notes we wrote together" (Italy)

The abuse trafficking victims have suffered can profoundly shape their sense of self and of those surrounding them, resulting in pervasive mistrust of others, and it can interrupt their ability to have healthy interpersonal relationships.

According to social workers, where there is a peer-support program in place, with former VoT's or volunteers offering guidance to victims as they become independent, these have to be trained on how to communicate and connect with clients.(1) A buddy must know how to build rapport, set boundaries, respect confidentiality, and deal with the survivor's complex feelings. A buddy needs to learn basic techniques for conflict resolution and motivational talk. A successful peer relationship is one built on trust. On the other hand, victims of sex trafficking may not feel comfortable sharing their experience with someone from their same culture, out of shame and stigma, even if the buddy is a survivor herself.

#### Steps to a healthy social life

#### The parting

Going from communal living in a shelter, where a person can step out of their room and talk to another guest or a social worker anytime they like, to being alone in a flat can be an abrupt change.

"I felt lonely. I was getting disconnected from people when I moved out. I wish there were more opportunities to get busy, to see friends, or neighbors, or go to work, to create connections with people in general. This is the most important thing for me." (Belgium)

"I did not expect that being alone would be so hard. It was as if I went from living with my family to living alone from one day to the other." (Belgium) In the shelter clients establish a love-hate relationship with other residents and social workers. They cherish and long for the privacy and freedom of living alone, but at the same time they realize that most of their social interaction comes from communal living. Some people who live independently said they appreciated the opportunity to learn how to relate to people from different backgrounds and cultures while in residential care. The shelter provides a training ground for practicing communication, patience, listening, respect and compliance to community rules.

"It felt sad to move out. I was lonely." (Germany)

"I will be very happy when I finally have my own flat. There'll be no stress, no pressure. I can organize things the way I like. I don't need any help." (Germany)



(1) In a peer-to-peer mentoring program risks of secondary victimization and vicarious trauma should be carefully evaluated and measures taken to mitigate them. Other factors to consider are the genuine motivation of the volunteer, his/her participation in community life and respect for strict privacy and security standards.

#### Understanding cultural differences

According to social workers, not every client is confident enough to speak up, build rapport with others or ask questions. Very often their communication style is one that could be considered inappropriate in our society. This could have an impact on their relationship with service providers and people in general. It is important that clients appreciate cultural differences and manage cross-cultural communication to be able to relate to other people in manners that are considered appropriate in their host society. Social workers must consider to what extent a culture and its social constructs influence someone's behavior in order to interpret the way in which the client perceives social interactions and be able to guide them in establishing connections.

#### Lack of social connection

Some clients, both inside and outside residential care, expressed concerns about the lack of integration into the host community, in spite of their best efforts. The lack of a social network can have an impact on the transition to self-reliance as it reduces the opportunities for emotional bonding and problem-solving.

Service providers confirm that a client's social network is often very small and sometimes non-existent. For many clients, leaving the shelter can lead to isolation. They may have a hard time connecting with people because of language or cultural barriers, or because of the trauma suffered. Loneliness has an impact on their quality of life and can cause major setbacks. Some clients seek connections with locals rather than fellow nationals to avoid trouble, out of fear that co-nationals may have links with the criminals or criminal networks involved in their trafficking.

"I would like them (the social workers) to help me find new friends. I don't know if I'll be able to make Italian friends by myself." (Italy)

"I do not have any friends from the past (...) I need to stay far from people that can get me in trouble" (Italy)

#### Barriers to social inclusion

The trauma resulting from trafficking can have long-lasting repercussions that affect a person's understanding of themselves and the world around them. For many victims, the effects of abuse manifest in dysfunctional interpersonal relationships. They lack confidence in their ability to engage with the world around them. They don't have a stable sense of identity and the ability to understand the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of both themselves and others. Social support is then essential to help survivors regain and rebuild trust.

The shelter provides a safe space where they can overcome the consequences of trauma step by step. For example, being able to talk to someone about their day or about their emotions can work miracles in lowering their stress level and being able to get closer to other people.

"I learned a lot but I still need information and help as I don't want to repeat the same mistakes. I still need the advice of social workers, of the psychologist and every other reliable person that can help me with my life here in Italy. I would like to know how to live my life without paying attention to gossip and bad-mouthing. I always have this feeling that other people know about my past. I still don't feel comfortable with people. I feel ashamed" (Italy)

The shelter house offers a safe haven for a new beginning, but social workers warn that it is far more difficult for clients to have social interactions outside their protected environment.

Unfortunately, places where clients can hope to build a social life (for example events or pubs) may not be always easily accessible, depending on the local context, and frequently, activities that encourage socialization are expensive (sports, classes, cultural events, etc). Sometimes, despite their best intentions, clients must give up on doing sports or other leisure activities as they cannot juggle work with personal life. Particularly in the beginning, they need to save money and energy when getting adjusted to a new job and the multiple responsibilities that come with being on their own.

To foster exchange with locals and develop a sense of belonging to the community, service providers encourage participation in sociocultural and educational activities in collaboration with local organizations and public entities.

#### Factors facilitating social inclusion

The results of the focus group discussions and interviews show that after at least one year outside shelter, clients with a stable job seem to finally find time to dedicate to their physical well-being, education or social activities. This demonstrates the positive impact employment has on their social inclusion. Daily contacts with co-workers help survivors improve their language skills. Over time, co-workers become a valuable source of advice and guidance for everyday life, and they can also facilitate social interactions even outside the work context. All these factors can significantly improve quality of life and psychological well-being.

"After a year in the shelter, I was ready to leave. Obviously, I was a bit scared about staying on my own but I knew I could count on my co-workers for any questions I had. My work environment has helped me a lot. I didn't want to go back to my case manager for help, but there were still many things I had to understand. So, day after day I brought bills, even traffic tickets (laughs) to colleagues to know what to do" (Italy)

In the shelter social workers organize group events such as sports, recreational, social and cultural activities -aiming at ensuring a level of social interaction appropriate to the client's social skills. The objective is to push people out of their comfort zone, show them different areas of the town and encourage them to explore their community. Recreational events like cultural or sport(2) activities can bring people together, acting like a 'universal language', that transcends social, cultural and national boundaries. They can provide an ideal setting for new arrivals to bond with locals, regardless of their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status, in the spirit of integration as a two-way process.

The importance of outdoor activities is confirmed in the interviews where clients wished they had more opportunities for socializing outside the shelter.

"I enjoyed the time we spend with social workers outdoors, but I think it's too little. I like to go out better than sitting inside in meetings. It really helps me release the stress." (Italy)

(2) For a list of Erasmus+ sports projects for the social inclusion of migrants, see "Mapping of good practices relating to social inclusion of migrants through sport", European Commission, DG Education and Culture, Youth and Sport, 2016.

The need to build a social network emerged strongly and transversally. Clients are encouraged to attend events and socialize, in accordance with their wish and aptitudes. However, sometimes there can be barriers to inclusion such as discrimination based on sex or origins, and survivors need to be equipped to recognize and respond to prejudice, bias and unfair treatment.



#### Health and well-being

Clients who went through psychological therapy recognize the benefits of psychological support to increase self-confidence, manage emotional distress and intrusive thoughts and finding coping mechanisms. They stated that counselling helps them reduce anxiety about their future and prepare for the next steps.

"First, I had a place to sleep and eat well.
Then, thanks to the work done with the
psychologist, I blossomed. I had meetings with
her and on my way home I would think about
our conversation, I would recall the words she
spoke to me, and I'd feel better" (Italy)

"The psychological counselling helped me shift the focus from my past to the present moment." (Italy) Some clients, both inside and outside care, stress the need for ongoing and more frequent specialized support.

"I am in pain, I feel distraught because of what my boss (exploiter) did to me, how he treated me. He humiliated me and harmed me. Also, I think a lot about my trip on the boat from Egypt to Italy, I was afraid for my life on that boat, and those memories keep coming back. I can talk to my case manager about this, and I have sessions with a psychologist every other week. I would like to have weekly sessions, but she can't do more." (Belgium)

When a client is willing to have psychological support, the service is provided either in house, where the shelter has counselors as part of the team, or by referral.

#### Barriers to psychological support

Psychological support cannot be provided to all clients, for different reasons. One of the main reasons is that not all survivors recognize they have experienced trauma, stress, or other psychological effects as a consequence of their exploitation. Some refuse psychotherapy because of the stigma associated with it. Sometimes a client cannot be referred to a therapist at the right time because of the long waiting lists, language barriers and high costs.

Very often clients are not familiar with the role of psychologists and do not understand the benefits. Therefore, it takes time for them to accept the idea of going into therapy. Most victims of sexual exploitation typically distrust other people, avoid thoughts and feelings related to the abuse suffered, believe that that they cannot be understood by those who have not gone through the same experience, and feel that avoiding disclosure is the best way to overcome their past.

There are also barriers related to spiritual and religious beliefs, such as the *juju* (witchcraft) among the Nigerians, that may prevent women from talking about the exploitation.

#### Developing an individual life plan

In their daily work in shelters and beyond, social workers offer individual support to help client rebuild their life and migration project. Through one-to-one counselling, victims learn to look at the abuse suffered under a different light, understand their victimization, identify the rights that have been violated and discover their inner resources for survival and resilience. Case managers help clients identify their needs, both in the country of origin (i.e. debt or family responsibilities) and in the host society, and transpose them into a life plan aimed at achieving full autonomy.

The conversation between case managers and clients can be very deep, have a truly healing effect and help victims make positive changes in their lives.

"(Social workers) advised me on what to do. This helped me reduce stress. We talked a lot and they told me how to do things.' In the shelter I could make a fresh start. (...) In the shelter I learned how to be a person, to be somebody again" (Belgium)

Social workers emphasized the importance of working on the concept of what it means to be a "victim of crime". This exercise is particularly important for women victims of sexual exploitation as it offers a chance to deconstruct their self-perception, often based on guilt, shame or fear. Also, it challenges the stereotype of victims as helpless and dependent.

#### Dealing with the consequences of trauma

Social workers must read the signs and consequences of trauma such as drug abuse, sleeping and eating disorders, intrusive memories and thoughts, nightmares, apathy and denial. In their daily contact with clients, social workers must deal with difficult behaviors like anger, extreme irritability, fear, anxiety, depression, etc. Their presence helps clients reach some balance, and understand the triggers and reactions they need to work on. However, to process trauma and pursue a successful healing process in the long run, specialized help is needed.

"I learned a lot, but now I would like to receive advice from a social worker, psychologist or any trusted person that can help me integrate in this country." (Italy)

"I need nothing more than information and support since I don't want to repeat the same mistakes" (Italy)

Considering how recovery from exploitation often requires long-term support and assistance and that any discontinuation of services could have a significantly negative impact on the victim social workers must encourage clients to continue treatment with the support of professional therapist.

Furthermore, due to the many difficulties and obstacles clients face daily in their long healing trajectory, it is essential to stress the importance of self-care.

#### The notions of mental and emotional wellbeing

Social workers should promote knowledge about physical, mental and emotional wellbeing (healthy eating, sports, self-care, etc). Basic notions of reproduction and sexual health should be provided together with basic information about anatomy and physiology, sexual development and responses, as well as intimate hygiene, to guide people towards healthy attitudes of concern and respect for themselves and others. Above all, there is a need for adequate education of women on the potential danger of cultural practice of selfmedication. Studies have found that African women resort to self-medication to treat fever with pain relievers, mixture of herbs and other drugs, sedatives and alcohol. Reasons for using these substances range from protection from witches and witchcraft, preventing pregnancy, treating sleep disorder, fever, vomiting and infections.(3) Moreover, young mothers shall be informed about the hazards of non-professional circumcision, that they often seek for their children, or self-induced abortion through medication.

Social services point out that the victims' perception of health varies according to cultural factors. Experience shows that to many women from African countries the notion of health is tantamount to absence of any apparent disease.

They are not familiar with the European concept of self-care and prevention, they tend to wait too long to seek medical care, thus resorting too often to emergency treatment, which inevitably translates in a dysfunctional use of health services and frustrate their expectations. Additionally, as in some countries of origin healthcare is a privilege and the majority of the population have no access to it, any small health problem can cause excessive worrying. Social workers should help clients learn about and practice preventive healthcare, promote a healthy lifestyle, address behavioral risk factors, and use available health care services for wellness visits, screenings and vaccinations.



## The use of the public health system and self-care services

Even when the use of the public health system is facilitated from the beginning, it is important to show clients how to access those services by themselves. They should also be encouraged to use self-care services such as wellness and social centers, women information and support centers, centers for victims of violence, etc.

Self-care is defined as "the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider." (WHO) The scope of self-care in this definition is a broad concept encompassing hygiene (general and personal), nutrition (type and quality of food eaten), lifestyle (sporting activities, leisure, etc.), environmental factors (living conditions, social habits, etc.) socioeconomic factors (income level, cultural beliefs, etc.) and self-medication. When it comes to selfcare, the main challenge is to find free services addressing victims' most pressing demands and needs. Places like toy libraries or children recreation centers are normally available in all towns and cities. On the other hand, fitness and sports activities usually come at a cost that not all VoT's can afford.

#### Language

Most clients consider host country language proficiency one of the most important elements for achieving self-reliance.

Language skills are perceived as a prerequisite for social interaction, access to services, economic inclusion, training and education and participation in community life.

The time spent in the shelter is often insufficient to gain adequate language skills. In some cases, the presence of many people of the same nationality or speaking the same language can significantly reduce the possibility of practicing a language.

People may have to wait to access free language classes, and sometimes the number of lessons and their quality are inadequate. Client with a low educational background may need extra support in their studies. Social workers encourage clients to make an effort to practice the language in real life situations as much as possible. Among the interviewees, those who are employed showed the highest level of language skills.

"Learning Dutch is very important. (...) If you speak Dutch you can connect, and people will open up to you. The more people talk to you and get to know you, the more opportunities you will find on your path." (Belgium)

"The biggest obstacle for me is that I don't speak the language well enough. (...) It's hard to do my paperwork, to understand letters, to make appointments, etc. My case manager helps me with all these things otherwise it would be impossible for me to cope. For example, going to a doctor and talking to him, going to the bank to open a bank account, going to the insurance company for my health insurance etc. (...). It's very important for me to speak better Dutch to become more independent. I understand how things work, but communication in society is difficult." (Belgium)

## Public services and administration

Clients keep facing different types of barriers in accessing mainstream services, the most common being bureaucratic hurdles, administrative requirements, practical challenges and personal and individual issues like shame or discomfort about seeking help, pessimism about the likelihood of receiving assistance, mistrust of authorities, etc.

Most clients outside the shelter, with the exception of those who have a job, said they need help to navigate the public administration. They said they need someone they can trust and who can answer questions about procedures and show them the way to do things.

"After I left the care facility, I went back to my case manager to know how to rent a place. I know how to do it, but I needed someone I could trust to make sure I was doing it right" (Italy)

"When I received letters in the mail I didn't really understand them. Thanks to my case managers I was able to understand what they were about. Also, making phone calls was difficult for me because I didn't speak the language very well. Also, I didn't have a lot of self-confidence, that made things even more difficult. Now I am more confident than before." (Belgium)

#### Safety and security

Victims of human trafficking have to deal with a constant feeling of insecurity and lack of control, as a result of the trauma they have suffered, because the exploiters keep looking for them, or they are afraid of being retaliated against. As a consequence, some believe they will never be able to settle down and start a new life.

To increase their sense of safety, case managers help clients become aware of the real risks posed by their exploiters. Survivors learn to develop coping mechanisms and ways to safeguard their privacy and safety in the use of social network, in their job search and at work.

It must be noted that being safe and feeling safe are different things. What feels safe to one person, may not be so for someone else. Feeling unsafe, regardless of any objective safety condition, limits a person's ability to experience human connection, which is foundation to our social well being. To some, safety relates to the place where they live or go to work, for others safety means having people they can trust. Clients in the shelter appreciate the safety they enjoy in the facility, as opposed to the idea of one day living alone in a flat. One client reported feeling unsafe because of problems with her neighbors, one was worried about being found by his exploiter, others stress their feeling in danger when hanging out with conationals potentially connected with criminal networks.

Another issue raised by the social workers is the sense of insecurity linked to possible retaliation of the exploiters against the clients and their families. Within the Nigerian community, there is widespread fear of the consequences of *juju* rituals performed in the host country to bind victims into slavery. This results in fears of spiritual retribution for breaking the oath of loyalty or for disclosing the abuse to the authorities.



#### Housing

#### Safe house-hunting

Most clients transitioning to autonomy expressed the need to be helped find an apartment. Social workers confirm that the majority of clients need assistance to find safe, adequate and affordable accommodation due to many factors: poor rent affordability due to poor allowances or low-wages, lack of a regular employment contract and therefore of sufficient guarantee for the landlord, limited availability or high costs of rentals. Clients are often afraid to be rejected because of widespread distrust of immigrants, and are afraid of being deceived by a landlord or real estate agent who may use unfair trading practices taking advantage of the person's lack of familiarity with the language and leasing procedures.

Social workers confirm having witnessed episodes of distrust and discrimination towards their clients. However, they also reported that clients often feel discriminated against even though in reality there seem to be no signs of bias. Misunderstanding in communicating with agencies, landlords or neighbors can often be interpreted as discrimination and rejection. Support is essential to help clients analyse the situation carefully and find different ways to cope.

"I've been told they don't give houses to black people" (Italy);

"At the moment the only thing I need is a proper place to live. Since I don't have a contract yet, I have no guarantee." (Italy)

When looking for an apartment, clients have to assess neighborhood safety and their proximity and connection to the places where their traffickers and exploiters operate. However, sometimes the safest areas are also the most expensive to rent, which further complicates the search.

"Yes, I feel ready to live on my own, but it depends of the area where I will be living, as I don't feel safe in all areas in this city.

Especially areas where there are a lot of Arabs make me very uncomfortable because my exploiter was an Arab" (Belgium)

To overcome this problem, sometimes clients choose to share an apartment with a fellow national, but this can increase their sense of insecurity and further slow down the inclusion process.

#### Household management

Many clients outside reported being glad they took the time to learn new skills while they were in the shelter, as those turned out to be very helpful later. They mentioned basic domestic skills like cleaning and hygiene, doing the laundry, making the bed every morning, checking that all lights and appliances are off before leaving, taking out the trash, recycling, cooking a simple meal, etc.

"I've learned how important it is to have a schedule -when you have to eat, clean your room, wash your clothes, etc. I had to work on my self-confidence and the social workers helped me do so. My mental health has improved. Because of the responsibility I had in the shelter house today I felt more self-confident." (Belgium)

"They taught us many things, also German. It was good for me to stay there." (Germany)

"The first year it was hard to take care of everything all of a sudden -doing the laundry, cleaning my house, going to classes. It wasn't easy and I had to figure out how to do everything on my own. But I learned a lot in the shelter house about chores and responsibilities." (Belgium)

"With all I've been through, if I hadn't had the shelter, I don't know where I would be now. I learned how to organize my time and set a schedule for myself" (Spain)

Some clients say that once in their apartment they found out they needed a lot of support for paying bills, applying for utility services, communicating with the landlord, requesting intervention for repairs and maintenance, etc.

Given the complexity of some administrative matters, clients need to become familiar with tasks like reading the gas, electricity or water meter, rental and utility contractual obligations, invoices and payments, use of public health care services, installing devices like internet routers and TV decoders, recycling, paying service tax on waste disposal, etc. As some procedures can be very complicated, even for locals, the best way to deal with them is to ask for help. It can be helpful to refer clients to any customer support service or help desk, including those offering advice on lease and tenant's rights, consumer protection, etc.

"First of all, finding a home was very difficult. It worked out in the end thanks to a social worker who helped me. Also, finding and buying furniture was a challenge (...) The housing assistant explained a lot of things to me in a way I could understand" (Belgium)

#### **Economic inclusion**

#### Job search

Receiving assistance finding a job is one of the main needs voiced by clients inside and outside the shelter. The emphasis put on work is not only due to financial motivations. Men stressed the need to have something that keeps themselves busy, a reason to go outside, meet people, feel independent, be a part of the society and feel better about themselves.

"To me, the most important thing to be able to live on my own is to have a steady job, which allows me to rent a flat and pay the rent every month." (Spain)



Social workers reported that sometimes young women see different paths to social inclusion. Getting married and having children can become the desired goal of young African women who, in light of the failed migration project, want to invest in a family -where it is safe to do so. Other clients use the support offered to attend training courses or vocational training or they take advantage of possible short-term jobs to gain experience and earn some money. Social workers put the stress on the importance of discussing the concept of independence, especially in economic terms, as a way to protect oneself from the risk of falling into dangerous power dynamics.

The opportunities for economic inclusion depend to a large extent on the welfare support system in place in the host country. In this context, the path to economic inclusion must address the vulnerabilities of the target group and create realistic opportunities for job placement.

In the area of economic integration, just like the psycho-socio-cultural dimension, clients will gradually learn about the host country. Attention must be paid to helping them become aware of their abilities and gaps, a fundamental process that must be supported by trained professionals to avoid failure and re-victimization. According to the social workers, the main barriers to economic inclusion are:

- Low-skilled profiles. Most victims of human trafficking are poorly educated and lack the qualifications needed to easily integrate in the EU job market.
- Recognition of educational and professional qualifications. Clients with significant educational or work experience cannot reap the benefits of their prior learning if their qualifications and degrees are not validated in the host countries.
   Recognition is particularly challenging when learning has occurred outside formal education pathways or when people do not carry proof of their qualifications.
- Access to information. Due to cultural, educational, or psychological factors, victims can have trouble accessing information about job opportunities.
   Without an understanding of the legal channels of employment, of labor rights and the difference between legal and illegal employment, they are exposed to exploitation, especially when they accept job offers through unreliable people.

- Employment agencies. In some instances employment agencies, whether private or public, may not be equipped to work with vulnerable groups or migrants with poor language skills.
- Discrimination. Job-seekers with names perceived as sounding 'immigrant' often have to submit twice as many applications as people with similar qualifications but with a name that sounds 'native'. There is an emerging trend for businesses to diversify their workforce and tackle discrimination through voluntary diversity measures. This model fulfills both economic and social objectives by increasing opportunities for underrepresented groups and, in particular, people with a migrant background.

"I actually needed somebody to help me look for a job or internship. It's really challenging when you move out of the shelter because it's hard for people like me to start a new life, find a job, etc. When I say people like me I mean people who are in Belgium because of human trafficking. They don't know how to go out and start looking for a job. We can't use the diploma from our home country."
(Belgium)

To avoid long- term unemployment or underpaid jobs and enhance access to the labor market, social workers shall identify talents and skills as early as possible, from the very first stage of the support program, as is compatible with the person's condition and recovery path. Most immigrants work, but their potential is often undervalued.

There is much support services can do to recognize and value the skills immigrants bring with them:

- Direct clients to competent authorities for the recognition of prior learning for accessing regulated professions. (4) Put clients in contact with employers and help them gain early work experience.
- Ensure clients benefit from inclusive labor market policies, including wage subsidies.
- Identify and remove barriers to employment in the public sector.

#### Unemployment and job search assistance

Assistance must be aimed at increasing chances of successful job placement, with clients' agency and participation, so as to allow them to become familiar with structures, rules and options available.



A realistic customized job inclusion plan is one that considers:

- Realistic options. Sustainable employment is more likely to be attained if the person has the right skills, abilities, and experience for the job. Job opportunities shall be evaluated against criteria such as mobility, transportation, family support, child management, etc. Unbalanced tradeoffs may take a significant toll on workers' well being, satisfaction and self-esteem.
- Job matching. the plan must match the demands of the local labour market.
- The client's expectations. The plan shall explore what type of jobs are within the

client's reach, based on their background and preferences, and the remuneration they can expect. This exercise helps prepare the person to the idea that one day they will have to manage their income, a responsibility that entails also learning new skills. The case manager can give insight of the job sectors that the client could explore and introduce some basic notions of labor law and rights. Certain differences must be explained in advance to avoid situations where the person may, for example, unaware of the legal requirements, start a small business in retail or as hairdresser in the informal economy, just like they would do in their home country.

As part of the economic inclusion plan, several activities can be promoted:

- · Skills building. Clients can be encouraged to find opportunities to practice basic or soft skills, for example, through volunteering, non-certification programs, workshops, etc. These can be the ideal setting to practice important skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, planning, prioritizing, and task management. Clients might feel more comfortable stretching their wings at work once they've honed these skills in a non-professional setting first. Case mangers shall give them a chance to talk about things they find difficult or frustrating and help them overcome their challenges.
- Guidance. Offer guidance on job search, curriculum writing, interviewing, etc.
- Vocational and professional training.
   Consider possible educational and professional training classes, vocational training and other workshops.

(4) UNESDOC. (2018) What a waste: ensure migrants and refugees' qualifications and prior learning are recognized.

• Work experience. Look for internship opportunities.

Some victims support organizations in Europe have created networks that bring together prospective employers and professional organisations to foster the economic inclusion of vulnerable categories of third-country nationals.(5)

## Getting acquainted with labor laws and workers' rights

The clients with a job, either inside or outside the shelter, said they would like to learn more about labor standards and laws and contractual terms related to sick leave, benefits, workers' rights, parental leave, allowances, understanding the pay check, income tax, unemployment benefits, retirement, etc.

"Even though I know how the Belgium system works, sometimes I need support with administrative procedures: for example to understand my rights concerning unemployment, pension, leave, etc." (Belgium)

Case managers stress the importance of raising awareness about labor rights and obligations to encourage clients seek fair work conditions and avoid grey zones of employment that may lead to exploitation.

"I would like you to help me be professional at work and to learn important things like how to organize my schedule. I also want help with the paperwork for me and the baby. I would like to have somebody that I can contact to ask for help." (Belgium)

#### Time management

According to some clients, the time management habits they learned while in the shelter turned out to be very helpful later in their integration process.

#### Mobility

Mobility as a need emerged especially among workers, with variations depending on individual degrees of autonomy achieved and the characteristics of the territory. Clients need support to learn how to use public transport and how to read maps or use web mapping apps, learn to ride a bicycle (or ride safely), get a driving license and understand the paperwork involved in buying and owing a car.



"It was hard to find my way to appointments, for example to go to school, to the social services, to the doctor, etc. The social workers explained to me how to use google maps. Once one of the social workers took me to explore my neighborhood, the area around the shelter, around her office. We went by bike. It was really nice.' (Belgium)

"When my subscription for public transport expired I had to ask for help to renew it" (Belgium)

"I feel very small. You need to have patience with me. I don't know what people are expecting from me. I want my job tutor to help me explain to my boss that he has to talk to me gently, or I won't understand. If he yells at me or tells me off, I shut down." (Italy)

(5) There are several initiatives at EU level to encourage diversity in the workforce through the economic inclusion of migrants. For example, <u>Diversity in the Economy</u> <u>and Local Integration</u>, a joint programme by the European Union and the Council of Europe.

## Financial assistance, financial independence and money management

Managing one's personal finances and staying within a budget takes a great deal of self-discipline. Supporting clients in accessing subsidies and managing their income fosters their economic empowerment and reduces risks of incurring into debt and making choices that may lead to re-victimization.

"I have received a lot of advice on how I can make ends meet with little money" (Belgium).

"I need to save money to open my own small shop, selling fish or vegetables. I want to be my own boss" (Germany)

Clients that have ill-paid or unstable jobs, or are not entitled to social security allowances need to be equipped with the skills to make the most out of their income. Many clients do not have a clear understanding of the purchasing power of the Euro and consequently they don't have a solid grasp of exactly how much they earn, they spend and how. They may get into trouble for not being able to buy food at the end of the month or to pay the bills and for going into debt. Clients must be prepared to manage their finances to cope with high rental costs and several other expenses they may need to cover such as bills, taxes, fines, deposits, healthcare, childcare and tuition etc.

Many clients send remittances to their families, irrespective of their financial situation. Clients often struggle to open a bank account and use online bank applications properly. When they don't understand how to use these tools, they forgo the service altogether.

"Before I moved out, I had saved enough money to cover the rent guarantee. Everything was in line with the plan I prepared with my case manager." (Belgium)

#### Child-care and family welfare

A common concern to all pregnant women and mothers is to learn the basics of primary care and fulfill their parental responsibilities. They have questions about enrolling their children in daycare, nurseries, kindergartens and schools, and about applying for parental subsidies, especially for single mothers. It is important to help young mothers bond with their children, as the emotional attachment can be sometimes compromised by their past experience of violence and abuse.

Patterns of parenting cognitions of African migrant mothers appear to reflect traditional cultural beliefs about children and parenting. Support in child development and parenting must incorporate a multi-cultural perspective encouraging behaviors that foster healthy pregnancies and children's health, physical, and cognitive growth.(5) For example, the frequency of doctor's appointments may be a source of anxiety for women who are used to see health care as sick care, and the role of case managers is to explain to pregnant women that prenatal care involves several medical checkups and screening tests to keep them and their baby healthy during pregnancy.

Advice can be also offered on staying healthy during pregnancy (diet, physical activity, avoiding risk behaviors, etc), on mother-infant interaction, breastfeeding, infant sleep and co-sleeping, introducing solids, nurturing, language, and didactic behavior including physical punishment.

"I asked my case manager to help me choose the best education for my daughter." (Germany)

(5) Child Development and parenting in a multi-cultural perspective, US Department of Health and Human Services, 2014. Often, young women find themselves alone in the host country, and they lack the family or social network that is so important to juggle family and work responsibilities and meet the challenges of raising a child.

"I need to know what the baby needs so I can take good care of him. I need help to prepare for motherhood and to move out." (Belgium)

"I wake up so early to take my baby to the nursery and then I take the bus to go to the cafe where I work. After work I've got to rush back to the nursery and we walk home. I am very stressed. I don't have time for myself. I feel overwhelmed. Everyone is complaining because I am always late" (Italy)

Mothers need help especially with daycare, health care and education for their children. Social workers do their best to find placement in daycare and other childcare options for the children of working mothers. At the same time, they help women understand that there is nothing wrong with seeking help on parenting and care giving, that their feeling overwhelmed by motherhood, unprepared, constantly tired and stressed out is common to many women. When they are not supported, their feelings can result in exhaustion, with a strong sense of loss and loneliness.



"It was the first time I lived alone with my baby, I had nobody to talk to and I felt lonely. The first few weeks were really hard for me." (Belgium)

"I used to live on my own before, in another region. But there I had friends helping with my child. Now I don't know who will stay with my son when I am at work." (Spain)

"I need support taking care of my baby and finishing school. I need someone who can explain to me how to apply for a residence permit." (Germany)

Family reunification, economic support, conflict resolution and domestic violence are also common family-related issues amongst trafficking survivors. For all these problems, clients are referred to specialized services.

### Clients with "no needs"

Asked about their needs to reach autonomy and self-reliance, several women answered that they did not need anything, or that they only need "a house" or "a job". This is not uncommon for VoTs, as very often victims of human trafficking and exploitation lack self-awareness, because of the subjugation endured.

The interviews showed how, in general, level of instruction, age and job experience seem to be positively correlated to increased awareness of a person's needs in a wide range of areas. In particular, older clients, who are usually better educated and employed, seem to be able to identify a larger number of needs as opposed to younger clients, with no job experience or little education.

Clients inside the shelter have a harder time to define their needs than clients outside the shelter. The exposure to an unfamiliar social system, combined with a low level of education, makes it quite impossible for a third-country national to anticipate what needs he or she might have in real life without any first-hand experience of what it means to live on their own.

It is not infrequent for female victims to exhibit low self-esteem and to have a tendency to underestimate their needs, abilities and strengths. They must gain knowledge and skills in order to live a self-reliant life. One of the keys to facilitate social inclusion and foster independence is precisely to help clients identify their needs, recognize their abilities or skills while building new ones.

"I don't need anything. If I need help, I'll call my case manager." (Germany)

When there is no awareness of one's needs, the person becomes prone to relying on the caregiver and reiterating the addiction patterns experienced in captivity. As they rely entirely on the service providers, victims restrict their decision-making and indiscriminately accept any service they are offered. Operational tools like the "individual life plan" can be used to avoid these pitfalls that ultimately compromise long-term integration. Social workers must find a balance between providing assistance and empowering the client to make informed decisions and take action. This process of gaining awareness of their own needs and seek ways to enhance their skills can take a long time and requires adequate support.

"I attended group meetings with a psychologist, they were useful to learn how to improve social interactions. Now when I need help, I know how to ask for it." (Italy)

Other possible factors affecting the client's ability to take charge are associated with the psychological consequences of trafficking victimization and abuse, such as low self-esteem, apathy, hopelessness, idleness, inability to reach out for help, ascribing success to factors beyond one's control, such as luck or God.

### conclusions

Short-term assistance is generally insufficient to support the social and economic inclusion of victims of human trafficking. When transitioning to independent living, very specific needs emerge, and a lack of ad hoc long-term support may not only compromise the person's life plan in his or her journey to self-reliance, but also recreate dangerous dynamics leading to re-victimization.

When victims leave the shelter, they try to move on with their lives and cope with multiple tasks. Services providers must ensure that clients have the tools to make informed decisions, have access to their fundamental rights and can take advantage of the opportunities and resources necessary to fully participate in their host community, socially and economically, with acceptable living standards.

Social workers shall guide clients on their path towards independence. They shall encourage them to make choices for themselves, cultivate emotional stability and overcome the barriers to inclusion, while enhancing safety, avoiding re-victimization, and mitigating risks of social stigmatization.

The present research has highlighter 10 areas where clients seem to require more support and the corresponding sets of skill needs:

#### Social life

Self-awareness
Understanding of the new cultural context
Knowledge of the national laws and
mainstream services
Overcoming victimhood
Feeling part of a social context
Self-advocacy and assertiveness
Establishing long-term relationships

#### Mental health and well being

Understanding of the role of psychologists and other practitioners and the benefits of therapy
Self-awareness
Self-advocacy
Self-confidence
Knowledge about physical, mental and emotional well-being
Adopting healthy routines and habits

# Language

Being aware of one's language skills
Self-motivation to learn a new language
Knowledge of services available
Knowledge of the existence of cultural
mediation services
Communication skills

### Safety and security

Recognizing safety and security risks

Knowledge of emergency numbers

Ability to safeguard own privacy

Understanding the dangers connected to social networking

Getting acquainted with laws in the host country

Feeling responsible for the own data

5

## Public services and administration

Knowledge of public administration and services

Digital access and ability to use digital services

Using the internet to navigate public services and PA

#### Housing -search

Knowledge of channels and modalities of house search
Understanding of the local real estate market
Familiarity with rules applying to rental

## Housing- household management

Handling utilities and bills

Communicating with service providers for setting-up and managing utilities

Consuming responsibly and recycling

Understanding the consequences of nonpayments

Accessing social benefits

8

## Financial assistance and money management

Budgeting income and expenses

Being aware of cost of living

in the host country

Searching for affordable and
decent accommodation

Reducing expenses and increasing
savings

Managing a bank account

#### **Economic inclusion**

Reconciling past goals with a new realistic
life plan

Getting familiar with the new cultural and
economic context

Time and mobility management

Awareness of one's skills with reference to
the requirements of the local job market
Searching for a job

Familiarity with workers' rights and
obligations

#### Child care and family welfare

Guidance on maintaining a healthy
pregnancy

Learning the basics of primary care and
child development

Managing the mental load of motherhood
Reaching out for phychological support
Seeking financial assistance
Finding daycare options

Juggling family and work responsibilities

In the transition phase to independent living, clients need to build on the skills they have learned in the care facilities to create the building blocks to a new life:

- Not to be afraid to rely on the support offered by professionals when facing new challenges;
- See anxiety, fear and frustration not as setbacks but as normal reactions to a major adjustment, and not to refrain from seeking help;
- Taking personal safety measures;
- Maintain reasonable standards of living;
- Practice self-care for mental and physical wellness;
- Seek opportunities for personal, social, and economic growth.

Long-terms assistance is key to increased security and stability, a precondition to achieving thorough and lasting recovery and a fundamental right for every victim of human trafficking.





"A world I can trust" has been published within the framework of the EU-funded project "Life Beyond the Shelter". The project is designed to ensure positive long-term integration for third-country national victims of trafficking in the host society by reinforcing support in the transition from shelter life to independence.

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