

# Trafficking for sexual exploitation of Romanian women. A qualitative research in Romania, Italy and Spain



Gender Interventions for the Rights and Liberties of Women and Girls Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation



Co-funded by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union

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# 1. Brief introduction on the methodological aspects of the research

## 1.1 Context of the research

The current research was conducted in the context of the **GIRL – Gender Interventions for the Rights and Liberties of Women and Girls Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation** project, implemented from 2014 to 2016 and co-funded by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union.

**GIRL** is implemented by a partnership composed of organizations from **Romania** (CPE – Center for Partnership and Equality and ADPARE – Association for the Development of Alternative Reintegration and Education Practices), **Italy** (Cultura Lavoro, Expert for Europe) and **Spain** (Fundació SURT); the project aims at raising awareness of and integrating the gender perspective in activities related to fighting trafficking for sexual exploitation (prevention, identification, investigation) and providing support for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (assistance, protection of rights and social reintegration). The **specific objectives** of the project are:

1. To evaluate the extent in which the gender dimension, vulnerabilities and inequalities influence trafficking for sexual exploitation and the efficiency of prevention, support, rights recovery and social reintegration of victims at the level of all project partner countries.
2. To develop awareness and working skills of 270 professionals (social assistants and psychologists, teachers and school counsellors, cultural and social mediators, prevention actors) from all partner countries working in the field of trafficking and related fields in understanding and integrating gender issues in the process of identification, prevention, investigation, assistance, protection of rights and social reintegration of victims of trafficking.
3. To develop an extensive trafficking prevention campaign, adapted and implemented in each of the partner countries, that will raise awareness of the gender vulnerabilities and inequalities linked to trafficking for sexual exploitation, will build stronger communities that can protect women and girls from trafficking and will target demand for services provided by victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The interviewers and authors of the research report were, as follows: Livia Aninoanu, László Éva and Gina Stoian (Romania), Marcello D'Amico (Italy) and Laura Sales Gutiérrez, Núria Francolí i Sanglas and Mar Camarasa i Casals (Spain).

## 1.2 Research aim and objectives

The aim of the study is to evaluate the extent in which the gender dimension, vulnerabilities and inequalities influence trafficking for sexual exploitation and the efficiency of prevention, support, rights recovery and social reintegration of victims at the level of all project partner countries.

The **objectives** of the study are, as follows:

- To provide new and specific knowledge regarding the main gender-related vulnerability factors that increase the risk for young Romanian girls, adolescents and young women to become victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation;

- To achieve a deep understanding of how gender-related vulnerability factors impact all phases of trafficking, from recruitment to exploitation and exiting the trafficking situation;
- To provide information and recommendations that could be helpful for specialists from Romania and destination countries in their prevention, identification, investigation, psychosocial or juridical assistance or in support activities that help reintegrate the victims into the labour market.

### 1.3 Research participants

Research participants in these qualitative studies are, on the one hand, **professionals** from state institutions and NGOs who come in direct contact with victims (for example, case managers, psychologist, psychotherapists, social assistants and educators, centre coordinators, attorneys, police and organized crime representatives, actors involved in prevention activities etc.) while having a mandate, mission or well-defined role in the process of investigation, in providing general or specialized assistance services for victims and/or prevention activities. On the other hand, the other research participants group is composed of **Romanian women survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation**, who are also beneficiaries of programs involving assistance and support for victims of trafficking.

No special additional requirements were applied in the selection of professionals to be interviewed. However, in the case of women survivors, the following mandatory conditions were imposed in the implementation of the research, in addition to other requirements to be further described in the *Ethics and special requirements* section:

- the interviewees will only be adult women, who reached the age of 18 years old;
- the interviewees have had previously benefited from a form of assistance or are currently receiving assistance from a public and/or private organization.

### 1.4 Methodology and research instruments

The research was simultaneously and independently conducted in the three countries of the project, Romania (by CPE – Center for Partnership and Equality, with support from ADPARE), Italy (by Expert for Europe) and Spain (by Fundació SURT), based on the use of common methodology and research instruments, which were previously developed by the multi-country research team and similarly applied in the three countries. Each research team is responsible for the realization and contents of their specific country report.

In each country, the research participants were contacted by the responsible partner. The professionals were invited to take part in the interview through a formal letter describing the GIRL project, the purpose and methodology of the research, as well as the research instruments. The women survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation had been contacted through the partner institutions and organizations of CPE – Center for Partnership and Equality and Fundació SURT.

In the case of professionals, semi-structured, face-to-face, guide-based interviews were organized and carried out by the interview operator. The interview guide was elaborated by the multi-country research team from Romania, Italy and Spain and was structured around the following areas of investigation:

- Professionals' characteristics and backgrounds
- Changes in the dynamics of the phenomenon
- Survivors' characteristics/potential vulnerabilities: personal and family-related characteristics and backgrounds
- Main recruitment patterns for victims of sexual exploitation
- Main exploitation patterns for victims of sexual exploitation
- Main gender-related vulnerabilities for victims of sexual exploitation

- Main reintegration patterns for victims of sexual exploitation
- Most important initiatives of prevention, identification and support

In the case of women survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation, the method used was a semi-structured, in-depth interview, conducted face to face and based on an interview guide, elaborated by the aforementioned research team. The interview guide was centred on the following themes:

- Current situation
- Personal and family background, family relations;
- Gender roles and expectations
- Social background and social relations
- The trafficking history: recruitment, exploitation, exiting
- Characteristics of the buyers
- Consequences of trafficking
- Plans for the future

The research was implemented in 2015 and the following interviews were conducted in each country:

#### Romania:

- *17 interviews with professionals* from a) local or national state institutions (10) and b) NGOs (7) from different regions of the country: South/Bucharest-Ilfov region (Bucharest), North-West region (Oradea and Cluj) and West region (Timi oara)
- *14 interviews with Romanian women survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation.*

#### Spain:

- *18 interviews with professionals* (service providers for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation from the public and private system) from different regions of the country (Barcelona, Valencia, Gijón, Granada, Santiago de Compostela, Madrid and Ourense)
- *7 interviews with Romanian women survivors of trafficking who were sexually exploited in Spain.*

#### Italy:

- *15 interviews with professionals* (service providers for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation from non-governmental organizations) from different regions of the country (Lombardia, Lazio, Campania, Puglia)

No interviews were conducted with Romanian women survivors of trafficking who were sexually exploited in Italy (details regarding the current challenges in Italy to be explored in the Italian research report).

The interviews lasted between 40 and 120 minutes.

## 1.5 Ethics and special requirements

The protection of research participants and the information they provided, as well as the ethical issues of the research were very important for the project team during the research implementation. In order to ensure the protection and security of the survivors participating in the research and to preserve the ethical principles of the research, the following measures were implemented:

**A.** Establishing mandatory conditions in relation to the Romanian women participating in the interviews, who were subjected to trafficking for sexual exploitation, respectively:

- limiting women survivor participants to the interviews to women **over 18 years old**. For multiple considerations, this condition was set up among the research limitations, ranging from the under-age/minority status of the person and the additional potential risks associated with this, to the minor persons needing, according to the legal framework, a signed informed consent form from the parents/legal guardian, which would disclose her victimization status and have the potential to put the person at risk
- organizing the interview in a **safe environment**, with respect for privacy and confidentiality, which does not have the potential to compromise, in any way, the security of the interviewee. The spaces that were mainly preferred were those that the interviewees were already familiar with and they have used before (for instance, the counseling rooms in the non-governmental organizations where they have previously received psychological counseling services).
- ensuring that the interviewees are **women who have previously benefited from a form of assistance**, in order to ensure the fact that the interviewees are not asked direct questions at a time when they are not emotionally or psychologically prepared or able to answer, in this way potentially exposing them to a negative emotional response, to triggering traumatic consequences and/or to negatively impact their healing process and feelings of trust, safety and security; having the time and context to process the trauma would be important for them in order to be ready to participate in such a research activity
- during the interview, the most important aspect taken into consideration was to create, for the interviewee, **the feeling of control over the interviewing experience**. Prior to registering the interview, the interviewer had to directly communicate this fact to the interviewee, by stating that they can take as much time as they need to answer a question, that can they require to stop and take some additional time before restarting, that they can decide to not carry on with the interview at any given time, that they can decide to not respond to one or more questions, if they do not feel like or if they find any of the questions particularly disturbing or upsetting or that, at the end of the interview, they can decide that they do not want their interview to be used in the research and request that the audio file is deleted right away, in their presence. In order for the interviewees to be able to follow the activity, receive the research report, request more information or make further decision with regard to the interview, the interviewee also received the contact data of the interviewer, for further communications
- the interviewees read, discussed with the interviewer and signed an **informed consent form**, that made sure they understand the scope and the objectives of the research, the context in which their interview is used, what will further happen with the audio file, how the project team will maintain the confidentiality, as well as them having control over the interviewing experience and deciding when and how to proceed. The informed content form also included the personal contact data of the interviewer, as well as the contact data of a support person they could have access to in the case of feeling that the interview had a negative physical, emotional or psychological impact and they need further help.

**B.** Establishing mandatory conditions in relation to the interviewers, respectively:

- the interviewer had to have **expertise in working with and interviewing women from vulnerable groups** or who found themselves in different situations of difficulty and/or vulnerability. This con-

dition was included in order for the interviewer to be able and have the necessary knowledge to understand the potential consequences of an improper interview for the victim, to have the skills to understand the potential moments of difficulty and the capacity to decide if there is a need for the interview to be stopped right away, to take breaks, to be able to contain the traumatic experience that is presented to her, to have a deep understanding of the phenomenon, which would diminish the risk of the interviewer making stereotypical remarks or, verbally or non-verbally send out harmful messages, to refrain from asking intrusive or inappropriate questions, that would place the interviewee in an uncomfortable and/or difficult position etc.

- the interviewer had to be prepared to **recognize if there is a high physical, emotional or psychological impact on the interviewee**, resulted from the interview experience, and to be able to refer the interviewee to other professionals for subsequent support, if needed. The possibility of receiving further support was discussed with the interviewee prior to starting the interview; the informed consent form also included information with regard to the person who could further represent a support point (name of the person).

### C. Establishing mandatory conditions in relation to the protection of data, respectively:

- having **consultations with organizations that provide direct services to victims of trafficking**, in order to ensure the project team of researchers fully understands the protection and confidentiality needs and that the suggestions of these organisations are included in the policy and research protocol and are followed throughout the project
- having the research participants sign the **informed consent form** (only with their initials to protect their identity) and including also the signed declaration of the interviewer that she takes upon herself to respect the identity of the victim and not disclose it under any circumstances
- keeping the informed consent forms filled in by the interviewees in a physical file, complying with the security requirements of the Protection Law currently in force in Romania and Spain, which is closed and does not allow access to anyone
- keeping all the audio files of the interviews, as well as the Word transcripts protected with a password which is only available to the research team and will not be disclosed to anyone else, under any circumstances
- not including, in the research report and under no other circumstances, any identification data of the victims which could compromise their confidentiality and endanger them in any way

## 1.6 Research limitations and novelty

One of the important limitations of the research is given by the fact that the number of respondents from both categories (professionals and survivors) is limited; also, due to the conditions imposed in the research methodology, no survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation who did not benefit from any form of services/assistance were involved, their views not being reflected in the research report. Closely observing ethical rules in the case of research participants who went through difficult or victimizing life experiences and ensuring the interview would not produce emotional harm to the respondents implies a significant effort to be made by the researchers in the preparation and implementation of the research, one of the consequences being that it can conflict with a larger number of interviewees. However, we consider that under these exact circumstances, the data obtained would reach a greater level of accuracy.

The novelty of the research resides in the use of common methodologies and areas of investigation for all three countries, which provided the opportunity to compare the perspectives from one origin and two destination countries, as well as significant ground for the further development of the project (data from the research represented the foundation of the trainings for professionals implemented in the three countries, as well as for the prevention campaigns developed in Romania, Italy and Spain). Having the

gender perspective at the centre of the research initiative also is an element of novelty in the landscape of other studies developed in the field.

## 1.7 Research report structure

This research report contains three distinctive parts, representing the three national reports (Romanian, Italian and Spanish), constituted on the same structure.

Each national report contains a short introduction regarding the situation of human trafficking for sexual exploitation from the viewpoint of the national legislative provisions and approaches, of the social policies and of the available statistical data. These are followed by the analysis of the major changes identified by the respondents of the research and the factors that lead to an increase in girls' and women's level of exposure to trafficking, as well as the factors that favour the human trafficking phenomenon. The outline of the present characteristics of recruitment, exploitation and escape is completed with the analysis of gender aspects. Each report also contains an attempt to identify the most vulnerable groups and to describe the solicitors of sexual services.

The reports also provide the opinions of professionals and survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation participating in the research regarding the efforts made in the field of prevention and intervention, as well as the needs and challenges that occurred in relation to the changes in the human trafficking phenomenon within Romania, as well as in the destination countries participating in the research, Italy and Spain.

**The research team is deeply grateful to all the participants in the research for their contributions, both professionals and organisations participating in interviews or facilitating information and contacts, and especially women survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation, for sharing their stories for the purpose of this research. We hope that the research results can contribute to improve our understanding of the trafficking of Romanian women into Romania, Italy and Spain and improve prevention and intervention strategies from a gender perspective.**

# 2. National research reports: Romania

## 2.1 Overview of the current situation concerning trafficking for sexual exploitation in Romania

Since the early 90s, Romania is mainly a country of origin for human trafficking to other European countries. After the Romanian revolution, that took place in 1989, some characteristics of the country, such as its geographical position (in between Asia and Western Europe), in the proximity of trafficking routes, as well as characteristics of the Romanian society (large number of groups exposed to social risks, failure of social policies to support vulnerable populations, in the context of opening borders and facilitating migration to Western countries) favored the development of trafficking (Anino anu, 2012, ANITP 2007, Fle ner, 2010, etc.).

The first structural reactions to the phenomenon, in a systematic and targeted manner, started at the end of the 90s and during early 2000s, through the support of international organizations such as IOM (International Organization for Migration) and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). Non-governmental organizations already active in the field of providing protection and services for victims of violence developed specialized services for victims of human trafficking. A significant moment in anti-trafficking movement is marked by the creation of special anti-crime structures, such as The Directorate of Combating Human Trafficking, Anti-Drug Organization and Crime Investigation Directorate of Organized Crime (founded in 2004); another very important initiative is the creation of National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (NAATP), in 2006. (Aninoşanu and colab., 2012). The Agency, which coordinates 15 regional centers, has the mandate to coordinate, evaluate and monitor the way in which institutions implement anti-trafficking policies, as well as the policies and activities regarding the protection and assistance provided to victims of trafficking in Romania (<http://www.anitp.mai.gov.ro>).

Romania is currently acknowledged at international level mainly as a country of origin for victims of trafficking, and, at a much lesser extent, as destination country for a small number of third country nationals (16 foreign victims identified in Romania between 2009 and 2013, Constatinoiu and colab. 2015, 2 victims identified in Romania in 2015, from the Republic of Moldova and Greece, NAATP, 2016).

### Definition of concepts and legal framework

The national anti-trafficking legal framework is aligned to the trans-national response against this specific crime, transposing the existing international core legislative tools. It is quite comprehensive and takes into account all types of exploitation, containing specific provisions regarding the trafficking of adults and the trafficking of children/underage persons, as well as regulations concerning the prevention and combating of trafficking in human beings, victims' rights to protection and assistance etc. (Law 678/2011 with later modifications).

The definitions provided below have been extracted from the main Romanian anti-trafficking law (Law 678/2011), with its modifications and completions. In addition, in February 2014, an updated Criminal Code has entered into force, proposing changes of vision with potential to impact on the interpretation of the already existing definitions, as follows:

- the abuse of the position of vulnerability has been given great importance in qualifying trafficking in persons as an offence;
- victims' consent will not be statutory for qualifying the offence;
- considering prostitution as a less aggravated offence, in the sense that it will be qualified as misdemeanour and the person performing it will be fined;
- pandering remaining a crime and will be punished with imprisonment between 2 to 7 years;

- clients of persons practicing prostitution will not be criminalized versus clients who use the services of persons who are exploited and who will be criminalized with a fine or with imprisonment.

The specific contents of the new articles in the Criminal Code (article 210 and article 211) are, as follows:

### **Trafficking in human beings means:**

(1) *Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons for exploitation purposes:*

a) *by means of coercion, abduction, deception, or abuse of authority;*

b) *by taking advantage of the inability of a person to defend themselves or to express their will or of their blatant state of vulnerability;*

c) *by offering, giving and receiving payments or other benefits in exchange for the consent of an individual having authority over such person,*

*shall be punishable by no less than 3 and no more than 10 years of imprisonment and a ban on the exercise of certain rights.*

(2) *Trafficking in human beings committed by a public servant in the exercise of their professional duties and prerogatives shall be punishable by no less than 5 and no more than 12 years of imprisonment.*

(3) *The consent expressed by an individual who is a victim of trafficking does not represent an acceptable defense. (Art. 210, Criminal Code)*

### **Trafficking in underage persons**

(1) *Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a juvenile for the purpose of their exploitation shall be punishable by no less than 3 and no more than 10 years of imprisonment and a ban on the exercise of certain rights.*

(2) *If such act was committed under the terms of Art. 210 par. (1) or by a public servant while in the exercise of their professional duties and prerogatives, it shall be punishable by no less than 5 and no more than 12 years of imprisonment and a ban on the exercise of certain rights.*

(3) *The consent expressed by an individual who is a victim of trafficking does not represent a acceptable defense. (Art. 211, Criminal Code)*

The two articles in the Criminal Code are completed by adding the definitions of exploitation and slavery, two other essential concepts required to describe the phenomenon.

### **Exploitation of a person**

*Exploitation of a person means:*

a) *forcing a person to carry out work or a task;*

b) *enslavement or other similar procedures to deprive of freedom or place in bondage;*

c) *forcing persons into prostitution, pornography, in view of obtaining and distributing pornographic material or any other types of sexual exploitation;*

d) *forcing into mendicancy;*

e) *illegal collection of body organs, tissues or other cells. (Art. 182, Criminal Code)*

## Slavery

*Pressing or keeping an individual in a state of slavery, as well as the trafficking in slaves shall be punishable by no less than 3 and no more than 10 years of imprisonment and a ban on the exercise of certain rights. (Art. 209, Criminal Code)*

## Data and statistics

Romania continues to be mainly a country of origin for victims of trafficking in human beings. Over 6.000 Romanian victims were identified across Europe between 2010 and 2012, more than a half of them being identified in Romania (3.230 out of 6.101 victims), while the rest abroad, in other European countries, according to the Eurostat database (2013, 2015), which also includes the official data collected by the Romanian authorities.

At the EU level, most of the victims of trafficking identified are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation; their vast majority is composed of women and girls. According to the 2015 Eurostat report, 80% of the registered victims of trafficking are women (67%) and girls (13%). Most of them are trafficked for sexual exploitation (69%), 85% of the total numbers of women and girls being sexually exploited. 45% of the victims were 25 years old and over, 36% were between 18 and 24 years old, 17% were between 12 to 17 years old and 2% were between 0 and 11 years old. The majority of the registered victims in the EU come from Romania and Bulgaria and, in the reference period of the report (2010, 2011, 2012), a tendency for the number of underage victims to increase was reported. Over the three years, more than 70 % of suspected traffickers were male.

According to data provided by the Romanian authorities in charge, respectively by the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons, women and girls compose the majority of victims of trafficking of Romanian origin. The Romanian minor victims are present in high percentages, representing up to 40% of the victims of sexual exploitation (data reflected in reports of the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons from 2009 to 2015), these being much higher than in the case of the European average (14% of registered victims of sexual exploitation in Europe, EUROSTAT, 2015).

In 2012-2013, the percentage of the sexually exploited girl (55%) was higher than the one of the sexually exploited women (45%). In 2014, 74% of the total number of victims was represented by women and girls (62% over 18 years old and 38% under 18 years old) and 66% of the total number of victims was subjected to sexual exploitation. In 2015, an increase in the number of boys subjected to sexual exploitation is registered; however, women and girls continue to represent the majority of victims (66%). The highest age risk mentioned by the 2014 report reveals the 18 to 24 years old category for women and the 14 to 17 category for girls. During the same year, according to the national statistical reports released by the Agency, false promises and job offers abroad were the main methods used to recruit into trafficking, the majority of victims being recruited by a person they already knew (a friend, acquaintance, neighbor, family member, partner); many of them were subjected to multiple exploitation (sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced mendicancy). In 2015, the percentage of girls subjected to sexual exploitation amounted 31%, with the remaining risk age range (14 to 17 years old). New forms of exploitation emerged, such as the exploitation of identity, forced marriage and associated exploitation, exploitation for social benefits.

The data is also supported by the experiences of the Romanian professionals directly involved in working with victims of trafficking:

“ If we were to strictly refer to sexual exploitation, we can say that it is the prevalent phenomenon as regards the victims of trafficking in human beings. This has been the trend from the first place, and continues to be the preeminent trend.” (RO/P)

Additionally, according to *TRACE - Trafficking as a Criminal Enterprise* report (Constatinouiu and colab., 2015)<sup>1</sup> there is a special connection between the country where the exploitation is taking place and

<sup>1</sup> Constantinou, A., Georgiou, M., Hoff, S., Tamas, A., Petrescu, A., Lupaşcu I., Saykovska, M. (2015) Report on the relevant aspects of the trafficking act (geographical routes and modus operandi) and on its possible evolutions in response to law en-

the age of victims: the majority of Romanian minor girls are sexually exploited internally, in the country, while the majority of adult women are sexually exploited through transnational trafficking and the majority of adult men are exploited in transnational human trafficking (p. 17). Romanian female victims subjected to sexual exploitation were coerced into practicing both indoor and outdoor prostitution - in the streets, in apartments, brothels, hotels, in clubs, in private and public spaces (Costantinoiu, 2015, Anino anu, 2012).

Concerning the routes, the international trafficking in Romanian citizens takes place mainly in Western European countries, such as Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France and others. Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece and Cyprus are the top 5 destination countries (Eurostat, 2015, Constatinoiu and colab., 2015). While Italy, Spain and Germany seem to be destination countries for all forms of trafficking, the Czech Republic and Cyprus are mainly chosen for labour exploitation, France and Poland for forced begging and Austria and the Netherlands for sexual exploitation. When the victimization occurs in more countries, the beginning of the exploitation takes place in either neighbouring countries or along the route to the final destination. The transportation of victims is mainly done by land ways (Constatinoiu and colab., 2015).

As reported by the Romanian Prosecutor's Office - the Directorate for the Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIOCTO), the prosecuted traffickers are mainly Romanians and, based on the estimation of the Romanian Police, 75% of the trafficking investigations is related to trafficking for sexual exploitation (Constatinoiu and colab., 2015).

## 2.2 Additional methodological notes

The participants to the research were:

a) professionals coming in direct contact with victims (case managers, psychologists, social assistants, police and organized crime representatives etc.) from local and central authorities with a mandate in the field and non-governmental organizations with a mission in providing assistance to victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. This category gathered a total amount of 17 interviews out of which 10 were conducted with representatives of local, regional or national institutions and 7 with representatives of non-governmental organizations, providing psychological, legal and social assistance from Bucharest, Timisoara, Oradea and Cluj.

b) survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation. 14 interviews were conducted. All victims interviewed were beneficiaries of psycho-social and legal assistance programs or were being monitored as victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Their age ranged from 19 to 36 years old, with the lowest age at the moment of recruitment being 15 years old. Different areas of provenience were represented among the interviewees, from small, rural areas to small cities or large ones (Bucharest, the capital). Out of the total number of victims interviewed, 8 were unemployed and unregistered in an educational unit at the moment of the interview, 2 of them were continuing their education and 4 of them worked. In most cases, the recruiters were known to the victims prior to the trafficking experience, in the majority of the cases the relationship with the recruiter being a close relationship (family, boyfriends, friends). The countries of trafficking were Spain and Italy in most cases; however, in some of the situations the victims were initially exploited internally, in Romania, while in other cases the exploitation took place in multiple countries, involving, among others, Germany, the Netherlands, UK, Denmark, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland. The exploitation took place in different spaces: on the street, in clubs, in apartments, in centers providing erotic massage services. In some of the cases, there were multiple, repetitive exploitation phases, the longest period being 5 years, while the shortest being 3 weeks. The lowest level of education among the interviewees was graduation from middle school (8 grades), while several of them followed high-school or were, at the moment of the interview, enrolled in a university.

An anticipated benefit of this study was the collection of empirically-based knowledge to inform prevention education materials for at-risk youth and to elaborate promising/more effective prevention programs adapted to the changes occurring in trafficking process.

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forcement, [http://trace-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TRACE-D2.1\\_FINAL.pdf](http://trace-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TRACE-D2.1_FINAL.pdf)

In order to differentiate the quotes from interviews with professionals and from interviews with victims, particular codes were applied: RO/P stands for a Romanian professional, while RO/V stands for a Romanian victim.

## 2.3 Changes in the dynamics of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Most professionals interviewed reported that the phenomenon is increasingly spreading and in recent years the internal trafficking has increased, the percentages of national and international trafficking registering the tendency to be equalized.

“ I noticed a growth trend in the number of trafficking victims inside the country. Until 2010-2011, the prevalent phenomenon was trafficking abroad, because the demand was greater and it was more profitable. Lately however, I noticed a change of direction towards Romania, so now we have more cases in the country.” (RO/P)

Two specialists appreciated that the phenomenon is declining, especially due to informative and prevention activities within the country.

“ In certain years, the phenomenon declined, with mild fluctuations. The population is much more informed and aware of the phenomenon, compared to a few years ago. We have numerous campaigns throughout the country, as well as specific local and regional activities.” (RO/P)

The highest number of victims are still sexually exploited and the number of exploited women is still much higher than the number of the men (higher than the number of male victims of labor exploitation).

“ Cases involving boys are isolated, but we have had some. We even had a case with a transgender person.” (RO/P)

The experts indicated a constant decreasing tendency on the age of the sexually exploited victims, especially in the country, in internal trafficking.

“ Numbers have not increased, but age distribution is now wider. If I think about it, during the last year we have had mostly underage girls. (...) At least in our case, with the services we provide.” (RO/P)

“ However, most persons trafficked internally are underage (...) They come into the program when they are 14, so they were recruited before reaching that age.” (RO/P)

“ We believe that the prospect will stay... within the same parameters. Sexual exploitation will remain the main form of trafficking. We'll still talk about women and young girls being exploited. Unfortunately, even though measures are being taken in this respect, we'll see a decline in the age of sexually exploited victims.” (RO/P)

According to the experts, some changes occurred regarding the destination countries, which are currently the Netherlands, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Austria, Italy and Spain. However, several believe these changes are in fact determined by the improvement of the collaboration between organizations or institutions from the destination countries and Romanian organizations, the changes being also defined by the strategies of identifying the victims from the destination countries. Destination countries that successfully implemented identification strategies adapted to the changes of the phenomenon identified more victims. In other countries, statistics show a decline in the number of victims.

“ The countries of destination are no longer the same. This is the biggest change. More and more sexually exploited women and men who come to us are repatriated mainly from Nordic countries, such as Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway. Before this change, the main countries were Italy, Spain, Germany. (...) But I firmly believe that the trafficking route has not changed. I still believe that, as before, there are very many Romanian victims in Spain and Italy. However,

*these countries severely decreased their identification capabilities. On the other hand, I think that Nordic countries increased their victim identification capabilities” (RO/P)*

“ *Most victims come back to the country from The Netherlands and Germany. One possible explanation is that our organization has created new ties with these countries. The number of girls repatriated from these countries and referred to us has increased.” (RO/P)*

All respondents pointed to a change in the use of force by the recruiters. Instead of physical violence, recruiters use more subtle forms of constraint, which leave no traces for investigators.

“ *I noticed that physical force is not used that much anymore. The lover boy method is preferred. They mostly employ psychological methods to obtain the initial consent of the victim.” (RO/P)*

*This trend has been noticed for several years by those working in the field.*

“ *Recruitment has not changed. It is the same.” (RO/P)*

Both experts from the field of investigation and those from the field of assistance noticed the emergence of victims already involved in prostitution prior to being subjected trafficking, among underage girls as well as adult women.

“ *There are many victims who practiced prostitution before being trafficked, identifying themselves or being identified as THB victims.” (RO/P)*

“ *The victims are aware of the purpose, but don’t know the whole truth. Then, they find themselves in situations of slavery...Even though they know some things, they only know half the truth. They may know they will eat or drink with the clients, but not that they must have sexual intercourse with them.” (RO/P)*

“ *There are also cases when prostitutes from the country are recruited. The deal is that they’ll split the money, but they actually get nothing, they are constrained or locked inside, or prevented from contacting their families. They are threatened concerning the family and the safety of their children.” (RO/P)*

The legislative, informational and awareness reactions caused changes in the way traffickers are organized. Compared to large, hierarchical networks, with many individuals involved in execution (recruitment, transport, housing, control, exploitation), we are now seeing smaller networks, comprising several collaborators, or members of the same family.

“ *I also noticed a change in the way criminal groups operate. They no longer operate in large groups, but rather in small or even unstructured groups. That’s because sentences are more severe in the case of organized groups. (...) But there are also cases when the groups have the traditional structure, so we have recruiters, transporters, hosts and exploiters.” (RO/P)*

“ *They operate in a group, but the groups are small. They may be family members in a clan, or may operate in a structure that has fellow nationals in the countries of destination and recruiters in Romania” (RO/P)*

One expert describes the dynamics of the relationship between the traffickers’ methods of operation and the methods the justice system employs to fight trafficking:

“ *These changes were caused by the reaction of the state authorities and the adjustment of the sentences. Many cases were well documented and concluded with convictions.” (RO/P)*

“ *Traffickers found out the investigation methods and started changing the way they operate.” (RO/P)*

“ *Suddenly, when I got online, all the sites that provided paid sexual services had disappeared. Now, they’ve come back. But they found another way - ads with a catch. I discussed with legal experts and found out the sites found a way to operate.” (RO/P)*

A very important aspect regarding prevention strategies is the higher degree of awareness among girl victims as regards trafficking in human beings. In one of the organizations involved in the research, assessment of the information about the phenomenon is now a key to evaluating the risk of victims being re-trafficked.

“ (...) they knew about the possibility of being trafficked. So the level of awareness has significantly increased. They (the beneficiaries - author's note) had information from various channels (...), such as somebody from school. They also mention the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons or the police, they know about prevention, they watched the news, or read information in the papers and online.” (RO/P)

Romanian legislation also introduced sanctions for clients who purchase sexual services or services of any other type from victims of trafficking. However, these provisions are very rarely put into practice.

“ The interesting thing is that now the law has been adapted. We have a provision about sanctioning the clients, too, if they know that the respective person is exploited (...). This is another way to discourage trafficking.” (RO/P)

“ Yes, we had a case when the clients were accused. But they didn't go to court. Not yet.” (RO/P)

According to an interviewee, the relaxation of the law on sanctioning prostitution, and the change in its legal status from crime to offense, brings prostitution a higher degree of visibility, and causes the development of services that are more attractive to the clients.

“ If you read at the ads in the field, they look like this: Just came to Cluj, or something like that... Some even say which town they come from, or that they are luxury escorts, they go to the gym, so they charge more (...) You can find them online, there are a lot of ads, you find new ones almost daily, with real pictures. (...) Many of these girls go to hotels. Sure, the clients pay for it, but it is convenient, because they risk no exposure.” (RO/P)

“ The THB phenomenon has become more relaxed, it is no longer that aggressive. That's partly due to the decriminalization of prostitution. (...) I think people more easily agree to provide paid sexual services and do not see them as a form of THB for sexual exploitation. THB is now more resembling of the phenomenon of prostitution.” (RO/P)

The new technologies are increasingly used by the traffickers for the recruitment and control of victims, as well as for advertising their services. New technologies are now part of our daily lives, so it is no surprise that traffickers use them to increase their efficiency. There are more and more cases where victims were approached by recruiters on social networks before actually meeting in person. Some are even exploited or controlled from a distance.

“ I had a case with hundreds of girls that a man recruited, controlled and exploited from a distance. (...) He met very few of them in person. He got to know most of them on social networks. Soon after, they saw each other on webcam. (...) He got them to undress on camera, and then took pictures and made short movies with them. (...) He was good at IT and managed to control the girls through the computer. (...) He blackmailed them and told them he'd make the photos and movies public. For example, he forced one girl to show him how she was dressed for school in the morning. If he didn't like it, he forced her to change clothes.” (RO/P)

“ Some traffickers control their girls from a distance. They don't even have to live in the same town. (...) For example, they install microphones and/or cameras in the apartments. This way they know everything that happens there, and the girls cannot cheat about the money they make. He knows the deal with the buyers, the amount received, the services provided (...). Or they control them by phone. They have to leave their phone on after they go inside the room. (...) The equipment isn't on all the time, because that costs money too. But it is enough for a girl to know that she can be monitored anytime” (RO/P)

## 2.4 Characteristics of the phenomenon and vulnerability factors

### I. SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY FACTORS

In the analysis of the vulnerability factors at societal and community level, we identified three large categories: the category relating to economic factors, the one relating to the availability and efficiency of different types of services and the category resulting from the values, traditions and social attitudes in place.

**The economic factors** mainly reflect on poverty, lack of resources and opportunities, the social discounting of several types of work and the low wages associated, the many irregularities of the labor market, the cases of general discrimination and gender-related discrimination at work, issues connected to the work environment and work agreements etc.

**The services-related factors (educational, social, legal)** mainly regard the lack of adaptation and practicality of the educational system, the deficient policies of job training, the legislative deficiencies and inefficiency in the practice of bringing the traffickers to justice for the committed crimes and ensuring the rights, protection, information and assistance of the victims.

**The factors connected to values, traditions, attitudes** mainly underline gender discrimination, gender specific roles, stereotypical portrayals of women and girls, high levels of tolerance concerning violence against women and children and sexual violence etc.

#### A) The economic factors

**Poverty and lack of opportunities.** Many of the interviewees mention poverty, as well as lack of opportunities among the main vulnerability factors leading to trafficking in human beings. Survival in conditions that are below the subsistence level, the inability of creating a more positive context, that would allow decent living conditions, repeated experiences of labor market abuse and discrimination and the perception that the situation cannot be improved, all lead to the belief that working abroad could be an answer for a better life; this often results in taking high level risks; levels of desperation and hopelessness could raise to such high points that any offer is interpreted as an opportunity to improve the current state:

“ There are people who have not questioned this issue. Somebody came, he told them he is taking them to work, all will be fine, they will earn hundreds of euro and they left. And she wasn't even 12 years old, she was an adult. But she was living in conditions that made her think that it can only be better than this.” (RO/P)

The realities of poverty experienced by some of the victims of trafficking during their childhood and mentioned during the interviews as very traumatic and troubling life experiences for both themselves and their close family are picturing a context of profound suffering and highly diminished security, where there is no social network to rely on and no plausible solutions; the entire family is at risk and this is reflected in a worsening of the family relationships and especially in the aggravation of mental health conditions of those impacted by unemployment, for instance, as well as in the incapacity of the parents to properly care for their children becoming apparent, even if hard to understand by a little girl.

“ Yes, it was a very tough period. I was five then, and my brother was nine. But I saw everything as an adult. I saw fights for reasons I didn't know. At that age, I didn't understand everything, but still, I understood some of it. Yes, these things made me suffer quite a lot; they hurt me a lot, and still hurt when I think about them. I know that you should not be false, that you should be yourself, but you must find solutions. It was during Ceausescu's rule, those were different times. Yes, maybe there were no associations or places where people could go for help. I know that my father, when I was that age, used to go sell clothes from the house, or distribute fliers, so that we could buy a loaf of bread and share it among the four of us. Sometimes we'd just eat salt. Other times I felt sick because I had nothing to eat. I just sat and waited for food. All of this was because...my father had very big problems with his nerves. Now, he is more at peace, but he had very serious problems because of money. This also affected me. Most people who have children

*these days, when they realize they don't have money, they get very scared and make mistakes.”*  
(RO/V)

In the case of some women, being poor or having very limited resources also negatively reflected on their sense of belonging and identity forming, very important during teenage years. Being accepted, being like the others, defining yourself through your social interactions is a significant task for adolescents and, in this context, poverty can, in their perception, equalize rejection, marginalization and inferiority.

“ *In my opinion, money can make you lose your mind. For example, you see girls on the street and say “look, how pretty their clothes are”, they are different and you'd like to have what they have. The thing is, you want to live, that's why..”* (RO/V)

“ *I know what I was hoping at the time. I wanted to have beautiful clothes...I didn't want my family to be poor anymore; I wanted to have many pretty clothes, like the other girls. That's what I was thinking at the time...”* (RO/V)

“ *...My stepmother used to tell me all the time that she suspected what I was doing. She saw me wear new shoes and knew that my father didn't give me money – or gave me just enough for food when I went to school. So, when she saw me wearing something new, as if she had known what I was doing, she would tell me that this will never help, that God never helps whores.”*  
(RO/V)

“ *I didn't have a very happy childhood, as other kids did. I didn't have everything I wanted. I wanted to be better dressed.”* (RO/V)

**Finding a place of employment** is generally a problematic issue in Romania for anyone who wants to change their workplace or is unemployed and the profoundness of this problem increases exponentially with the lowering level of education of individuals. The interviewees describe experiences of being hired informally, without a legal working agreement, which deprives them of any social benefits or protection; legally and officially, they do not exist as workers.

“ *So, even today, I think of myself as a woman with bad luck. I don't know how to explain, I didn't have any luck. After my mother left, while I stayed with my grandma, I looked for a job; I got hired as a barista, without legal papers...I always had bad luck. But I worked, because I thought: “my poor father is working too”. When I got my salary, I spent it all for the house. These other two didn't work, even though they were older. But I always came and went, worked until late and night, and then the next day I'll leave for work again...”* (RO/V)

**Low wages**, great discrepancy between the earned income and the amounts necessary for a person, a family, for ensuring a decent livelihood constitutes another factor with an effect on vulnerability, even among those who are employed:

“ *Yes, if we think about it, we are also or may be considered a vulnerable category. Social workers from NGOs, with high amounts of work and with...a paycheck from time to time. Sometimes I also wonder what to tell victims”* (RO/P)

“ *I hated my life, that's why I ended up there. I think that, if I had had better or different conditions at home, maybe I wouldn't have ended up doing it. This is where kids with difficulties at home end up. Kids who are not taken by the hand and helped to find a job, helped to do something in order to realize that they really can make their own money - but not by putting them through hell. Not like now, when you work 15 hours for 600 lei (author's note – approximately 133 EUR). This is why these kids get lost – because of problems with money. People steal so much money and give so many bribes. You get to know these things only after you overcome these problems. If you don't overcome them, the others deceive you... Because of money, you get to do all these... There are many girls in the country, from many villages, doing these things. They go to work abroad in order to earn money for their children...”* (RO/V)

Among some of the victims, there is a perception of the **injustice on the labor market** and in working relationships, in terms of valuing different types of work and associating those works with decent wage levels; in some opinions, working under such conditions would only represent re-victimization and yet another instance of exploitation, this time in a better regulated and more legal context, the one of employment in a poorly paid job, that does not allow for the workers to even meet their most basic needs.

“ There is a battle going on inside you. You look at other people, you see they are well dressed and they have everything they want. And you’re thinking, “look, I had to work like a horse, I got tortured and beaten so that others could take my money and I was left with nothing, and now...”. Life doesn’t become rosy just like that. You can’t get hired at the first store for 600 lei (less than the minimum average wage). You can’t think that if you have that job everything will be all right. I was forced to work and make money, and now I’ll take a job for 600 lei a month? After I was tormented by others, how can I let these guys torment me again and make us work for change? Yes, it’s hard to have a normal life, there is a battle going on inside you.” (RO/V)

Among the examples provided, there are some of the poorest regions of Romania, where no opportunities are available and the only apparent survival “chance” is represented by the practice of prostitution. Decisions are made in the context of no other options and this social reality impacts adult women, as well as teenage girls, but also preteens, both girls and boys.

“ In general, in this part of Moldavia, we are poorer, much poorer... Even now, in my town, this is what every girl does for a living. It’s terrifying there, you don’t see any women or girls on the street – just grannies, who will soon be exploited themselves... But what terrifies me is that I have seen children sold and forced to have sexual intercourse with older men. If anyone on the street asked them who the man is, they’d answer it was their foster father.” (RO/V)

Other examples provided relate to not only poor, but also **deeply marginalized communities**, where poverty and the lack of opportunities are magnified by the impact of discrimination and the isolation resulted from this context. In these communities, parallel forms of organization seem to develop, sometimes in a sense of new hierarchies of power established in the community, where it may happen that the exploiters and their victims live in the same geographical area (the same village, the same neighborhood). The ones who have less power in the community may end up being exploited, at first inside the community and then, later on, their exploitation could also easily occur outside the community, by others.

“ Here, in these communities that are much marginalized, we can speak of a parallel world. One where laws, safety provided by the daily routine, institutions, this is why stability is different. It is a world where there are no limits... the community lives on the outskirts of the city, where normality as we know it, does not extend (...) the institutional force is very small and the power that leads is a parallel one. The “laws” that dominate are parallel to ours and I can say that they are sometimes even the mobster laws, of the organized crime. (...) Social control is different. They have their leaders, but they make “the rules of the game”. There, vulnerability and human exposure is much greater”. (RO/P)

Poverty is however sometimes differently assessed by some of the professionals interviewed. While some believe that extreme poverty is one of the most impactful vulnerability factors, another professional considers that family tensions may be caused not so much by financial difficulties, but by the failure to manage these difficulties.

“ Sometimes poverty is not caused by the lack of money, but by inadequate financial management (...). When you spend half your money on drinking, it’s normal to be in debt (...)” (RO/P)

## **B) The service-related factors (educational, social, legal)**

**The educational system and the policies of professional formation.** Among the most significant of the issues mentioned as part of this category by the respondents, those regarding the rigidity of the educational system are considered to be at the top.

“ In our country, I can say education is also a problem. It has entirely depreciated. At least primary education. I am amazed to hear minors say they graduated 5-6 grades, but they can't read or write. Sadly, I worked with minors who came from villages and passed the grade just so that their class would not be dissolved.” (RO/P)

Educational reintegration of those who had dropped out is, thus, very difficult. The changes made regarding professional schools, the disappearance of the possibility to obtain a qualification at the place of employment have significantly decreased the possibility of integration or of reintegration of the groups of people with social exclusion risk.

Regarding the training programs available for unemployed people, for victims of trafficking and other social groups at risk, to which they are entitled for free, these are not synchronized with the labour market needs. Often, the learners' chances remain unchanged, even after promoting such qualification/requalification training:

“ The AJOFM have training programs...that do not help. They are not the most sought in the labor market. I take the courses and keep it as information.” (RO/P)

The training courses that would ensure a greater chance of enrollment require a level of education that the most vulnerable people do not have.

**Legislative deficiencies and ineffective law enforcement.** Punishing traffickers seems to be a long and very challenging task for the justice system. The majority of specialists interviewed were unsatisfied firstly with the light punishments and with the ineffectiveness of their convictions, from the perspective of reeducating them.

“ Most of the suspended sentences surprise me, both in the case of trafficking, as well as in the case of rape...If somebody buys/sells a human being, they exploit them to make money off of them and their sentence is suspended...” (RO/P)

Changing the legal classification into pandering, fraud and other less severe acts is another challenge for both the people who work in the criminal investigation phase, as well as for those who intervene in the field of assisting the victim.

“ We prepare the cases so that they are OK. We really did not have changes in legal classification. We gather evidence and we continue investigations until we have a sufficiently thorough case, with evidence and everything. We go to court when we are ready. The traffickers escape and they continue their criminal activities. The victims remain impacted by the injustice and are afraid.” (RO/P)

The very long period of prosecution and trial of these causes, the immediate effects, all function as permissive attitudes and allow traffickers to continue their criminal activity or to commit new ones.

Another line of legislation is the one regarding **victims' protection**, its deficiency being linked to the risk of re-victimization, from the trafficking vulnerability point of view. Although the law provides that victims have a set of rights to a number of free services, accessing them is very challenging.

“ Yes, on paper, the victims have rights. But in reality we have severe problems with ensuring emergency services and not to mention others”. (RO/P)

Deficiencies also appear in the child protection system for children with high risk (homeless children, the ones who live in major poverty, the ones who had been sexually abused), who in the absence of services are trafficked or re-trafficked.

“ At about 12-13 years old (...) they were taken in an apartment where it happened. They were

*children and they were being introduced to the sexual world. They were undressed... they had contact... there were other children there, too... Older friends (did this to them), from the entourage (...) after that she was with everybody... and after that she met this lady at the train station. She procured the clients. She was about 15-16 years old (...) after a while, he realized that he can manage by himself and ended the connection with the lady and practiced prostitution by himself.” (RO/P)*

### **C) The social values, traditions and attitudes connected factors**

**Valuing rapid enrichment in the absence of opportunities for practicing systematic growth.** The respondents underline changes in the value system in the last few years, marked by the diminishing of the value of education and by the high valuing of rapidly achieved material wellbeing, especially in the context of lacking opportunities for practicing systematic growth.

“ We have become a society where we believe we must make piles of money in the blink of an eye. This is impossible. Easy money comes from ugly and wrong things. This doesn't happen only in our country.” (RO/P)

The interviewees point out these problems as major challenges in the prevention activities designed for 12-13 year old minors.

“ Many activities of prevention are carried out in governmental and nongovernmental segments, focusing both in the urban and rural areas. But if we analyze the discussion about the target group, minors, we see that the information they receive is adapted to their level of understanding...but they would still accept a possible offer of any nature in order to achieve certain goals or ideals. The children's ideals are small. “I want what I have seen at school, at a colleague, a smart phone, whereas the phone that I own is not a smart phone” (RO/P)

However, these perceptions, even among the professionals working in the field, often only point out a superficial level, where the root, in-depth cause of such attitudes is not properly explored and integrated in services and response mechanisms to the challenges teenagers and young people face. The Romanian educational system remains inefficient in terms of not only building self-esteem and resilience, but also in terms of building the necessary practical skills and supporting, in a positive manner, a reality-based perception of young people's abilities and capacities, that would further lead them into critically analyzing their options and choosing what works best in their particular contexts. Schools should be a space of safety and growth for all children, yet rather than that, many schools still operate with systems of punishments, labels and rejections and with a diminished function of supporting young people's vision of their future. In this context, it is a simple process for a smart phone to become a highly valued asset, as the outer world of fantasy objects that bring safety, happiness and the respect of others becomes more significant than the inner world of capacities, non-conditional respect and healthy adaptations.

The media (for instance, commercials<sup>2</sup>), as well as the success stories provided by Romanians who went abroad and display a major leap regarding the improvement of their personal and family economic situation, bring forward distorted models of achievement for the persons who are willing to take risks or make significant changes to improve their financial situation, especially in the case of a very high need. At times, it can be the family who encourages young women to try and build a better future by going abroad, even when the information provided is scarce or the absence of a safety net is very clear.

“ (...) Family members (are) involved in the decision to leave the country, to try to do something else (...). Hence, the family encourages them to go work abroad.” (RO/P)

“ Many times the family itself encourages the young women to leave, in order to make more money. But they are not informed about what the persons who leave the country will be doing. Or they are misled by malevolent individuals.” (RO/P)

<sup>2</sup> Commercials promoting objects and activities as happiness and status deliverers, as well as those promoting easy ways of receiving loans, credit cards from the bank etc.

**Growth of demand in the sex industry and normalization of children’s sexual exploitation.** The theme of demand also constitutes a very sensitive subject in the debates regarding human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation. Even some of the professionals working with survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation show subtle or more evident forms of prejudice against women practicing different forms of commercial sex, still positioning their activity under the mark of blame and morality questioning.

“ We have these video chats in apartments, performed by law, medical science, psychology, foreign languages students. What kind of role models will these individuals become, considering the way they earned their money for exams or for their life? How can we expect them to become true educators?” (RO/P)

However, a significant issue is the normalization of the sexual exploitation of children; the idea that all people involved in the sex industry do it willingly, following a certain decision, is widely accepted. In this context, the situation of a 13-14 year old girl who is sexually exploited is not really perceived as abnormal or as a grave breach in children’s rights.

## **II. VULNERABILITY FACTORS AT THE FAMILY LEVEL**

Every professional interviewed emphasized the essential role that family and the relationships between family members play in the vulnerability of potential victims. These conclusions were based on the experiences of those working in prevention, as well as in intervention. In their perspective, young victims come from disorganized, neglectful and/or violent families, with negatively impacted relationships and repeated experiences of loss. Poverty, the lack of stability, the physical or emotional absence of different significant family members, the role confusion, the lack of opportunities for parents, the isolation or marginalization of the family appear to increase the levels of vulnerability.

The victims of trafficking participating in the interviews come from different family structures and forms; it is evident that the vulnerability element does not reside in the family structure, but rather in the lack of healthy interactions, in the traumatic events occurring inside the family life, in the unmet needs for contact and emotional connection, in the different forms of violence happening among family members, to which the interviewees were subjected to as victims or witnesses, in the lack of availability and understanding in regard to children’s and young people’s needs, in the acceptance of corporal punishment as a normal parenting tool, in the incapacity of some families to provide stability and security to the youngest of their members. Healthy relationships, development and low vulnerability risks could be a characteristic of any type of family, with the condition that children are looked after by a good enough parent or parental figure.

“ The families are very different, but generally they are disorganized” (RO/P)

“ If we look at the curriculum of each victim, I can state without error that more than 90% of them have been subjected to incest or exploitation within the family. So, first and foremost, we have to talk about the family environment. This is why we have to keep coming back to education. Secondly, I want to emphasize that the lack of affectionateness and interest in the child affects very poor children as well as those coming from very well-to-do families.” (RO/P)

In fact, among the victims of trafficking interviewed, a multitude of different family situations were portrayed, ranging from the divorce or separation of parents, with the children previously having to manage or endure complicated interaction patterns and later on acute feelings of belonging nowhere, also resulting from tense relationships with their step-parents, to the death of one or both parents occurring at a young age, the transference of parental roles for younger children to their older siblings or to other relatives or friends, while the real parents are absent, in some cases working abroad, the imposing of a self-parenting situation on the abandoned child and to the painfully experienced physical presence of parents, who are or become emotionally non-responsive.

“ Mom and dad broke up when I was little. They both remarried. My mother is now by herself, because the man she found ruined her life.” (RO/V)

“ My parents are divorced and they both remarried. I don't get along well with either my stepmother or my stepfather. They went abroad. We were mostly cared for by nannies or by our parents' godsons.” (RO/V)

“ Until last year, I lived in the same village as my father, one street away from him. I haven't spoken to him in a year – I mean, he doesn't speak to me.” (RO/V)

“ She was a neglected child (...) her mother went abroad and left her to manage for herself.” (RO/P)

It is not as much the absence of the parent that has the potential to create vulnerability, but rather the entire context created around the experience of leaving: why did the parent leave and how is this reflecting on the parent-child relationship and connected to it, how is the communication going to continue, who is going to care for the child while the parent is absent, which will be the opportunities of meeting and reconnecting in the future. It seems that it is not primarily the physical absence of the parent that creates vulnerability, but rather the lack of any explanation and the interruption of the relationship, combined with the entrusting of the child to unfit guardians that foster the creation of damaging stories in the mind of the child or teenager and the psychological experience of abandonment, of being left behind. In some cases, being the one left behind is processed as being the one undeserving and unloved, and this might lead to a poor sense of self-value and distort the image of the self, especially in relationship with the significance of the person for others.

“ ...I never really lived with my mother, only once in a while, when she came back to the country. She had to work abroad in order to provide for us. Even so, she barely could. We got used to live without her... I was always an introvert, never talked to anybody. I trusted no one, so I didn't want to talk; I was never able to talk openly. I kept everything inside rather than talk, because talking wouldn't have changed anything.” (RO/V)

“ At some point, when they left, I thought they had deserted me. That's how I saw it, and I didn't want to hear from them again.” (RO/V)

“ They loved me... and then, everything became distant.” (RO/V)

“ My grandma used to tell me: “your father didn't leave you, but your mother did”. I used to cry at night, couldn't sleep, you know, this kind of things...” (RO/V)

“ Before, I used to have a very distant relationship with my mother – even with my father.” (RO/V)

“ Not so much with dad – but that doesn't mean I don't communicate. But he is a rather distant character. Sometimes I tell him stuff and his only answer is “all right”. I don't know... he's not that interested, as long as he knows I'm OK.” (RO/V)

The experiences of lack of emotional availability and presence from their family members were mentioned several times by the victims participating in the interviews, especially while also underlining the unmet needs that they had for authentic, protective relationships, as well as how this lack of availability further created effects in their lives, directing them towards decisions that were not as beneficial in the long run.

“ I don't remember and I don't think my mother and I ever had a discussion about life, or about how one is supposed to behave. There was a time when she was very, very ill and couldn't talk. But even when I was in primary school, I don't remember having any conversations with her, about life or about what I was supposed to do.” (RO/V)

“ My parents split up when I was 2, and I was raised by my mother. Mom was a very hardworking woman. But, because she sometimes worked night shifts far away, or had weekly jobs, she couldn't be with me every day and she was not able to show me her motherly love, which I missed. My grandmother took care of me. As for my father... I continued to see him until I was 14-

15. I haven't contacted him since I was 15. I severed my ties with my father. I finished 8 grades of school, and then, since my mother wasn't with me, I decided to settle to my own house, I started a relationship with the first boy I met and I moved in with him. This way, I ended my relationship with my father." (RO/V)

The majority of the victims interviewed mentions experiencing violent situations in the family, either emotional violence, manifested in the form of tension and conflicts or physical violence, inflicted by different members of the family (father, step-father, mother, grandmother etc.).

“ Sometimes I would fight with my mother, too. She had found out what had happened and cursed me or look for a fight every day. When she didn't fight with my father, she would pick on her son, who was living with us. She is... I don't know, she seems strange to me. To constantly want to fight every day is kind of banal, if you know what I mean.” (RO/V)

“ Yes. Fights, fights, fights. But she used to say that's how love is, that one must also fight. Every day... I don't know.” (RO/V)

“ ...When I heard she left home, I can't say I was happy, because dad was depressed. I was hurt, but, believe me, I made a cross. I had gotten rid of the devil. On the other hand, I pitied my brother, who needed his mother, and I also felt sorry for Dad. But, in a way, I swear I was glad that I had gotten rid of her. The atmosphere in the house was already very tense, I felt like I was going to suffocate.” (RO/V)

Violence is also in the view of the professionals interviewed a common occurrence in the lives of victims of trafficking.

“ Girls leave from disorganized, very violent families, from violence between parents, in the couple, from domestic violence.” (RO/P)

In some of the cases, there are accounts of trans-generational violence, where the abusive parent is presented as a victim of abuse himself/herself in their childhood; however, this rationalization (parents beat their children because they were beaten), though somehow efficient as a defense mechanism, could also potentially contribute to the transmission of violence against children as given fact, a negative parenting trait and as normality, from generation to generation.

“ I lived with my parents until I was 12. But they were always fighting. My mother was kind of distant, but that doesn't mean she did not love me... Anyway, it's in the past now... She didn't really take care of me and, you know, she beat me once in a while. She went through the same stuff in her youth, she saw abuse, and her father beat her mother until blood splattered the walls... She has weak nerves, I understand her, so...” (RO/V)

It is also evident from other examples that the justification of violence, many times by self-inquiring or self-blaming, is a common process, which however requires a significant level of energy in the search for sense. Not in all cases the process of reflection ends with the outcome of acceptance and integration of the violent past.

“ Mom used to beat me, but not all the time - you know, when I made a mistake. Nobody's perfect. But she... I don't know, she used to make up horrible insults.” (RO/V)

“ They were almost always fighting. Dad would scream at her and... He beat us for no reason. Just because he was nervous that we had no money, for example. He would come and beat us for not making his bed, or stuff like that. To get beaten and not know why...Even today I see situations when children are beaten and they don't know why. Just because their parents are tired or nervous or...” (RO/V)

“ She hit me with anything she could lay her hand on. And she left marks... So, this period was very... Even now, when I have some kind of relationship with her, I still can't forget, if you know what I mean.” (RO/V)

Sometimes, violence may also occur or become more common in the context of the relational status

change of the father, happening even while the parents are not separated or divorced. These are realities the children have to cope with, sometimes in a potentially traumatic or disturbing manner.

“ Ever since he met that woman, he completely changed. I was not allowed to offend her or say anything to her – he would start screaming or beat me. “Don’t offend her, or else”. He didn’t even hide it anymore. In the beginning, he didn’t want mom to know he was in a relationship, but then he stopped hiding. He left home, the phone rang, he talked on the phone.” (RO/V)

“ I always had a great relationship with my mother, but I was rather distant with my father. Then, after he found someone else, things got worse. Insults, beatings... He would fight with that person, or that person wouldn’t answer his phone, so he blew off his steam on me.” (RO/V)

At times, the women interviewed provide examples of situations when they were both the victim and the witness of the violent situation, in many cases the main victim being the mother, which did not make the situation less traumatic or easier to manage for the girl-witness; besides seeing their mother in a victimized position, some of the women also experienced violence in their adult relationships, with their male partners.

“ When my mother remarried, I started caring for that man. Mom told me to respect him and... But there were times when I just couldn’t... I preferred to get out of the house, to play with my friends, not to see him anymore, because he was... He was a very bad person, I don’t know how to explain... My real father never laid a hand on me, but he did. One day, when I came back from a neighbor, I didn’t want to get inside the yard, so he slapped me and bumped my head into the fence. Mother asked him why he hit me and then the fight started. I always saw him hit mom, that’s why she started drinking. He always beat her, even hit her with iron pliers.” (RO/V)

“ ...Then, the problems started. Beatings and such, especially with my mother... He started drinking and screaming and then started beating her and...” (RO/V)

“ Because he saw she wasn’t that affected, she said that she should stay and endure, for us – because I was in high school. In the beginning I didn’t even know the extent of my problems, until I started seeing him beat her, tried to split them up, protested him hitting me. Then, when he saw that she wasn’t that affected and just endured, he started with me. It never was really bad; I mean I never had to go to the hospital, but... It hurts.” (RO/V)

There are instances in which it is very clear how experiences of rejection, humiliation and abuse lived during childhood could be repeated during teenage years or during adulthood. Situations of traumatic attachment could be hypothesized, in cases in which abusive relationships are internalized and, in these contexts, repeated, through the identification and practicing of dysfunctional solutions to dysfunctional and abusive relationships and the incapacity to set healthy and self-protective boundaries.

“ From these kids I met a boy... I boy I fell in love it at some point, I liked him. I thought he was different... He laughed, he joked, made me laugh. But he also had this crazy, strange side, I don’t know how to put it... I was going through a period when I liked to fool around and... I kept close to him because I liked him. I dated him, he sometimes stole my phone, I mean he took my phone, and I didn’t react, because I liked him. I didn’t have any discussions with my family or relatives about how a relationship between a boy and a girl should be, and how I should keep away from this kind of people. I thought that’s what love is, I don’t know... One time, he stole all my meal coupons. Dad had taken his salary and he gave me coupons to buy books and notebooks for school. He took them away and blackmailed me. He told me that, if I didn’t sleep with him, he wouldn’t give them back. Of course, that’s what happened anyway, he took my coupons and he also... Yes. After that there was a period when I stole money from my brother and my father. I used it to get cabs, or to buy him cigarettes, or sometimes just to give the money to him...” (RO/V)

While the recurrence of violence experienced during childhood is often a vulnerability factor during the adult years, there are situations in which the violent pattern can be broken.

“ When he last beat me, he hit me with his fists on my head and bumped my head against the ground, while I was holding my baby, my daughter.” (RO/V)

“...After giving birth, the fights and hardships started. I decided it's better to be alone. I can manage by myself, rather than raise my children with all those fights and tension. It's not right, I'll traumatize them and they won't be happy. So we kept pushing and hitting each other, and then I said: that's it. I put his luggage in his hand and told him to leave. He wouldn't leave willingly, so I called the police and got him out of the house. These things made me stronger, believe me. I wasn't afraid. Everybody was asking me how I'll manage with three kids... We'll go on, with God's help.” (RO/V)

In some cases, parental roles and functions are transferred from the parents to the oldest children, leaving those to care for younger brothers or sisters, for elderly relatives, to do household chores or work in more formalized jobs, from a very young age.

“The youngest was about three months old when they split up, so she was left in my care. I took care of both of us.” (RO/V)

“(...) in large families, with lower control over each child, children have to take responsibility for their younger siblings.” (RO/P)

“No, I lived with my neighbor. She helped me very much. I stayed at her place, helped her in the household, and I finished the 8th grade.” (RO/V)

“I would come back from school and clean up block entrances. I had to take care of my father too. We didn't have a washing machine at that time, so, when he came back from work, I had to wash his work shirt, his socks. I also had to take care of my younger brother.” (RO/V)

“I've worked since I was 10 or 11, as far as I can remember. I was already friends with the groom, the dustpan, the mop.” (RO/V)

As mentioned during the interviews, there were other destabilizing or potentially traumatic events that impacted the early lives of the victims, among which unemployment of the parents and the financial collapse of the family, early loss of parents, teenage pregnancy and birth and uncertain or precarious living conditions, marked by a high level of instability and frequent changes.

“Yes...they were together, more or less. From my point of view, less. Due to the problems during Ceausescu's rule, at some point they were laid off. This destroyed their morale. Together with the family problems, this caused bigger psychological problems, and they found it harder to cope...” (RO/V)

“My mother fell ill and died. My father couldn't cope with her death and killed himself. He hanged himself. I was the one who found him.” (RO/V)

“Complicated, what can I say...One day I had some place to live, the next day I was homeless. I stayed with a neighbor in the village for almost a year, she helped me quite a lot. I managed to finish the 8th grade. If she hadn't helped me, I wouldn't have been able to do it.” (RO/V)

“I... I went to my mother's. I had nowhere to live and she said: "I can let you stay for one or two days, but that's it." I think the very next day, this girl told me "we need girls, we'd like you to come, this woman needs girls". (RO/V)

“I can't live anywhere, at my mother's or at my father's. I don't get along with either of them. I don't want to stay with my stepmother and stepfather. Mom doesn't want to let me live with her, because she has a very small house.” (RO/V)

Another traumatic experience that seems to be common to a number of victims is the occurrence of sexual violence, which remains unprocessed or is processed in an unhealthy manner by the family, school and/or community. The opinion of a professional working in the field is that this is one of the red lines in the life patterns of victims.

“ Common element in their history? Violence. Sexual violence.” (RO/P)

Moreover, an example of sexual violence improperly processed by the community is provided by one of the victims, who was expelled from school after the events she describes.

“ On the third day... I went upstairs to the canteen. Suddenly, I see the boy that girl had talked to... “I’ll be waiting for you in front of the high school. If you do not come...”. He threatened me: “I can come to the dorm and hurt you”... Anyway, I got into the car... A while later, he blocked the doors. There were two boys, who called another one, so they were three in total. They took me near a forest... That’s where everything happened... They forced me to do things I didn’t want to do... They told me that if I don’t do what they say... One showed me his tattoo, he had a girl’s head tattooed on his leg. “If you don’t do what we say, we’ll kill you, like we did this other girl”... I didn’t know anything, I was like a child, I didn’t know what was happening. With my child’s mind, I thought something bad was going to happen to me and... I did what they told me to do and never told anyone.” (RO/V)

As negative relationships can occur in every type of family and from different family members, it is the same in the case of positive, healthy and nourishing relationships the victims account for.

“ I felt good, I was safe, I was in her yard. If, for example, older boys threatened me (I was afraid of them), when she saw them on the street, she would tell their families, or warn them: “if you do something to my girl”... I helped her with work, but I did it happily. I never said “I’ve had enough” or anything. I was very happy to work or to help her in the garden. She always gave me good advice – be careful with boys, they’re hoodlums...” (RO/V)

“ I used to talk with the other grandma, on my mother’s side. She was a woman... She didn’t go to school, but she knew how to treat people and never raised her voice. I found myself in her, she boosted my morale. This grandma was nice.” (RO/V)

“ He’s all I got. He loves me very much. He loves me because he knows I’m truthful and I’m not like my mother. My father died by his side and he told my brother that, whatever happens, he should take care of his sister... He said that during his final days.” (RO/V)

“ After she split up with dad, my mother moved on with her life. When I was 2, she remarried. I considered that man my father, and called him dad. Mom was not always with me, because she had to work. But he was. When I was 14, my mother and my stepfather split up, because mom had made a mistake: she cheated on him. He found out and they eventually separated. But that man stood close to me. When I was in the first grade, he was the one who dressed me, took me to school, and made my sandwiches. If I didn’t have any trousers or a uniform for school, he was the one that bought them. He practically was the only one who took care of me. My mother started an extra-marital affair and she would even leave the house for a month at a time. She left me with him. He knew what we needed in the fridge and all...” (RO/V)

A particular case encountered is the one of the families whose members are involved in illegal activities; especially if these activities are related to exploitation or trafficking in human beings, the vulnerability of young children to victimization and crime is very high.

“ We had a case in Turda, where the mother herself made her two girls practice prostitution.” (RO/P)

“ These families are isolated, but also dangerous (...). It is extremely hard for them (the children’s mothers – author’s note), but it is impossible to imagine what the children must feel. And people do not intervene, out of fear. We also have been threatened many times. These families do not respect the law... and the children are victims to various types of violence and face a great risk of being victims of trafficking, as well as becoming traffickers themselves.” (RO/P)

There are also accounts of parents who believe prostitution is a significant opportunity for the girls to make money and the girls are encouraged to choose this path.

“ Her mother encourages her in all this (practicing prostitution – author’s note). Even though the mother left her child (...), remarried with an Italian man and had other children”. (RO/P)

According to some respondents among the professionals, the parents’ low level of education could be another factor that influences the parents’ attitude towards their children’s needs, and the family priorities. Others highlight the variety of the cases depending on the family background, however mentioning that there is no clear-cut rule.

“ I ask them: Why don’t you send the kids (to school – author’s note)? I didn’t go to school, but I still managed. What do I say to that? You managed how? You have no job, no house; you can’t take care of your children.” (RO/P)

“ Environments with low levels of education and poor living conditions. This is where most come from, but there are also cases from more educated environments. There is no clear-cut rule...” (RO/P)

“ This year we didn’t have victims from “respectable” families, but we’ve had cases... With parents who were teachers, physicians – even a father who was a priest” (RO/P)

### III. Vulnerability factors at the individual level

At the individual level, we find vulnerability elements related to gender and age. Both are vulnerability factors first of all because these are the characteristics defined by the demand. Concerning gender vulnerabilities, we will further elaborate on those in the dedicated chapter.

In the case of homeless or runaway children, the individual vulnerabilities are also shaped by the low level of education, lack of experienced healthy relationships, the high degree of exposure to crime, the lack of life abilities, drug and/or alcohol use, risky sexual behaviors.

As previously mentioned, the vulnerability of victims with a history of living in violent families or partnerships (lover boy or husband as trafficker) can be described by the consequences of the abuse in the family: the ambivalence towards the family members, the lack of trust in the chance of changing their life for the better, the hope that the situation will be solved by the trafficker. Another pattern of vulnerability could also be related to the low level of education in the case of some of the victims, in many of these cases school drop-out being registered. The highest risk in the case of some of them is the proximity of traffickers, high tolerance of criminality etc. Usually the girls’ educational level is adequate their age at the recruitment phase.

“ The beginning of exploitation is the end of school education. (...) They are able to go to school until the exploitation becomes savage. But that doesn’t take long...” (RO/P)

The vulnerability of young women is increased by the fact that the girls drop-out of school, they lack interest in education, personal or professional development, they have lots of unstructured time that they try to fill in by “walks in the town”, with unreal expectation over couple relationship and setting up a family. The trafficker, usually with an interest, reacts at the girl’s aspiration of a “movie-like” love relationship or at her aspiration of the loving parents.

The victims coming from wealthy families, where the lack of resources is not an issue, declare emotional neglect. Often there seems to be discrimination between girls and boys in the family (that later usually get more attention, favors and freedom). Professionals mention the girls are looking for new experiences, financial wealth, reaching financial autonomy, while having a tendency in crossing norms, getting involved in risky sexual behavior, drug abuse and being attracted by the mirage of “elite entourage”.

“ From 13 years of age, during puberty. There are a lot of factors that make them seek to satisfy their needs someplace else: affection, financial needs. They are clearly in a vulnerable situation.” (RO/P)

“ I asked (the high school students who took part in prevention activities – author’s note) what these “likes” mean, and they found it hard to explain (...). They are a very exposed generation.” (RO/P)

## 2.5 Characteristics and patterns of recruitment

Interviews with professionals reveal a large variety of recruiting methods still in place, even if the trafficking networks have decreased in size, and are currently made out of 2-4 people. Some of the professionals interviewed also mention that the members of these small groups could also, in some cases, be part of the same family, where men play a protective part, women can be recruiters, but they also handle the control over the victims’ behavior and during “working hours” and play an active part in recruiting clients looking for sexual services (on the street or in bars). The victims could be even the younger family members, relatives or girlfriends of the boys.

“ I noticed a trend among these groups to organize according to a family pattern, they become a family business.” (RO/P)

The roles are very well defined between the criminal group members and they collaborate with other criminal groups.

“ I see that they contact each other. The groups are no longer structured, but there is a very well developed relationship between small cells. “Come here, it’s nice, don’t go there”. They call each other. This is a horizontal network.” (RO/P)

The recruiters and traffickers show their capacities to adapt to different contexts and constraints, are very flexible and mobile. They can act in different cities, countries depending on their resources in that specific country and on the country or region policies and legislation.

“ Their only interest is profit. They don’t care whether it is from Germany or Italy. They are very mobile, and can easily switch the country they operate in. They get informed very quickly. Or they can operate simultaneously in Italy and Germany.” (RO/P)

“ They discuss within the same group of friends, they gain know-how. They start to make plans. They are anti – role models in society. They show off with luxury cars and loads of money – it’s easy to impress vulnerable persons. They are very mobile individuals, they travel abroad and see and observe many things (...). They switch areas of influence depending on their interest – which is maximum profit” (RO/P)

Some of them are using the Internet and other new technologies to recruit and control victims. The starting point of a contact with the potential victim is usually a face-to-face encounter, but there are also cases in which virtual channels or the telephone is used by the recruiters. The contact established via Internet is realized through social networks and chatrooms.

However, in most cases the recruiter is known to the victim and it could be a woman or a man, a family member or a good friend, a life partner or a new romance.

“ Some recruiters belong to the victims` close circle of friends. In some cases, families themselves carry out such activities, without relations or too much information, becoming unknowing intermediaries.” (RO/P)

“ Recruitment remained unchanged. Personal relationships.” (RO/P)

“ From the circle of acquaintances – friends or people who just know where to find vulnerable individuals. They may have experience in exploitation and recruitment. They are specialized and may belong to organized networks.” (RO/P)

“ Some women who are exploited every day by their concubines or husbands, as well as by other family members, live with their aggressors. It is very hard for women. They are treated as a man’s

*personal asset. Sometimes the situation reaches extremes. The man has no problem sending his wife off to prostitute herself, together with other girls. But he also send her to other men within the community. He shares her with his friends. The woman just submits. And they get seriously beaten.” (RO/P)*

The professionals’ perspectives are also supported by the personal accounts of victims and by their experiences of being recruited. In most cases, the recruitment took place through close, trustworthy persons, whom the victims knew directly, without mediation, or persons about whom they have guarantees from other acquaintances or close friends. Based on the interviews with victims, in a similar percentage women and men were involved in various or all stages of the trafficking process, from recruitment to transport and exploitation.

“ *This girl kept telling me, don’t you want to talk to this guy.. I told her I didn’t. “OK, then”. She was talking to that guy. The next day when I came to school, I saw her again. She told me she had talked to the guy and that the next day he’d come to the front of the high school. She practically made me talk to that guy, but I didn’t want to. So, she said the guy would come anyway. But I didn’t tell her anything.” (RO/V)*

“ *It was... It was hard.And I didn’t expect that, I mean, she was my best friend and... ” (RO/V)*

“ *Yes, she had been to Spain before and she told me she worked in a bar as a barista, she sometimes washes dishes, this kind of stuff. She lied that she goes there and she has a proper job, and maybe I could make a future there. I actually thought about it, I wanted to help my family more... ” (RO/V)*

“ *...I met her at a coming of age party. She came with drugs. That was the first time when I smoked and I felt sick. After that we met in a larger group, smoked joints and did stuff. So... we became great friends, up to a certain point. We were inseparable... I think I met her when I was 15. ” (RO/V)*

“ *We were friends, not that close, but we met on the street and she invited me to her house for a coffee. The she asked „will you go with me to Portugal, to make money?” And I said yes. She told me we’d leave in October that she had a sister there, married to a Portuguese guy. I asked her where we’d live. She said she had a close friend. I said OK, but I didn’t have any money. She said that girl would pay for accommodation and everything. So I said, OK, I’ll go. ” (RO/V)*

“ *I started with video chat, too. I had no money to raise my child and could not afford an operation, so I saw no other way out. And it didn’t really work out with the video chat, I had no patience to satisfy all their whims... I had a friend who asked me whether I wanted to offer services for money, and I said yes. I got to this lady, who told me the conditions from the start: fifty-fifty. I said yes, but it was very difficult for me, I first had to drink before doing it. So it was much harder. ” (RO/V)*

“ *So she bought me a ticket, I left home and went to Switzerland. But I was going to perform erotic massage, not practice prostitution; I didn’t see myself doing that. Video chat is totally different, you play with men’s imagination. But from that to...is a long way. I was told that yes, there is an erotic massage parlor, we’ll handle your papers, you’ll live with us, and you have to split fifty-fifty with the house. They took 50, I took 50. And I went there. They waited for me downstairs, took my luggage, bought me a juice, everything was great. Then I saw this was no massage parlor. All the girls had a shower first, then went with their clients to the room, took condoms and... ” (RO/V)*

“ *In Denmark, for work. A distant cousin promised me she’d find work for me. When I got there, I was held hostage in an apartment. Fortunately it didn’t get worse, I didn’t get beaten or killed or... ” (RO/V)*

“ *This girl called her boyfriend in Spain. I heard her talk on the phone. The girl started crying, saying*

*she was afraid not to lose me and... I didn't know what that was about exactly. After two days, on the plane, she started to explain to me that I can work at a bar in Spain. But I should talk to the clients, have a drink with them, and that's how you make money... When I found out, I was speechless... But I thought, since I started and I'm here, I can't back off, it was impossible. "* (RO/V)

A very common case is the one of the lover boy – the partner in the couple being also the recruiter and, in some cases, being both the recruiter and the trafficker. In some cases, there is a very strong pressure from the lover boy so that the decision is made very quickly, with no possibility for the girl to communicate with others, her family or friends, or to consult with those on her decision or leaving to work abroad.

“ *There was a boy there... When he saw me, he told my dad that he had a beautiful girl and stuff... Over time, since I was just a child, he started to crawl under my skin and he grew on me... I started telling him... that I want to leave, to look for work that I wanted to have my own house, to get by on my own, to be independent... And he told me he'd help me. He first told me he would look for a job for me at a restaurant close by. After that, he told me that no, he talked to a girl so I could go to Spain and work there, and he would also come with me... But it wasn't like that. At first I didn't know what it was about, I thought it was a restaurant, something normal. Everything happened fast. When I left, I didn't get to tell my father or anyone else... He called me and told me "I'm coming to take you". Just like that. And I said, OK, I'm leaving. When I got to Spain, I called my father. It was like, I left yesterday and tomorrow I was going to be 18.* ” (RO/V)

Other times, the decision has to be made as a commitment of the woman to the relationship and to the well-being of the couple. By sacrificing herself for a limited time, she could provide for the couple, she could be important and valuable and, more than anything else, she would be the one who, through her selfless act, secures the future for the couple.

“ *For several weeks I practiced prostitution in Bucharest. He had a well thought-out strategy. He complained and he told me that we actually have to buy a studio. We'd pay for it and stay there together until we get old.* ” (RO/V)

The practice of the recruiter-trafficker-lover boy is also described by another of the victims participating in the interview, showing a potential practice where the man in the couple exploits his partner, not only by forcing the young woman to provide sexual services to different men, but also by strictly deciding about the money that are made and usually keeping it for himself, a common situation that will be further described in the following chapter.

“ *After I got there, I stayed for about a week. We were not the only ones in the house; there were several couples, girls and boys, who did the same stuff...At the club...There a couple who...This guy who forced the girl to do it. If she didn't make the money he wanted, he hit her. So, in the next to last day, he told me he wanted to proceed just like this guy, he wanted me to make more money. He realized I was also thinking about myself. He wanted all the money, but I split them fifty-fifty and I think he realized that. So he told me that if I didn't do what he said, or how much money he said, he would hit me.* ” (RO/V)

The vulnerability concerning the precarity and instability of the living situation, mentioned in the previous chapters, was in some of the cases of both recruitment, as well as trafficking, a very significant opportunity for the recruiters and traffickers to exploit in not only getting the woman in, but also in controlling her remaining. Through the promise of a home that could be bought as a result of practicing prostitution, the recruiters and traffickers were able to support the growth and flourishing of a fantasy based on negative experiences of consecutive losses of the private space, the security and the psychological comfort.

“ *...I preferred to stay there and finish. He told me he was going to buy me an apartment and stuff. They made me a contract for an apartment, but now the Police told me it is fake. They didn't follow the normal steps. Contracts are made at a Notary office, but they made it at an ordinary bar. The girl had one of her friends come over, who said he was the seller. He gave her about 20 million (20 000 RON) and they got me to sign. I signed the contract and she took her with her* ”

*papers. When the Police found it, they said it was fake... I preferred to keep silent. She said she will leave Romania in the autumn, so she could finish the apartment. When I heard about that, I decided not to speak, just hold on for a few more months, so that I could go.” (RO/V)*

“ *Her sister always told me “who has got an apartment, like you”, if I said something or got angry... When new women came, they’d try to convince them by giving me as an example. “Look, a girl just like you has an apartment at 20-21”. And I kept silent. But she’d always tell this to the new girls, in order to convince them.” (RO/V)*

“ *No, he is my best girlfriend’s cousin. That’s how I met him and we became friends, kept in touch... He came and asked how I was getting on. I told him it was the same. He asked me “wouldn’t you like to have your own house, your own money, to not depend on anyone?” He caught me at the right time. I didn’t know what to do. He had asked me twice before and I said no. I don’t know, I didn’t want to, I didn’t see myself doing that.” (RO/V)*

One of the victims interviewed also mentioned being recruited in the context of a very difficult personal situation, involving the loss of her child’s custody, which also led her to start using drugs.

“ *When my child was 6 and we split up, he didn’t want to give my child to me. I went to his mother and asked her to help me get my child back through a court of law... His mother had already fallen prey to a vice – drinking. She wanted to help me in some way, but couldn’t. Because I couldn’t have my child back, I fell into depressions, which lead me to this vice. I let all of my steam go through drugs; they made me forget. Drugs... The street where I lived was full of them. I lived in the suburbs, so I knew what drugs were. When I saw my old friends do it, I tried some, too. When I saw they brought me euphoria and made me forget about my problems and took me away from the real world, I felt this was what I needed and continued using, so I became an addict... I started directly with the heroin syringe - I skipped joints.” (RO/V)*

## 2.6 Characteristics and patterns of exploitation

Based on the interviews, most of the victims that have been identified in Romania or abroad have been exploited in apartments, in clubs or on the street, but there also seems to be sexual exploitation irrespective of the location (night bars, brothels, massage salons) and legal norms existing in the destination country.

“ *It happened while I was in school. That’s why I said I basically supported myself. I was going to... There was this woman, we called her boss... There were several girls at the parlor, well, so-called parlor. It was an apartment where they said they offered erotic massage, so to say... I mean we also did erotic massage, but also all the other stuff... for money. And we split everything in half.” (RO/V)*

The traffickers are using different strategies to keep the appearance of consent, however instances of control are visible in the interviews with victims, in many forms and degrees, concerning the amount of money the victims receive, the contacts they are able to have with family, friends or anyone else, the freedom of movement and of deciding with regard to their own time, the freedom of selecting the buyers and of rejecting practices they do not want, the moment when they have clients or not, as follows:

- **control of communication with any outside persons**

“ *After a few days, we moved somewhere else, with the same girl, so that they may know what I am or am not doing, whether I talk on the phone or not... After that, her sister came and started to work. But she didn’t do much, she mostly stayed at home to see what we were doing, who we were speaking to, what we were speaking about, if we were speaking to the other girls in the group, or if we speak to Romanian boys that came to the club...” (RO/V)*

“ *Two years ago I came back... I went to see my mother, couldn’t even stay with her for half an hour. I bought her what she needed, like rice and stuff... I went to my sisters at school, to give*

them a present, and then I wanted to spend more time with Mom, because she still asks me why... Every time I came here, we just talked a little then I had to go. On the way, she told me not to be long, just go and see your mother, give her what you brought and we'll leave, lest she should ask anything or I should spill the beans and start crying and..." (RO/V)

“...I used to call from street phones, but she stood beside me... I just told my mother to sand me money. Dad, too. I was never alone.” (RO/V)

“I was even watched in the bathroom and at the club I went to.” (RO/V)

- **control of “productivity”, money earned, time worked, clients accepted**

“If today we made no money, she would shut up. But, if we didn't make any the next day, she'd ask, what happened, why you aren't making money, that group makes this much... Always, the same discussions. I couldn't stand it anymore... Always, the same discussions, we didn't make money.” (RO/V)

“...She stressed us because of the money, she said it was too little, but we actually made more than needed. She rarely let us out of the house. If we had to go out a little, to go to the store or something... Come quickly, don't waste time... We are mostly locked in. So that she could make money.” (RO/V)

“Most of them were... You were afraid to go to them or talk to them. But, if we didn't go, they said we were refusing clients. We couldn't do that. Her sister was there, then we were there and another group of girls who were friends with them and knew each other. They'd always meet the next day for coffee and would talk about what this or that girl did... And we couldn't do anything. If we refused clients, they heard about it.” (RO/V)

“They were following our every move and if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, there were consequences.” (RO/V)

- **control of money**

“Yes, 10 Euro per night, for a pack of cigarettes and some coffee, and a pack of gum, which cost 2 Euro. You were left with 3 Euro.” (RO/V)

“He brought in the clients, I mean... And I... did this stuff, but I think he took most of the money and I got nothing. I told him I didn't want to do this anymore and... he started hitting me, he took my ID and my phone and told me that... if I didn't make money until a certain day, he won't give me back my ID and my phone... I was also in school at the time, I didn't know what to do, I needed my ID, my...” (RO/V)

“He told me that if I wanted to come back home, I needed to make money. I did, but they kept all of it. They kept all the money. If I needed something, I had to ask for it.” (RO/V)

“...I never had any credit, not even for an SMS.” (RO/V)

“They parked the car on the other side and I would take the clients from the street, got into their car and drove across the street in a parking lot. They didn't even let me go somewhere else... After I finished with the client, I just took the money, crossed the street and gave it to them.” (RO/V)

- **taking the papers, dispossession of communication means**

“They didn't give me my ID and phone. They gave me one of their phones, to be able to contact me, and see how much money I made and how many clients I had.” (RO/V)

- **control through the use of drugs**

“...He found me again, he started following me, he called at the apartment and so on... I stayed with him for a while... I couldn't get rid of him and stayed with him for 6 more months. During this time, he gave me drugs and beat me, to... All mixed with some kind of love... So that he could make me dependent of him and of the atmosphere around him. I smoked heroin for six months, and I had become an addict.” (RO/V)

“They knew that if they told me “no drugs”, I would quite. They had to keep with something. They knew that a girl who doesn't do drugs wants her cut... She takes half and gives them half. If she does drugs, she gives them all the money. Because a girl, if she doesn't do drugs, wants her half... But when she does, she simply doesn't want her cut, she gives away everything she makes, and she makes more and more money, she is motivated... It's simple: they get a bigger cut... So this is their interest and their aim.” (RO/V)

- **control through blackmail for the payment of a debt**

“Yes, so she left me there. And she came back to Romania. I asked her why she could come back and I couldn't. She told me I had to stay there and pay my debt.” (RO/V)

Physical violence is still present in some cases, even if apparently diminished compared to other previous periods.

“So I practically ran away from home. She told me she would get me a job, but when I got there everything changed. I mean she changed, she forced me to do stuff, she beat me, starved me... She had everything in place there...” (RO/P)

“She broke a wooden broom stick on my head, my back, my hands. My wrists were shattered, I had swollen eyes, this kind of stuff...” (RO/P)

“After a few weeks he managed to sell me in Italy for 2000 Euro. Of course, once there, I was beaten, tortured, suffered... all kinds of unpleasant things. You can imagine what it's like to stay on the street at night in a short dress, with the snow up to your knees, to be in that period of the month and wash yourself with freezing-cold water in order to continue, because if you stop, they'll kill you. You keep thinking what should be done with this kind of people who force you to... These are not human beings...” (RO/V)

“I stayed in England for 4 months. For one month, I was held hostage, beaten and deprived of all my money.” (RO/V)

“I also suffered a shock. Kind of. A big one. The trauma... the beatings I endured were very painful.” (RO/V)

“I stayed in a room there. It was cold. I only took a bath once a week. I took a bath at a client's house, or, when I didn't go to one, I went to the bathroom in the house. „What are you doing in the bathroom, how long will you be, what are you doing there?” One time, I went in to die my hair, and she started beating me, bashed my head against the bathtub, punched me...” (RO/V)

Violence can be also experienced in direct contact with the lack of protection from the trafficker, leaving the women exposed to violence from buyers, from other traffickers etc. Sexual violence is also reported as frequent in the accounts of one victim interviewed.

“He took me, beat me, hit me over the head with the bag, hit me with the shoe... Sometimes I got to eat, sometimes hot. He took me out in the street to... And they were many other people... Until I met the person who attacked me, which left me with a trauma. He put a knife to my neck and beat me. Then, when I came back “what do you want now, how much do you want, go, put

*your make-up on and get out on the street again". (RO/V)*

“ *Because of the bad stuff I endured... I remember I even got pregnant once and had an abortion... Believe me, I still don't know who got me pregnant. Rapes were order of the day at that time. If I went to this guy and told him I'd been raped, he went "OK, go wash and move on, we have to make money..." (RO/V)*

Depending on the situation, in some cases physical and emotional violence were prevalent, while in others there were only threats unaccompanied by physical violence.

“ *She insulted me, told me bad words, she destroyed my self-esteem. I was the ugliest, the stupidest woman... I breathed air for nothing... That's how I felt. Like nobody." (RO/V)*

“ *He never hit me, but he threatened me. You know, you can see it from the gesture...I still think about it and get scared, because he has a lot of friends and..." (RO/V)*

When the traffickers are also the victim's partners, we can recognize many elements of the violent couple relationships (domestic violence) and the behavior patterns of the people with violent behavior (domestic aggressor). They can use abuse (manipulation, emotional blackmail) or severe physical, mental, sexual and economical violence (in the phase of exploitation) blackmail, physical violence, the alternation of violent behavior with special attention, financial constraint, excessive control.

“ *Something like this: we don't have money, but we have to earn a living somehow, and I want to be with you. But it would be better if you went on the street, nothing will happen to you. I'll be there and look after you. It's better this way, than if I bashed someone's head and went to jail." (RO/P)*

The element of violence or coercion is present in other situations also (when the traffickers are not the victims' lovers/partners) to keep the victim in exploitation (the alternation of violent behavior with special attention, financial constraint, excessive control, emotional manipulation or physical violence, blackmail, isolation).

During or prior to the sexual exploitation phase, a few of the victims also mentioned other types of exploitation experienced, such as labor exploitation, as well as proposals to participate in other criminal activities.

“ *Yes, I used to wake up in the morning... I took care of a little girl... It was the first time I worked in that house... She was two, not yet in kindergarten. I looked after her, fed her while her parents were at work, I cleaned the house, so I was also a maid, not just a nanny. When she went to kindergarten, I had a busier schedule. I had to take her to kindergarten in the morning, and bring her back at 4 in the afternoon. Before that, I had to clean the house. So I woke up very early and stayed very late, because her mother worked in the second shift and came back home at 10:15 at night." (RO/V)*

“ *I came home about twice a year. I asked to go home for the holidays and then on leave, during the summer. I worked many hours. If I asked for just one day of leave a week, they took it off my salary... It was very little... When I first went there, they gave me 300 Euro. Later, it went down, because his salary at work was lowered, so they gave me 150 Euro." (RO/V)*

“ *When I asked for a free day, he refused. Not even a Saturday or a Sunday. He started shouting. "If you want a free day, I'll take it off your salary, you don't work that much anyway." The little girl also used to come to my room. I couldn't refuse, the girl was little, and she'd gotten used to me. So I asked for just one day a week and he told me he'll take 25 Euro off my salary. I didn't want that, so I said OK, I'll work 24/7." (RO/V)*

“ *...I had been to Italy once before. With a boy I met... He was a thief there and he told me he needed a girl for this... He would help me quit drugs and prostitution, but I had to help him with this, and I would get a cut. But it was different... Yes, I had quit drugs, he helped me with that, but as far as prostitution, it was different. He'd told me I wouldn't have to do it anymore; I'd just*

*have to help him. Instead, he stopped stealing and made me practice prostitution.” (RO/V)*

In most cases, the exiting of the exploitation happened through the support of the law enforcement, while in one case a different type of Police interaction is mentioned.

“ *...The Police came banging on the door. There was a lot of noise. They told us to lift our arms, put us down and then took the girls and her sister. The girl with that man stayed there. The man wanted to run, but couldn't, the Police caught him, they punched him and handcuffed him. The girl told him to run, but he didn't make it...*” (RO/V)

“ *...Police came. Every night the Police followed us. In the morning, I don't know how they came; they just barged in and found us and another group working at the same club. They came and took us.*” (RO/V)

“ *At one point, I managed to run away from there and went to the first Italian Police car. Of course - I mean, not of course, that's what I say now: I had to stay half an hour and explain that I want to leave that place, to run away, that I'm scared... They thought I was joking and told me to go back to the street and do what I have to do...*” (RO/V)

In other cases, the exiting of the situation happened with the help of social services or the women ran away on their own, finding the appropriate moment, or through some level of indirect emotional support from their families.

“ *A girl was exploited on the street in Sweden. This helped her escape, because they had a lot of rooms. They noticed she was very young. They don't even need a court order or the intervention of child protection services. They just take her off street.*” (RO/P)

“ *She took advantage of the right moment. The traffickers also used drugs. At some point, they were too high to notice and she managed to escape.*” (RO/P)

“ *...I met a girl, actually, two Romanian sisters. They once saw me really drunk. It only lasted a minute. They asked me to go with them, I said yes, I was desperate, I didn't care about anything anymore, so I went. Then I looked for my mother, I knew her profile name on Facebook and I called her...*” (R/V)

“ *One day my Dad called me and told he heard I had been beaten. Somebody from our place told us I was being beaten. Dad called me and told me to come home, so then I came back home.*” (RO/V)

## 2.7 Consequences of trafficking

In many of the cases, consequences of the trafficking experience are very negative and deeply impact the lives of the women and girls who were subjected to it. Most survivors participating in the interviews mention the deterioration or termination of significant relationships after the trafficking situation was disclosed.

“ *...I only keep in touch with my mother. With dad... He is upset for... He's upset because of what I have done.*” (RO/V)

“ *Everything changed a lot, because the family is no longer with me. I lost my father. I speak to my mother from time to time, but she doesn't know exactly what happened... When I last talked to him, his woman took the phone and told me very bad things, so I talked back and then she hung up... When I called him to talk to him, he asked me... whether I was happy with what I had done... and he asked me where I was. I told him I was in Bucharest and he said ok, stay there, and hung up.*” (RO/V)

“ *Yes, things changed. There is a slight coldness. My parents suffered very much when I was ex-*

*ploited, they didn't expect me to run away from home. I was the good girl, the one who stayed in school, the one who had her responsibilities as a pupil and a child, and that was it. They never thought I could be lured into leaving home, so the relationship changed, there is a level of mistrust..." (RO/V)*

Other relationships were readjusted in a sense of the parent ensuring more parental control and paying more attention to the life of his daughter, which is not always beneficial and could have the opposite effect.

“ *If I tell my father I want to get out, he says no. Before it was different. He would let me go.*” (RO/V)

Besides changes in relationships, some of the interviewees also mention severe emotional imbalance, trauma, difficulties in the management of emotions, ambivalence, self-harm.

“ *No, but sometimes I lost my temper... I'm one of those who break things, cut my wrists, cry, scream, and punch the walls... Maybe now I say it lightly, but in those moments I really can't control myself, it's like I lose my mind, I don't know... And then I regret it.*” (RO/V)

“ *I've also tried to kill myself... But it passed. It was my brother, you know... He took me out of the hospital and I remembered what had happened and felt guilty, so I strangled myself with a rope. I got to the hospital in a very bad way. They stuck a catheter in me for about two hours and did five or six injections, perfusions and stuff. Then I recovered.*” (RO/V)

“ *I still can't sleep well. Sometimes I think about it and it... I can't sleep. Sleep is the biggest problem, amplified by stress, fear... and great anxiety.*” (RO/V)

“ *A nightmare. Looking back, I don't want this to happen again and I don't want it to happen to anyone. I just felt... like I was nothing. I didn't want to live, I felt useless, I really no longer cared about myself.*” (RO/V)

One interviewee mentioned as a direct result of trafficking a deformed perception concerning relationships with men and the appearance of several sexual disorders.

“ *Yes, I think deeply about many things, I go pretty far, but I don't know, I don't want to hurt anybody. But it's true... I hate them. This is why I hate men in general, because I had this trauma. I couldn't touch another man ever since. I don't know, I don't want to see them near me, I'd go mad.*” (RO/V)

Another crucial aspect mentioned is reflected by the awareness concerning the permanent risk of re-trafficking. This is a latent type of vulnerability that is always present and that needs effort, awareness and acceptance in order to gain control over it.

“ *I also went through a lot of bad, very bad things, but... Even though I'm not completely cured... These things exist and stay with me, but I keep on, as I am, I move on... I still make mistakes, believe me... People who don't know this, who only know that I've been through these situations... They often think that, if they see that I'm well dressed now (meaning clean) and I am no longer in the street and I managed to get out, they think that it's over... That now I'll be different, I'll be what I should have been from the start... This is impossible. This is a great inner battle, believe me... Not even my family understands this. They pity me, but they can't understand. Only people who still work in this field can...*” (RO/V)

## 2.8 Gender and trafficking for sexual exploitation

In the case of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the fact that women (both minors and majors) are overrepresented as victims and men as traffickers and clients (sexual service consumers) is incontestable. The majority of professional respondents have not encountered men victims of

sexual exploitation during their career or only met a few of them; in the case of boys, the fact that the phenomenon is so hidden and difficult to approach could also signify additional risks and vulnerabilities.

““ No, we haven't had such cases.” (RO/P)

““ I'm convinced there are cases of exploited boys. But we haven't discovered any” (RO/P)

““ We had only one case of male prostitution. He was exploited in Italy for the gay community. He was a gay adult, 27-28 years of age.” (RO/P)

In the early 90s in Romania, the “identikit” of the trafficker was clearly that of a man. Now there are more and more women involved, at all levels and during all phases of the trafficking: delivering information about possible victims, active implication in recruiting, complicity in the exploitation or even exploitation itself. The girls' and women's level of trust in other women is higher, appearing to be falsely based on a presumed feminine solidarity, according to which, no woman would subject another to aggression or sexual exploitation.

Besides this reflection on the roles women and men play in the phenomenon of trafficking, there are also specific contexts that entitle us to consider gender as a significant root cause of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Among those, several patterns could be mentioned:

#### **A. Social and community perceptions on women's sexuality and sexual violence.**

Most of the taboos in the community are still linked to sexuality and, even more so, to sexual violence. Stultification of the severity of the actions and consequences, blaming the victim, all have deep, historical, traditional roots. The traditional approach of sexuality as a “connective” action of interpersonal relationships which must occur within a marriage in order to be in the interest of society” was well represented in the Criminal Code, valid until the year 2000. According to the respective Criminal Code, there was a possibility that, after the rape, the victim will make their peace with the aggressor through marriage. “Such a solution is in full compliance with both the general interest of society and with the individual interest of the victim and of the possible child who is born after the rape and it offers the best guarantee against any relapses”, as the theoretical explanations of the Criminal Code of 1971 (Dongoroz et al., 1971, p. 339) state.

Since even the law saw rape as an excusable act, acquitting the rapist of any responsibility further offered the opportunity to commit the infraction in a continuous form, the victim not having the chance to request reckoning.

As far as we know, there are no studies that have observed the long term effects on the woman, the couple and the family that was established in such circumstances. The procedures, though, have been made part of the forms of resolving the “conflicts” between victim and aggressor.

““ We have situations in which the girls, after they had been freed from the hands of the traffickers and they are taken to court, after a while they marry the trafficker during the criminal trial. The defendant's entire family is nice to the girl in order to convince her to accept the marriage. They consider that this is the way to solve the whole problem. The purpose is clear. This way, the victim loses her credibility in court, the human trafficking cannot be proven (the element of force) and the victim stays in the hands of traffickers. And this is their aim.” (RO/P)

Concerning women's sexuality, strong messages are sent out to girls and young women concerning their bodies, the way they should preserve their virginity as an important asset and sometimes the most valuable thing that they have; the presumed loss of virginity often comes with symbolic violence to which not only the close family, but also the large community as a whole is entitled – the woman who lost her virginity is hopeless and without value. She is less and she should pay a price.

““ They used to say all sorts of things. That I'm going to the disco, that I went with this or that guy... I told them, and some of them beat me... She told me to go to the doctor. I went to the doctor and to the Police, too. I proved I was a virgin... All the time they'd say that... I do it for money, and... I was about 16... ” (RO/V)

“ Yes, I moved in with him. I stayed at his place for about a month, but then I told him I was going back home, I didn't want to stay there anymore. So I went back home. My older brother got mad, and asked me why I did it. He slapped me a few times and beat me and... I didn't tell him why, I didn't tell him the reason I left...” (RO/V)

“ My relatives accused me of being a whore, even before I started my sex life.” (RO/V)

The fear that girls could initiate their sexual life is also visible, in some communities, in the efforts the mothers or the families make in order to get them out of the house and married as soon as possible, this reducing the possibilities for the young women to shame their families and, eventually, to be rejected by potential male partners on the ground of no longer being virgins.

“ It was like... When my mother and my stepfather spilt up, I left, because he wanted me to get married. I wasn't even 16. He took me somewhere far from home, I didn't know anybody. I can't remember exactly where. I ran away and went to the Police, but they sent me back home by train. I lived at this neighbor I was telling you about, and she helped me very much. So I got to finish the 8th grade.” (RO/V)

“ My mother made me get a man. She wanted me to get married to an older man, but I didn't agree. I was 14. So I ran away from home. ” (RO/V)

Other times, the intention of protecting girls from sexual violence comes with the imposing of limitations that affect young girls' lives; gender discriminations practiced by parents are interpreted as responsible parental styles and gestures of protection.

“ Parents say that they want to prevent girls from having problems with boys. They are referring to sexual violence or... so that their girls are not considered “easy”. (RO/P)

“ Yes, there are situations in which the family forbids the girls to go to school. Especially if the classes are in the afternoon, if they have to return home after dark. There are parents, mothers, who say they will not let their girls be scorned”. (RO/P)

The difficulties fathers face in handling the maturation of teenage girls appear in many victims' life stories. Some professionals consider this is a period when the vulnerability to risky sexual behavior and/or sexual victimization is increased. In some of the cases described, the fathers warned their teenage daughters about the dangers men pose and, in some cases, reacted inappropriately to the encounter with the boyfriend. However, even in the cases where good intentions could be seen behind such acts of warning, the main focus remains the young woman's sexuality and virginity, which should be preserved and kept safe for the chosen man. What is underlined is virginity as a valuable asset and not the entrance in the world of relationships, the important of being prepared for the beginning of the sexual life, the dynamics of young romance etc.

“ No, they prepared me over time, when they saw that I was growing into a woman, I made myself look pretty, started meeting met boys, so... I brought my first boyfriend home and my father jokingly told him: “be careful, what you'll do to her, I'll do to you”. Dad likes to make jokes, but that was inappropriate.” (RO/V)

In some of the interviews, the focus on young women's sexuality is very evident and, in some cases, is presented by the survivors interviewed as very interiorized; some of them mention their perceptions prior to the sexual exploitation experiences, underlining important elements, such as the expectations that good girls, who do not start their sexual lives, will eventually find wonderful men and live happily ever after. The “normal” girl profile is very clearly drawn and, in this context, it is very difficult for girls and women who experience sexual violence and who are mirrored in an extraordinarily negative manner by their families and communities, to refrain from self-blame and, eventually, to process the experience of exploitation and heal.

“ I was a rather old fashioned girl. You know, “don't sleep with many men, only marry in a church”. I liked it this way. I didn't go to discos, I never liked to stand out from a crowd. When I made money, I didn't like to dress provocatively, I didn't want to get noticed, so... I always remained

*the same simple person. I didn't buy fancy dresses or go to clubs. No. I liked staying with my animals, cleaning up, so I didn't... I stayed with my family. Sometimes I'd go out for a cappuccino with a girlfriend or two. Otherwise, I'd stay home.” (RO/V)*

“ *Very shy, very shy... If a boy looked at me, I got embarrassed. If, if he gave me a kiss, I'd say it was a sin. I remember... ” (RO/V)*

“ *I was a normal girl. I went out with the girls, we chatted on Sundays or other holidays, I also went to church sometimes, to pray. But I stayed near the house. I never went too far, because I was afraid... ” (RO/V)*

“ *I always ran from boys, I don't know. I waited for the one, the boy that God chose for me... I wanted to meet my true love, I don't know... ” (RO/V)*

## **B. Perceptions on femininity and masculinity**

The interviews with the professionals contain references to the fact that sexual violence experienced by girls is significantly marking further life events, often being encountered in the life stories of sexual exploitation victims. These dynamics are closely linked to gender representation, femininity, masculinity and the roles associated with these in the community.

The model of woman promoted in society, with a negative effect on the girls' perspectives, is the one connected with beauty, sexual behavior, seduction of men, and culminating with the “successful” marriage - with an “influential” man, with material possibilities.

“ *The girls who return to “business” after a human trafficking episode expect to be rescued by the clients. They are under the impression that the only chance to safely escape prostitution is by finding a “good” husband. (...) There are well known and widely advertised examples of such success.”. (RO/V)*

Success conditioned by the existence of an appealing body and sexualized behavior, treating the feminine body as an instrument are issues intensely spread in the Romanian mass-media.

“ *What are we talking about? Several months ago, when the movie “Youth” won at the Cannes festival, the one which Mădălina Ghenea played, for days in a row the news only reported about her naked body when she enters a pool next to two geezers. After that, the two actors who are sure enough well known are on the red carpet. Not only do the teenagers see all of this, but this also seems to transmit: if you want to be famous, this is the way to do it.” (RO/P)*

“ *I dread to think about it... If you don't have any photos on Facebook, you don't exist and nobody gives a damn about you. You're not popular, you don't exist. (...) If you're in high school, you must be a big diva (...) and post the most indecent photos in order to get as many likes as possible.” (RO/P)*

However, young women and girls find themselves at the intersection of clashing influences: on one side, they are encouraged to be sexual and appealing and enter successful marriages, on the other side they are socially sanctioned and shamed for the accomplishment of these exact things. The situation for women in the Romanian society continues to be difficult. The “emancipated” women are also apparently accepted, with the condition that they do not abandon their traditional roles. These difficulties are vividly perceived by some of the women interviewed, for them marriage translating into giving up parts of your identity, opportunities and choices.

“ *Perhaps it is also our fault, as parents. In order to raise girls: you can play both football and ballet, you can be whatever you want, BUT get good grades, be nice, wear skirts etc. Just like the mothers, as a matter of fact. Be good at your job, sometimes at two jobs, be a good mother who plays, studies with the child, who has time and patience with him. But we also want the house to be clean and to receive guests with cookies. And as for women? We do not have either time or energy left. I think we do not concern ourselves with our healthy femininity enough. Not only our emotional relationships, but also our sexual lives with our partner need to be properly valued.*

*This is the first thing that, as I see it, women “sacrifice”. As if they do not have sexual needs, like men do. In my opinion, these roles must change together, or in parallel, in order to maintain balance between partners.” (RO/P)*

“ *It’s not really a great idea to get married. When you get married, you become a woman, and that’s when the big hardships begin. You don’t finish school, or skip school, and you don’t get to become someone in life. It’s very difficult. ” (RO/V)*

Femininity is also associated with submission, integration of gender roles, kindness and a deeper understanding of human relationships and motivation. In these contexts, many times women find themselves pressured to understand, accept, and forgive.

“ *I always did what she told me to, I cleaned the household, so I was a good girl... ” (RO/V)*

“ *I can’t say that we are more naive, but, I don’t know, probably we have more soul. My problem is that I got there because I trusted the wrong person. That was my problem; I didn’t even think it through. Maybe some girls get there out of fear, or maybe they feel lonely. It can also happen to boys. I don’t know whether we have a special problem or not. It depends on the situation. ” (RO/V)*

“ *I don’t know, we’re probably more sensitive, more profound, as women. Men are more negligent, they don’t really care about stuff. But we feel more, that’s just what I think. I was never in a man’s skin, but I analyzed different behaviors and I think I’m right. They are more careless. They take too much for granted, but we are more aware. ” (RO/V)*

Masculinity is associated with material wellbeing, with power and with virility, all of which having a facilitating effect to becoming sexual services consumers or sexual exploiters.

“ *Boys are encouraged to have multiple partners in their lifetime. The number of girlfriends represents an index of masculinity, whereas girls are appreciated if they are admired, if they have many fans/followers on FB but they must be faithful and must only have “serious” relationships.” (RO/P)*

“ *Yes, there are men who behave like the kindest people in the world, until they catch you in their trap. But there are also boys that pour their soul out for you, never leave you and love you more every day. However, some cannot live without sex, and... I’m not a fan of men. To me... Sex in relationships is less important to me than the soul and what the man thinks. I don’t like men who are always looking for sex, I think this is the wrong way to live. ” (RO/V)*

This differentiated treatment for boys and girls is still present in many families, including the families with a high socio-economical and educational statute, according to many experts. The “social value” of boys seems to be higher. Both experts and victims tell stories about victims in connection with parent appreciation being “won” or “lost” through genes.

“ *My mother wished I had been a boy. She picked out a name, only one, a boy name. She was very disappointed when I was born a girl. I have two older sisters. My grandmother also told me that I was refused from the moment I was born. Because I was not born what I should have been born. And that was it... Nothing I did was right. Only arguments, beatings and work. A lot of work. It was as if I was Cinderella from the story... without the happy ending.” (RO/V)*

In some cases, the different treatment of women and men can also be perceived trans-generationally, in the relationships parents have with their own parents or other family members, which are obviously marked by gender differences, usually expressed in the overvaluing of male family members and undervaluing of women family members, disguised as normality or as the result of some very clear genetic traits.

“ *My mother had a brother. Her father treated them differently. “He’s my son, so he’s mine, but I don’t care about you”. Even today I see the same behavior... ” (RO/V)*

“ Her mother treats them differently, too. She praises him, because he’s a man. She’s probably afraid of him. I mean, he did things to her, and he’s also got tattoos... She is probably scared of him, so she treats him and my mother differently. ” (RO/V)

“ I remember, every time my father took us there, she would give him three plates of food. She gave us very little food, and gave him much more. She said he was a man and men need to eat more, because they are the head of the family. I kept looking and thinking “yes, but we are a family, we are his children, we should eat the same amount of food, why would she give him more, why is he more special”... ” (RO/V)

Different gender roles and different patterns of interaction between women and men are also easily observed in some families, which makes it even easier for the young girls and young women exposed to these patterns repeatedly to integrate them at a profound level, in the absence of more egalitarian or gender balanced examples.

“ My mother always did everything to please this man. She always cooked for him, laid the table, and cleared the dishes away, and so on. There were days when he wouldn’t even speak to her at the table. So, my mother started drinking. Now, she has an alcohol problem. ” (RO/V)

“ The woman is always the main support in the house. Men might say they’re not, but they are...” (RO/V)

“ In our family, they said the woman should be the foundation of the household. She had to respect her husband, and the children. But this was not the case. In our family, she was different; I don’t know how to explain it so that you can understand. She had lived in a different environment. I found out when I grew up that she had six sisters and her father was extremely violent. She didn’t tell me about this herself. One of her sisters told me that once, when she got home too late, their father beat her with the whip and took her to the shed. It was very... So, my mother lived in an abnormal environment, and she learned the wrong lesson from what had happened to her. ” (RO/V)

One of the respondents points out that gender discrimination appears even in the exploitation of girls who are trafficked. The majority of these girls are also simultaneously exploited through labor.

“ The girls presented the situation thus: I was also exploited through labor. Household labor. Cleaning, washing, tidying up the trafficker’s house, taking care of his and his concubine’s baby. Where, in someone’s contract, can it be stated that they also have to wash the boss’ dirty socks?”(RO/P)

There were also respondents who did not consider that the human trafficking phenomenon should be approached from a gender related point of view. In their opinion, the difference in approaching girls/women and boys/men does not exist, nor in the way they are treated in society, ways that have an impact on the phenomenon.

“ No, I do not believe that it has anything to do with the way girls and boys are educated. Or that some or other are favored or discriminated. At least not on the gender criteria.” (RO/P)

## 2.9 Groups most at risk

When we analyze the groups who are “most at risk”, we actually refer to the specific situations in which multiple vulnerability factors are present. Their cumulated effect exponentially raises the risk for the members of these groups to be exploited and/or trafficked with the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The results of this research shows that the category of those most at risk includes people of Roma ethnicity, those with mental health issues, homeless people, people raised in the child care system, people with former experiences of violence (especially if they are of a sexual nature or of trafficking). Vulnerability is even greater if these persons are also minors.

**Homeless children** are the ones who face multiple and complex problems. Because of this reason, they can become delinquents by committing robberies, thefts or drug dealing. The risk of becoming victims of abuse is high (performed both by other homeless children and by people who use them in illegal activities, but also by the community or, often, the authorities). They are more exposed to all types of exploitation, often being also involved in infantile pornography. The majority of children performs hard work, in very difficult conditions. Apart from being sexually exploited, we see homeless children washing cars, selling newspapers or car fresheners on the street, loading and unloading cargo, and collecting waste.

**People with disabilities**, whether they are minors or majors, are recruited with promises of work and are exploited through beggary or sexual exploitation in the hardest conditions, locally and abroad. Their vulnerability is higher due to their limited possibilities to defend themselves, the faulty system and, due to the society perceives disability, this also being reflected in the services and opportunities provided, the limited chances of success in life.

**Young people raised within the childcare system** are considered vulnerable, generally having a complex history of personal, family and social problems, starting on the path to earning one’s autonomy without the proper preparation. The protection system for the moment when a young person is leaving the system is very defective. These young people have much fewer human and economical assets than other people of the same age and they generally look for possibilities abroad.

**Young men and women from marginalized communities who live in poverty and young people of Roma ethnicity** constitute another category with a high level of risk regarding exploitation and victimization through human trafficking. The high levels of discrimination against members of these communities expose them to additional risks.

“*Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are regarded as vulnerable on trafficking. They are sometimes stigmatized in formal educational environments, while perceiving from their family the message that they need to engage prematurely to obtain financial resources. They abandon school and in the absence of knowledge, they employ in hope of a great income, without being aware of the dangers they are exposed to.*” (RO/P)

Extreme poverty, social exclusion, the low level of education, institutionalization, abuse (verbal, physical, sexual) within the family, excessive alcohol consumption and drug abuse, implication in prostitution are described to be the most significant elements. Excessive risk taking, trusting strangers appear, according to some professionals working in the field, on the base of desperation caused by the situations already experienced, at home or in other contexts.

The children from poor families and marginalized communities prematurely assume responsibility. They are involved in labor (day laborer or within the household, in taking care of the younger or the older members of the family) from the ages of 9 or 10, they are treated as adults who must contribute to the family budget. As teenagers, it is characteristic for them to be considered adults. The boys are allowed to bring “a woman” home, who must also work or help around the household, or the boys are allowed to live separately, with the woman and must be capable of maintaining her. In the case of girls, as teenagers they must find a man and move out of their parents’ house. Therefore, boys are socialized from an early age, in order to become financially independent as soon as possible and the girls must move out of their parents’ house, entering a marital relationship or, most often, cohabitation.

“ Girls aged 12-13 start to “get married”. Boys, too, from about 14 years old. It sounds strange, but now I’m beginning to understand this grants them some kind of social safety (...). Nobody will pick on me, I’m a serious woman, I have a husband” (RO/P)

It is an already well-known fact that in the marginalized communities with multiple problems of interpersonal violence (in and outside the family), there is an increased frequency of delinquent behavior.

A community with very limited resources also represents a context favorable for usury. The poor families turn to usurers and, if the family does not manage to return the borrowed money with the interest payment, the younger members of the family are often forced to obtain the necessary money. In the case of girls, that would also mean entering prostitution and, in the case of boys, involvement in committing different infractions.

In this context we come across girls and/or women who are convinced that their only option for survival is prostitution.

“ The girls who, from a very young age, see nothing but the fact that they and other women in the communities are being used. They are very easy to convince that this is their only value.” (RO/P)

**Persons/children with victimization experiences** (previous to trafficking). It is known that the effects of a situation of abuse are more severe if (among others), the duration of the abuse/exploitation had been longer and the recovery from trauma is negatively influenced by the indifferent attitude or that of rejection and blaming the victim (Roth M and collab., 2008, Herman, 2014 and many more). Often, the protection system does not reach the children who live in environments dominated by abuse, negligence and poverty and where education is neglected. This factor greatly increases the risk of victimization for these children.

“ She’s been to Germany, too. Sweden isn’t the only country where she was exploited. She was also exploited in Romania (...). She was 16 (...). There was no one to help her when she needed it, so she became an introvert, and now it is too late.” (RO/P)

The deficiencies or lack of involvement from the specialized services and from the professionals trained accordingly, the persistence of risk factors (including the individual ones) that have created the auspicious context for trafficking keep the victims in a constant state of vulnerability. If the victims return or remain in the entourage from which they had been trafficked, the recruiters have a sure way of contacting and finding a way to bring them back into their reach.

Another category on the list of groups most at risk is the one regarding the **undocumented immigrants**. They are considered vulnerable firstly due to their lack of official papers, which can be personal papers – birth certificate, ID – or travel papers, such as passport or visa, residence and work permit, but also due to their frequent involvement in illegal actions (illegally crossing the border, illegal residence within a country), which makes them easy targets to abuse and blackmail.

## 2.10 Descriptions of buyers

The least amount of information given by the professionals was regarding the solicitors of sexual services; very few had any knowledge about them, other than gender and demographic characteristics.

The buyers, based on the respondents' experiences, are in their vast majority men. Some of the respondents had never even heard of and cannot imagine female buyers.

“ To be honest, I cannot imagine a woman picking up the phone and ordering sexual services. Giving details, having preferences for certain types of services and ordering them. No, I do not believe this exists here. At least, I never heard of such a thing and I cannot imagine.” (RO/P)

“ We only had one case with a boy who had women clients (...). It was not officially confirmed, but most of the time he was accompanied by older ladies, who drove him around. So it was quite obvious.” (RO/P)

The ones who seek services from human trafficking victims do not seem to be different from the buyers of sexual services in general. They are described by both the professionals and the victims as men with or without a family, from all age groups, social classes and education etc.

“ ...Intellectuals also came there. Like lawyers and other well-read men, and I wondered, why do these people come to this type of women? I thought that maybe they had no woman to wait for them at home. ” (RO/V)

“ They didn't kiss me on the mouth. They were kind and polite. I don't know their age. 40, 50, 60, something like that. Some were singles, other not. Yes. Some just worked in Bucharest, and their wives were at home. ” (RO/V)

Both professionals and victims reflect on the possible motivations of men who solicit these services, relating these practices first of all with commodity, due to the availability of the girls, with their incapacity to express their sexual needs to their regular partners or with their inability to develop healthy relationships with available women.

“ They do not have to make the smallest effort, as compared to dating, where they would have to invest time, attention, energy etc, until they reach the point of having a sexual relationship. Even if they only want a romantic affair.” (RO/P)

“ Turning to sexual services protects you from failure. It is almost impossible not to find a girl you like. And there is no risk of being rejected. None of them will ever tell you that you are unlikable or that she doesn't like you”. (RO/P)

“ This has to do with their psyche... There are men who really like women. Some men... I don't understand, they have their women at home, but they come here and spent money and inevitably expose themselves to diseases. Really, most my clients were married, with a wedding ring. Their wives would call them while they were with me, they'd answer yes, I'm with a friend, I'm coming home in ten minutes. This... I wouldn't accept this, I'd send them a message. Behind these beautiful women there are pimps, and they shouldn't give them money. This is my message. The girls look happy, but it his just a facade. After work, they are severely abused. ” (RO/V)

“ Some men come to us because there are things they wouldn't do at home with their wives. ” (RO/V)

However, in many cases the women interviewed are unsuccessful in their effort to understand the motivations behind the clients' behaviors and reflect more on their lack of empathy and interest in the quality of human being of the person in front of them.

“ I don't even know I have too many words, except hatred, disgust and... I don't know, they are careless, they only think about themselves... Maybe that person... I don't know, if I were a man, I couldn't do that. That's how I am, I always think first about the ones near me, and then about me. I think this is why I suffered so much. ” (RO/V)

“To...I don't know, just to make themselves feel good, only them. I think this is the reason. They want to blow off steam. ” (RO/V)

“...All they knew was that they were paying, so if they were paying they were the masters and they gave the orders, but it's not like that. I was amazed by their behavior. They were human, but the person in front of them was a robot. They just had to satisfy their needs with that robot and they didn't... I really was shocked and stunned by what they... ” (RO/V)

“If I were the men who come there, I'd stay home with my family... Better there, than in a club with working girls. You don't know whether or not we do this willingly. Moreover, when you know you have a family and kids at home, how can you come to a club...” (RO/V)

“Once, I even tried, I forced myself to think that they are doing this... because this is what they see. If this is what they see and what is offered to them, why wouldn't they accept? You get tempted, especially when you see a naked woman... But I always had murderous thoughts... I mean, I hated every one of them, I didn't have the time or the patience, to think that they want something else, or... I truly hated them, I wished they never existed, I wished no man existed in this world anymore... I wanted to die right that second... ” (RO/V)

“I don't agree with this method, I mean paying a woman for certain services. I don't agree as long as they have a woman at home. And I don't agree because many come and don't know which to choose, and the girls don't know what he'll ask them to do. Because there are many risks. ” (RO/V)

“Without clients, there would be no market and... The more the clients, the more the exploited prostitutes. And there are always more. Clients keep this thing going, they are to blame for everything. ” (RO/V)

Many of the victims interviewed describe situations in which the requests of clients were either perverse or risky, putting them in uncomfortable situations that they could not refuse or endangering their health and wellbeing.

“...there was a client who... We had to do things we didn't want to do, for money, I mean... This client, he did this with me and with other girls: he just laid over them and it looked like he was suffocating them, it was very strange. There were many crazy people...” (RO/V)

“Yes. Some do it without a condom and they could... The other girls don't want to do it, but they do. One of them may be sick or could get sick, so they'd be better off with their families, not there doing...” (RO/V)

“They are sick. I was subjected to slavery, without being asked. I was just locked inside the house, beaten for 10 hours and received no money. Electric shocks, fetishes... So they are sick... He put hooks on me, all sorts of stuff on my back, my breasts... I didn't like it, it hurt...” (RO/V)

“One time, a client came to me and told me “you have to make me the strongest injection possible”. There are girls who do this. He wants it to hurt very much. I told him I don't do this type of thing. I don't know, you could be allergic and go into shock. I can't risk my life and have you die in front of me... Yes, an injection. ” (RO/V)

Some of the respondents, in a very pragmatic and cynical manner, also pointed out that among the people who have “special” preferences are many times the sexual tourists, the ones who come from abroad because they feel safer to fulfill their requests in Romania.

“The foreigners come with all kinds of cravings. And they ruin the market in Romania, if I may say so. This way, even boys will start appearing on the market. This is how I see the future of this phenomenon, this is going to happen, there is going to be more of them and stranger” (RO/P)

Other women mention different types of abuse they were subjected to by the clients, ranging from violence to accusations and threats that deeply affect women who are already in a very vulnerable situation.

“ There were aggressive persons. They think they have the right. That shocked me the most. By paying, they think they have all the rights. Often they would pull your hair. That’s what made them feel good, so they had the right to do it... Many of them took your money back and beat you. ” (RO/V)

“ Yes, I went through this, but... Many tried... I won’t give you the money, but do it, or else I’ll beat you. But, once I got the money, I never gave them back... It only happened to me once, when I was starting out, but after that I know how to handle them. ” (RO/V)

“ Many things can happen. I heard that in England, at the place where I stayed, a girl was killed... And not only there. I also heard ugly stories from Romania... ” (RO/V)

“ There were old men and young men. There were several cases when... Crazy people. I’m not the only one that went through this... Where I worked, we had security. If something happened, we pressed the panic button and they’d come in 2-3 minutes. One time, a client who went in with me told me he’d lost his wallet. God, I was crying and shaking. The girls told me to calm down, that he’s done this before, but I didn’t believe it, or half-believed it. But they knew him as an old client who came before. The boy called to apologize, said he didn’t find the wallet. But I was so stressed and cried over nothing. There was a lot of stress. ” (RO/V)

“ The only way I defended myself, so that man wouldn’t kill me, was to bend down for a sip of water. Then I kicked with my foot. I tried to run, but he punched me and I lost consciousness. ” (RO/V)

“ This guy told me to go some place. So I followed him. He grabbed me by the throat and took my bag, my money, everything. ” (RO/V)

“ ...I’ve had clients who beat me, I got cut on my face, this kind of stuff. I actually risked my life for 2 cents that weren’t even all mine. It’s not worth it. ” (RO/V)

Some of the women interviewed also describe the connections and bonds that were created with some of the clients, especially with those showing empathy for their situation, the ambivalence in these relationships and the fact that having the interest of men sometimes functioned as validation, as fulfilling some previously unmet needs and feeling chosen and important.

“ ...I was happy that people liked me. That I was being chosen and admired. On the other hand, I don’t consider the guys who come to these women as real people. Real men. ” (RO/V)

“ ...There was this one man, I went to his place and was along with him, and he was using drugs. But he never wanted to hurt me. I stayed for the two hours he had paid, and then he paid for another hour. I talked to him, trying to understand what he was saying. He asked me if I was working for somebody. I told him I worked alone. Just for myself. I was ashamed to tell him there was somebody else behind it. So he asked me, why don’t you go, leave, one day someone will put a gun to your head. I thanked him, I didn’t know how to explain, but I told him I was on my own and I didn’t work for anyone. The man told me, you’re beautiful, anything can happen. ” (RO/V)

“ No, just this boy. I got along really well with him. Sometimes I’d go to him and wouldn’t do anything. Without her knowledge. I got along very well with that man. ” (RO/V)

“ In my case, many clients saw me bruised and asked me what had happened. They were... They told me I was beautiful and delicate and didn’t understand why I was doing this. They returned to me many times to try to talk to me, they were the ones giving me a massage... And I talked. This Italian guy told me, God, I have a daughter who looks like you. You don’t have to be here, this is not where you belong, I don’t see you doing this, you should be home, in college, making a future. This is no future for you, it’s temporary... ” (RO/V)

However, there is little emphasis on the clients’ drives, responsibilities and participation in trafficking. In this context, the client is the most protected and anonymous actor in the phenomenon of trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation.

## 2.11 Interventions addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation

### Prevention activities

In recent years, many informational and prevention programs were carried out at both national and local levels.

“ Every year we carry out at least two national prevention and information campaigns, and many more at local level (...), in both rural and urban environments.” (RO/P)

The programs presented by professionals are usually focused around three vulnerability elements: the potential victims' lack of information, the inadequate family and community relationships and poverty, including the lack of decent living conditions as well.

The majority of the activities described by interviewees had teenagers as main target and beneficiaries: informational sessions were undertaken in schools, using presentations, fliers, posters and situational games, as well as educational and informational films. In carrying the information through, TV advertisements, blogs and informational sites were created, involving well known persons as speakers, many times personalities that are familiar and important for teenagers.

The effect of these efforts is visible at the level of different communities: more and more people within the wider community now have information about this phenomenon.

As regards prevention, some of the professionals interviewed were optimistic and brought in ideas for improvement and development. Others expressed their reservations concerning the real impact of the informational campaigns, considering the intervention may change the knowledge, yet it is not enough to change attitudes and behaviors:

“ After you talk and interact with them, eventually they'll say: OK, I understood everything you said, but I'd still go with X, even though he's a foreigner and the offer is vague. I'll manage.” (RO/P)

However, permanent adaptation of information and prevention strategies to the changes of the phenomenon is consciously monitored by the majority of the interviewees. According to the professionals interviewed, the actions increasingly focus on boosting the youngsters' abilities in developing balanced relationships, as well as recognizing and managing situations that may result in exploitation or abuse.

“ We carry out many activities targeted at teenage girls. We work a lot on topics such as relationships and love.” (RO/P)

Concerning the prevention activities that should be carried on in order to diminish the risk for more and more girls and women to become victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, several of the victims interviewed stressed out the fact that allowing time to pass and allowing yourself to get to know the relation better before making a crucial decision could save you from being lied to and, eventually, used and abused.

“ To always be careful who they talk to. Don't trust someone unless they know them well, or get to know them better, find out who they hang out with or who their friends are, meet their family before doing something stupid or saying "let's leave somewhere... Never make the decision before getting to know the person.” (RO/V)

“ ...Girls who want to work abroad must be very careful who they get involved with when leaving. It's not as easy as it seems. When you get there, everything will be totally different and it will be very hard to overcome the problems unless you are a strong woman. They may never manage to get out of... some organization that keeps them captive. Girls should be very careful.” (RO/V)

Some prevention activities should, according to the victims interviewed, be directed towards clients, so that the clients are able to have accurate information about trafficking for sexual exploitation, about the situation of the women and girls involved and about the costs evolving from the exploitation.

“ They don’t have a soul. I already said I would never do this... They should think twice before going there, making this step... We all have a soul and we sell, we suffer, we go through those moments. We can’t dream or... Our dreams were never happy from any point of view... That’s about it.” (RO/V)

“ The clients...should not be bad. They should not beat the woman. If she doesn’t want to do something, they should not force her.” (RO/V)

“ Clients should not be so selfish and think only about themselves. Even if you have money, you can’t buy anything... OK, so they pay, but maybe the girl feels forced to do this. Clients should think this is not the best way... It’s one of the worst ways to make a girl do... this. Money is constraining, but still, you can’t just buy anything with it... They should think that maybe that girl did it mechanically. Maybe she despises that client, maybe she was traumatized by him. Maybe he destroyed somebody’s life. Clients should think about this... Maybe then they’ll stop doing this...” (RO/V)

“ I tried to be as careless as possible. I thought, well, they paid me, I’ll get through it, I need the money. But... It’s not... Even if he paid, that doesn’t give him the right. I don’t have to get so humiliated just for money...” (RO/V)

In several of the victims’ accounts of the clients, a recurrent topic is the concern for the families of clients back home, which are lied to and, through the client using sexual services, cheated on and eventually subjected and exposed to different risks, from getting sexually transmissible diseases to conflict and separation.

“ Yes, my advice would be for them to stop resorting to this thing, especially when they have somebody home. Think about the one they have home, because... that person loves them, right? It’s really not worth it. This can lead to a separation, the destruction of a family. If they have children, they may be left without their mother or their father. So this could end in tragedy, all because of one such adventure...” (RO/V)

The love of the family and their unconditional support is mentioned as one key-ingredient for the prevention of sexual exploitation and for the diminishing of risks and vulnerabilities, as well as for the prevention of re-victimization. When families are supportive and present, when they ask real questions and await real answers, when they are able to resist hardship and painful moments and still provide a containment and stability role for the young girl or young woman, the potentiality of trafficking to occur is much smaller.

“ Be closer to them, talk to them, and ask them questions. A girl may or not have a boyfriend, but maybe she doesn’t want to tell her parent. These things happen.” (RO/V)

“ Be very attentive to the children. Give them advice, tell them what’s right and wrong, stand by them no matter what, even if they are going through difficult times, when they didn’t want something to happen and... No matter what that is, parents should think that it’s about their child. They should boost her spirits and not let her fall...” (RO/V)

“ Be close to them, don’t drift apart. Keep in touch with them even when they’re away, just like my mother does now. We get closer to one another every day; we have more and more things to talk about. This way, I regain my self-confidence, and she regains her trust in me... Keep in touch and tell your children you love them. It matters... And, most importantly, if you parents stand beside your children, give them the hug I never had...” (RO/V)

“ Help them and support them. Don’t turn your back on them, and, no matter how painful the truth can be, deal with it and take it for what it is...” (RO/V)

Sometimes the parents not accepting the young woman’s sacrifice in order to provide for the entire family could be an important change factor; in that situation, the unprepared daughter would feel like she is also needed at home, she is part of the family system and her parents want her safe.

“ I don't know... I'd tell parents to get more involved in the life of their child, to stand beside them... I don't want to exaggerate, I mean, you shouldn't be overprotective, but... Especially with girls, you have to be their mother as well as their friend: "Tell me, dear, what's bothering you? Where, why do you want to leave the country? No, stay a little while more"... They have to be involved and explain things to them... "I know you want a better life for yourself and for us". This is exactly what happened to me, I had to leave because of our misfortune, so I thought I'd offer the family better living conditions, because you can't get by working here, for a few pennies. I said yes and I convinced my father, my grandma, everyone. I told them we'd all have a better life... But it's not OK to leave your own child. They have to know they can rely on you..." (RO/V)

Other victims mention the impact that unfulfilled needs from the early childhood to teenage years had on their development; the children should not be forgotten, irrespectively of the challenges the family goes through. Feeling invisible and lost, the child would not always be able to grow up and develop in a healthy manner; moreover, the child might grow anxious, dependent and used to being neglected and abused. When this happens, it is very hard for children in those situations not to develop different degrees and forms of traumatic attachments and not to enter new relationships in which they might be once more neglected or abused. In constant need of love, the young woman or girl could be easily manipulated with the promise of being loved, of being accepted, of connecting with another human being who is there for her, as the parental figures were not in the past.

“ Today, most young people... I don't know how to put it... Their biggest problem is the love of the family... Most of the times, families forget to take care of the child. Some get involved, but not as much as they should. Even though they have their own problems, they should remember how they were when they were young. They remember how they were. I don't want to blame anybody; I just want them to understand. Very many families offer love as long as they have money. The moment they start having money problems (whether it's the mother, the father, the grandmother - anyone who raises these children), they panic, leave the country, or become overwhelmed with the problems in the household, with the relatives, or health problems. And they forget to talk to these children, whether they are small, or older. Negligence is negligence." (RO/V)

Another important issue for the parents or any other helpers (professionals providing assistance to victims of trafficking, for instance) is to be predictable, to refrain from deserting the child or adult who makes repeated mistakes. Repeated mistakes could also be symbolically used as a form of testing the grounds and assessing if the person in front of you is to be trusted or not, is reliable or not, is the one who abandons and rejects the child, reinforcing the child's experience that he is unwanted and undeserving or if, on the contrary, the person is welcoming, consistent and strong enough to provide containment and healthy limits for the child or abused adult even when he/she is at his/her worst.

“ To stand beside a person means to have patience with them. If today your child makes a mistake, and tomorrow they go to somebody and talk bad things about you as a parent or as a friend, but then come back to you, even though they have done you wrong, you should continue to help them. If you play the blame game, point your finger at them and tell them "I can't help you anymore, look what you've become, you don't want to get on the right track", then they end up where they came from. But this happens. I have seen it." (RO/V)

“ They are very sensitive. That child, if s/he doesn't have love at home, tries to find it from somebody else. If that person offers just momentary kindness, and then leaves them, it's not right... I said it earlier. It doesn't help to just go and give away clothes, food, drinks, or condoms on the street. You must develop some long-term communication with that person. You must talk to them, try to help them..." (RO/V)

“ ...That kid or teenager is very sensitive to these things. He must find a way to move on. But he is very sensitive because, while he thinks whether he'll have anything to eat or a place to sleep, he also pays great attention to what those around think about him." (RO/V)

“ Children need love, support and understanding. Let me give you an example. I stole something, broke something, beat or killed someone, went to prison. And I come to you for help. You help me, give me a warm meal, some money, I don't know, you give me advice. I leave and, at a certain point, I realize that you either forgot about me, or just can't do this all the time. There are many children in this situation. You can't do the same thing every day. So I continue to do bad things, because that's all I know, that's what society offered me. I come to you a second time, and you help me again. But the third time, you say “I don't want to help you anymore. Please leave”. What will I do in this situation, as a young person in need of help? What could I do? If you want to help a child, you shouldn't just give them money and say “take it, sweetie, I understand you”... This isn't the right thing to do. It's true, many young people today have to be understood, because they are smokers or drug addicts or got used to stealing and begging. They must be understood; because that's the only thing they know... Most people are very judgmental. I discovered this the hard way. Children are judged. People don't laugh at you, they don't say “look at that stupid orphan, he stayed in a foster home”. But they judge you and say “look, he's a thief, he'll do this for the rest of his life”... That's what people say these days, instead of helping. These kids must be understood, they must be helped all the way. Even if you become desperate and can't think of anything else to do, don't drive that person away. Even if they come and put a knife to your neck, or hurt you, although you have helped them for years on end and gave all you could to them, don't drive them away. This way, they'll understand. Because they don't have a family, or come from a broken home, they won't understand, at first. In the beginning, when they go and ask somebody for help, they will first try to figure out how things stand. It's not that they are testing that person, but they'll try to figure that person out. They are afraid, because of what they went through before. They won't trust that person for some time, and that person must understand that. You can't just offer somebody some candy, a warm meal or a cigarette, shed a tear, tell them you understand them and walk away... Honestly, there are many people who do cry, because they remember or think about their own situation when they listen to disabled children or children with problems. But then, they just walk away and go about their business. Nobody's saying you should cry all the time, but you have to talk about issues, you have to know what to do in a situation of crisis. If you ask the usual questions, you might as well go home. Ask yourself how you can help, would you give them a blanket, a sandwich, as they do today. Or you may hire them for a few hours a day and see that things are not going the way they should. Apart from all this, how should we look at the problem, so that children don't get into this kind of trouble? Maybe you don't know that child comes from a broken family and needs help. You see him on the street, but you don't go to him. There's no conversation going on that could make him stop. But if you show understanding, love, and kindness, that kid will see it and cherish it and he'll think “look, this person understood me, in spite of what I am and what I did. I'll go to that person, because I know they understand me, don't judge me, don't point their fingers at me and don't call me names.” (RO/V)

Victims also mentioned the result of some prevention activities that included them as active speakers. While not only the “sad” stories should be communicated, it is also very important that parents and other important figures do not refuse to perceive the reality, with all the existing risks.

“ I really had a hard life ever since I was a child. I don't think it would help talking about it, because it's all sad stories. I once went to an event and told people about trafficking in human beings, and I gave away fliers and stuff. A lady told me “these are all sad stories, I don't want to hear them anymore”. It's true, the stories are sad, but they should somehow be combined with the good ones. Yes, the causes are poverty and lack of communication in the family. If the families, the parents have problems, the children end up making mistakes. Things go from bad to worse and many of them are no longer able to do the right thing.” (RO/V)

In implementing prevention activities, an important aspect, stressed out by one of the victims interviewed, is the authenticity and care for the wellbeing of the person in front of you, of the campaign beneficiaries. Using simple, yet inefficient tools, such as fliers and communicating the same message to a multitude of teenagers does not seem to meet the real objectives of preventions. Campaigns should

be honest, adapted and trustful, as the challenges and vulnerabilities young women face cannot be balanced out through a piece of paper with information.

“ Girls in the country work in the field, they don't have beauty creams like the first in town. When a boy comes and tells you “I love you just the way you are, you are beautiful to me anyway, don't mind the other, they are just envious, come with me and everything will be fine”... There must be discussions with girls in the country on this topic. Not the kind where you sit at an office with a row of girls and boys in front of you. Even if you have just one day, or just three hours to stay with that child, try to make them... Play a short movie, show them something real, show them that life isn't how they think it is. Even if you spend a whole day, show them proof, real things. Don't just give them fliers. Fliers end up in the first trash bin. Then they will still go and do what they want, for a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of soda. You must try and do things so that children really become aware of the problems. Don't just give them fliers and condoms. These young people must be treated with understanding and must be made aware that yes, they can go to an association or a center, even if they are ashamed. They must be convinced that if they go there, they will not be judged and everything they say will be confidential... There are many problems...” (RO/V)

### Services provided to victims of trafficking

Romanian victims receive complex assistance, based on an individual assistance plan for each victim. Those who have been working intensively for 10 years or more in the field of victim assistance, with various categories of beneficiaries and the most diverse sets of problems, say that the quality of their services has increased significantly. Specialists from NGOs in the field take part in many vocational, supervision and experience exchange programs. Therefore, their level of expertise and the quality of their services increased significantly.

“ I believe that our approach is more focused on the victim than in any other country of destination. I find it very important to also think of the victim from a psychological standpoint. Very few programs provide such services in the countries of destination. They quickly skip the steps from intervention to labor integration. Victims must work as soon as possible, because that makes them independent. But is she prepared to work? This is a question many don't ask.” (RO/P)

“ The others don't see (the signs of exploitation – author's note). But, after all these years, I recognize them.” (RO/P)

“ Since we are a country of origin and we have worked with extremely diverse cases, with diseases and trauma... we somehow developed significantly (...). We greatly improved, with scarce resources.” (RO/P)

The intervention provided to victims improved, by consolidating the services and adapting them to the changes in the phenomenon.

“ As regards the services, we have not changed anything – rather, consolidated them. Just as before, we have social and psychological services, financial and legal assistance. But our staff numbers increased. And we have more volunteers, compared to previous years.” (RO/P)

“ Ever since we started seeing boy victims, we have attracted male counselors who handle these cases” (RO/P)

The victims interviewed also provided input on the services and assistance they have received after being identified and exiting the trafficking situation, referring to services that are provided in both Romania, as well as in destination countries such as Italy and Spain. While some of them provided examples of the things they considered to be helpful, other criticized some of the assistance practices that they found inefficient and superficial.

“ I really loved how they treated me. They looked after me, took me to the doctor, we went to court, I made a statement to the police. The police took the phone those people had given me. After a while, I managed to find a job, I bought my own phone...” (RO/V)

“ They should see them and get involved in any way they can... It's easy to say “we should be generous, we should help those around us”, but very few people mention these things, even on TV or anywhere else. When somebody says “you should be more compassionate and help those around you”, they should think it's not enough to give somebody a sandwich or a cup of tea or a condom.” (RO/V)

Some other practices that are meant to display empathy and care for the disadvantaged children and teenagers who are at risk are criticized in an interview with one of the victims: the practice of taking home a child living in an institution just for Christmas or Easter, for example, is perceived by the victim as being extremely cruel and, instead of creating good memories and providing the feeling of being a family member, it has the potential to further traumatize the child who is only for a brief moment sunk in a pleasant fantasy world, only to wake up from the dream and return to his difficult life.

“ Once, I saw a project on TV, with Easter or Christmas offers from some organization. They were supposed to help the children, to take them home for the holidays. That's the crappiest thing ever. I don't know, I really want to spit on these people... I don't know what I would do to them. I don't want to offend anyone, I don't want to be brutal, but I think this is unspeakable. You just torment the child even more than he already is. What do you mean, taking the child home for the holidays? He already has a view on life, he doesn't have a family and s/he stayed with all the other orphans... You must put yourself in the shoes of that child. Thinking s/he's poor and giving him/her an extra piece of cake for Christmas is not enough. You're practically making fun of that child. The child gets attached to that house, but if you send him/her back to the foster home, you're just mocking them. This has to stop. Don't remove children from foster centers, just to take them home for the holidays. This is just a farce, you just torment the child. That child got used to the foster center, to the beatings and insults. The other children around them are their family. To take them away from there just for an extra piece of cake, and then to bring them back to the center, is really a terrible torture. These projects are farces. They should stop this kind of projects. Yes, the organizations and associations should help, but not this way.” (RO/V)

Some of the experiences that one of the victims lived in a child protection center would actually be considered an exposure to a higher level of disturbance and risk, rather than a context for the child to recover and move further with their life.

“ ... My parents managed to talk to the Police and to get me to an institution, where I lived for about three years... It was very hard, I wish no one stayed in an orphanage or in a foster home... Many children had no parents or family. They would beat each other to a pulp for a bit of food. Meals were set at certain fixed hours. If you didn't come at the proper time, you didn't eat. There were strict rules. If you weren't careful, you woke up the next day with your underwear on somebody else, who wouldn't give it back... There were children who talked by to themselves, went crazy, slept with the toilet seat under their pillow... All this, because their families had run out of money and it was easier for them to desert them or tell the kids “you must manage by yourself”.” (RO/V)

In her opinion, what would, however, help, would be emotional support and continuous presence.

“ ...In this day and age, you have to think how to approach this situation, what questions you should ask. Today, there are 14 year-olds who make babies or have abortions, instead of living their beautiful teenage years as they should. We should have these talks... That's why I told you there are many foster homes, social workers, foster parents, who are just not interested...” (RO/V)

No matter the type of services provided to victims or the types of prevention initiatives organized for teenage girls and young women at risk or children in general, the most significant factor is keeping it real, practical, individualized. One important characteristics of the services, in the perception of this particular victim interviewed, is to provide understanding and love.

“ I wish these questions and these answers were analyzed. I don't mean staying up all night and picking at every word, but you should at least find the essence in them. You should know that there really are solutions for these children, but they have to be more practical, more realistic, more helpful. More realistic. This way, people would become more aware and less complacent, and these situations could be eliminated. This can be done, but we need to be more understanding and loving. That's about all I had to say about it.” (RO/V)

### Cooperation among key actors

Another important element of an effective intervention, mentioned by most experts, is consolidating the collaboration between representatives of various institutions in the country and abroad, through formal or informal networks.

“ We have a great collaboration with NGOs that provide services to the victims.” (RO/P)

“ It is great to be able to collaborate with those who offer victims psychological assistance (...). Moreover, we collaborate much better with victims who have received psychological and social assistance. In my opinion, this is also because the quality of the collaboration between us and the service providers has improved”. (RO/P)

“ Victims are referred to us directly from countries where we maintain a good collaboration with organizations that provide services and identify victims with Romanian citizenship.” (RO/P)

“ The quality of the services has improved. We have been collaborating with the investigative authorities for many years, and we managed to get the girls questioned here. This is very important for them. We got here because we gained the trust of our colleagues, after many years of collaboration.” (RO/P)

“ The programs are carried out as partnerships. We have many local and regional partnerships. This way, we can refer the cases to the partners that provide assistance.” (RO/P)

“ We have a great collaborative relationship with colleagues from many countries. I think we managed to gain their trust.” (RO/P)

### Needs concerning the work in the field of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Most interviewees operating in the field of combating and prevention declare they are satisfied with the way the phenomenon is managed in the country, and support further collaboration, as a permanent necessity.

“ I believe things are going well. What do we need? We need to continue cross-institutional collaboration. For example, we have a great collaboration with the NGOs, and it is important that we gain this mutual trust.” (RO/P)

However, respondents from the field of assistance voiced several needs:

Managing the trafficking phenomenon requires regional action plans, strategies based on studies, which, by **forecasting** the phenomenon, would enable **proactive** actions, according to specific regional needs.

“ I really don't see a serious involvement in this issue on the part of sociologists. Even though they should be at the forefront of it., Sociological research, planning and implementation. These things are very important (...). We shouldn't work as we please (...). There should be very clear strategies, depending on region and areas of development.” (RO/P)

Over the years, a great deal of experience has been gained in the field of victim assistance, but only in certain areas of the country. The continuous lack of services, or their poor quality, is a severe issue highlighted by the interviewees. The failure to identify exploited victims (often underage), and the failure

to provide victims with the required psychological and social assistance, increase their vulnerability to a relapse.

“ We go there... Unfortunately, in that area, we don't have anyone to refer the victims to.” (RO/P)

The adaptation of the educational system to the needs of the labor market and to the potential of the vulnerable persons represents a necessity, in order to re/integrate the victims and to reduce their vulnerability.

“ ...These children must be educated and trained. Not all of them will become engineers, but they have to be trained to do a job that is in demand, so that you can be sure they get hired. Otherwise, it's useless to include them in a project just for the sake of it... After I'm done, there might not be any employers in the area for that particular job. Therefore, we have to be very realistic in everything we do.” (RO/P)

Prostitution is still a taboo issue in Romania. We lack debates involving experts in various fields and the society as a whole; we lack studies that analyze the current state of the phenomenon, and that explore (even in international teams, including trafficking destination countries) the social and economic effects of the various social, medical and legislative policies regarding prostitution management. All respondents agreed that debates and analyses are necessary, while some remain cautious:

“ It's hard to say... In some countries, prostitution is legal and therefore more visible. They have other investigation methods. They go directly to clubs and talk to the managers... There are countries where prostitution is not legal and the phenomenon is just as frequent, only underground. So we cannot yet see whether or not legalization can influence it.” (RO/P)

“ We do not have a clear position concerning the legal standing of prostitution. (...). Yes, debates are necessary. We know there have been such attempts. (...). I don't know whether we would initiate the debates, but NGOs could do that and we will surely take part. The discussions should be carried out between state representatives and the civil society.” (RO/P)

Others have more adamant positions for or against prostitution being legalized:

“ Yes, I think it should be criminalized. The request and purchase of sexual services should be punished. It's of little use to punish those already in the vulnerable situation. Let's be serious. If demand is not prevented, pimps and traffickers will handle the offer.” (RO/P)

“ We should also punish demand. At least as severely as providing the services.” (RO/P)

“ Does legalizing prostitution lead to reducing trafficking? Surely not. In the countries where prostitution is accepted, such as The Netherlands, our girls are brought by traffickers who are always breathing down their neck and take their money.” (RO/P)

There is a great need for services in areas where they are not available; furthermore, one must ensure minimum standards as regards assistance. The changes in funding availability led to fluctuations in the quality of assistance services. Old services disappear, new services emerge, or the staff in various institutions changes. Under these circumstances, a permanent flow of qualified personnel is essential.

Prevention requires more community actions, which boost solidarity and social responsibility within the community:

“ Let's do it Romania” or other similar programs, should be carried out permanently, not only once every 6 months. Thus, they would encourage people to do the right and human thing. (...) This is the surest method of prevention. When the community resonates and cooperates, one immediately sees that Gheorghe's son has disappeared, and will ask themselves where he is. I am amazed when I hear some mayors say “300 children from my village left the country”. What did you do, as a mayor and manager of the community, to prevent them from leaving?” (RO/P)

It is a well-known fact the information has more impact if helped by testimonials from the victims. Some specialists believe that the method should be employed more often.

“ We could prepare the victims. That would represent real prevention, because we would alleviate the soul and the interior torment for many of them” (RO/P)

Several professionals highlighted the need to carry out informational and prevention activities in the countries of destination.

### **Obstacles, barriers and particular challenges in working in the field of trafficking for sexual exploitation**

The biggest challenges are the complex, long-term assistance needs for the victims, and providing the required budget. Reducing initial vulnerability and treating the consequence of trafficking require a complex and costly intervention.

“ Many of them told me: I'll come back to Romania, give me a job, a house, the possibility to live a decent life. The state offers us nothing and we have to be very careful (...). If you, as an NGO that handles victims, don't have a structure and lack the relations required in order to provide them with food, housing, jobs and human living conditions, then you can't do anything.” (RO/P)

The interviewees describe many obstacles they meet every day, which make their work harder. For example: if the victim doesn't have any papers or degrees, their recovery takes months, and the victim does not benefit from free public services during this time.

“ Everything is designed against the victim. I kept silent and hoped, but I lost hope. I realize this is a farce. The Romanian state fools us, we fool the state. I don't know what we should do. But, if we fool one another and do not get involved, we lose people.” (RO/P)

Another obstacle that needs to be eliminated is the lacking expertise of the specialists one should work with in order to identify and then reintegrate the victims.

“ I had a case with a girl who, during the exploitation period, still went to school. She did not move away from home, but skipped a lot of classes. The case was discovered, a legal investigation started, and the class master told her to stand up and exposed her. Instead of helping her, she made it impossible for her to stay at this school. (...) We don't expect teachers to be saviors in every case, but at least they shouldn't be executioners.” (RO/P)

“ I wonder how you can work in prevention if you have never seen a victim and you don't know what is actually happening.” (RO/P)

Lacking the minimum professional standards on the part of those who deal with victims (not necessarily due to poor personnel expertise), and the failure to sanction this inadequacy:

“ There are abuses within the organization, I can't call them any other way... And what do the Social Services do? They should take action in these cases, and to close down these organizations.” (RO/P)

One of the great challenges is collaborating with helping victims who are still strongly attached to their traffickers:

“ Few of the girls are coming with their complaints and disappear after...” (RO/P)

“ Many of them do not want to file a complaint against them, because they still love them” (RO/P)

## Positive and negative examples

The information and awareness activities were praised by all respondents. According to the professionals, the high level of information within the population (compared to 10 years ago) was the result of constant actions organized in both rural and urban environments. Thus, the topic was brought up and maintained within the young people's area of interest.

Furthermore, the best and most promising programs seem to be those whose aim is to improve the quality of life and interpersonal relationships, through community intervention.

“ If a family is overcome by a situation and has a difficult time, the burden should be taken over by the community. We were surprised when we went to various communities and saw people's reaction... When you go there, everybody wants to be listened to, they all have their problems. As they talk about it, they may realize that they are not alone, and that their neighbor may have an even more serious problem.” (RO/P)

The respondents did not give any negative examples; they talked more about the need to develop strategies (level of intervention, target group, work methods, the content of messages etc.), in line with the changes of the phenomenon.

On the topic of intervention, respondents presented both positive and negative examples. The positive examples refer to integrated intervention models, based on the victims' personalized plan, and carried out at the individual, family and community level. The respondents highlighted those programs, which, apart from treating the consequences of the events suffered during the trafficking period, also treat the initial vulnerability factors that existed even before trafficking. This way, victims may be successfully integrated in the long run.

“ We work with the victim, with her express agreement. We also work with her family and with others. (...) We travel a lot. Lately, we've all been travelling a lot. We went into the community, in order to see what resources they have there.” (RO/P)

As negative examples, respondents mention those services that do not comply with the professional principles in working with the victims, and which fail to observe their rights to autonomy, safety and freedom (to choose, to make decisions etc).

“ My greatest disappointment was that we couldn't take food from the fridge. They did exactly that the traffickers did” (RO/P)

## Unexpected elements, key points and recurring topics

The unexpected element during the research was the relative high tolerance and lack of professional knowledge of some of the professionals interviewed regarding child trafficking.

## Interviewee's general and gender awareness

Most respondents were very well informed, with a lot of experience and knowledge in the field. However, in the case of gender awareness and understanding of the relationship between gender and trafficking for sexual exploitation, a lack of expertise was evident, reflected in the reluctance or incapacity of almost 1/3 of the interviewees to answer the questions.

“ I don't know what to say, I never thought about it.” (RO/P)

“ I don't think it has anything to do with gender or with our perception of masculinity and femininity.” (RO/P)

The rest of the respondents believe that gender inequality still exists in the society, and that its effects are also present in the case of the trafficking phenomenon (women in the role of the victim, men as clients and numerous traffickers).

“ We are talking about equal opportunities... If you go to a conference about equal opportunities, you see 100 women and 7 men, of whom 5 are translators and 2 are from the Prefect's Office, or partners. They say two words and go home. When we see a 50-50 gender ration during these conferences, surely many women's rights issues will disappear.” (RO/P)

## 2.12 Conclusions

The phenomenon of trafficking in human beings is very flexible, with the capacity to adapt to different contexts and constraints and is perpetually changing and adjusting. In Romania, the current practice of trafficking for sexual exploitation may be less violent, but the very high patterns of control seem to remain in place. The phenomenon is also characterized by a very large variety of recruiting and exploitation methods. The profiles of both traffickers and victims are various; to combine it in a single or narrower profile would certainly not reflect the existing realities.

In this study, we aimed to capture mainly those gender-related vulnerability factors highering the risk for Romanian young girls, adolescents and young women to become victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Analysis of the results reveals a number of factors mostly present at social and familial levels, such as the rapid development of the sex industry and even normalization of the exploitation of minors, a history of tolerance with regard to violence and abuse against women and children, as well as with regard to the sexual violence against women and girls, the general, but apparent valorization of "sexy, seductive behaviour" of girls, coexisting with women and girls being blamed for more flexible approaches to sexuality and couple relationships, as well as with traditional, patriarchal expectation regarding the family helper, submissive role of women and girls in the family. The basic individual vulnerability factors are the gender and age - both are vulnerability factors first of all because these are the characteristics defined by the demand.

The present paper describes in detail, through the experiences of survivors of sexual exploitation, the short and long-term effects of abuses suffered by young girls in the family and at a social level. However, it should be noted that these are not realities only specific or characteristic of different communities in Romania, but they are global phenomena, impacting women and girls in other European Union countries as well, as well as in many other regions of the world. Persistence of bad relationship (cargiver and partnership) models, unhealthy interactions in the teenage girls' lives, the lack of opportunities in the labor market, the devaluation of girls' education, the practice of victim-blaming in communities in the case of sexual violence or family violence, the unavailability of services and support, all make them more vulnerable in the front of skilled manipulator recruiters. The research has the intention to attract the attention of professionals on both the importance of general, early intervention, as well as on the treating of cases with high seriousness, in a particularized, specific way.

Precurity and/or instability of the living situation, the income of the family, the lack of opportunities in the labor market, the personal aspirations of achieving a decent life with no developed lifeskills and without resources needed in the labour market also ensures higher levels of vulnerability of women and girls.

In Romania many informational and prevention programs were carried out at both national and local levels whose effect is appreciated by professionals. They consider the switching to youth skills development programs (relationships, life skills, etc.) important. At the same time, there is a high need for multidimensioned prevention programs, targeting not only the potential victims, but also their caregivers, as well as the consumers of sex services.

Following and predicting changes are essential in preventing and combating activities, in this regard there is a need for longitudinal, international researches also.

Regarding the assistance services provided for victims, the access to those varies. There are regions in Romania where victims of sexual exploitation receive a very complex assistance, based on an individual assistance plan for each victim, offered by a well trained staff and there are, at the same time, other regions where there are no specialised services or trained personnel. Even in the case of specialised services, as part of this research we identified professionals who presented a high tolerance of the sexual exploitation of minors.

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### Legislation

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Romanian Criminal Code

# 3. National research reports: Italy

## 1.3 Overview of the current situation concerning trafficking for sexual exploitation in Italy

Due to its geographical position, since the middle of the 1980s Italy has been a country of destination and transit for the flows of trafficking for sexual exploitation from Africa, particularly from Nigeria, and from Eastern Europe, particularly from Albania.

Subsequently, from the late 1990s, a reduction of the flows from the Balkans was reported, while flows from Central Eastern European countries began to emerge, which involved a high number of girls and women arriving to Italy from Romania.

In recent years, two factors have affected the characteristics of trafficking flows in Italy, determining a higher degree of complexity both in terms of analysis and understanding of the phenomenon, as well as for the efficacy of protection and assistance interventions to the victims: a) the EU accession of Central and Eastern countries, from which flows mainly originated; b) the increasing number of human beings who cross the Mediterranean to escape from war, violence and poverty and reach the Southern coast of Italy.

Obviously, the changing framework of trafficking in human beings for purposes of sexual exploitation (both in terms of modality of appearance of the phenomenon and actions of enforcement, protection and assistance) is the result of several factors other than those referred above (e.g. the impact of austerity policies and the worsening of the economic and social conditions in the countries of origin, transit and destination of the EU should be considered; the adoption of restrictive immigration policies in the strengthening of nationalist and even xenophobic positions in many countries; the reduced consideration for measures and policies promoting and fostering gender equality in favour of policies to support male employment sectors etc.).

The adhesion of Romania to the European Union has changed the status of the victims in Italy, who are no longer third countries citizens (non-EU Member State) but European citizens, with obvious consequences not only on the conditions of entry and residence in Italy, but also on the methods of recruitment and exploitation used in the framework of the trafficking processes. The acquisition of the right to free movement within the EU has also influenced girls and women's idea and perception of their migration project to Italy, aiming at escaping from poverty and discrimination. The changes in the "traditional models" of recruitment and exploitation have also been strengthened by the increased "fluidity" between trafficking flows, smuggling of migrants and asylum seekers. In this context, the conditions of vulnerability to trafficking include economic and social elements, denial of opportunities and discrimination in origin countries, the use of violence. This has boosted the varied and complex character of migration flows to Italy and made the identification of a clear border between "voluntary" and "forced" migration more questionable.

The dialogue with professionals in the field of trafficking confirms the need to take into account these factors in order to better understand, identify and govern a phenomenon that, beyond the emerging new patterns, continues to be a form of serious denial of human rights and breach in the respect for the dignity of victims. From the experience of professionals, a common element emerges that links the different models of exploitation and abuse related to trafficking: the condition of vulnerability that affects and limits, down to zero, the capacity to self-determination, even in the absence of external signs of violence, threats or abuse. The life stories of the victims of trafficking, as presented for the research indirectly, by the professionals working in the field, reveal experiences of social exclusion, of abuse and violence in childhood, as well as of the lack of emotional ties with family and friends and of denial of opportunities for access to economic and social resources.

The Italian legal framework to prevent and combat trafficking and to protect victims of trafficking has changed over the years, as a result of the evolution of the regulations at international (e.g. United Nations and Council of Europe) and EU level. Italy is part of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) and the UN Convention against Transnational Crime, including the Protocol for the prevention and criminalization of trafficking in persons (Palermo Protocol, 2000). The national legislation, by virtue of the Italian participation in the European Union, has been amended by Legislative Decree n.24/2014, in order to transpose the new EU Directive 2011/36/EU.

In 1998, under the framework of the immigration law, a provision was introduced (article 18 of *Legislative Decree no. 286/1998 on Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning immigration*) designed to secure the issue of a residence permit to victims of trafficking with the purpose of ensuring access to protection and social integration programs. As far as human trafficking is concerned, *Law no. 228/2003 on Measures against trafficking in persons* amended the Criminal Code in order to ensure the compliance of the Italian legislation to the international standards set in regard with the definition of trafficking (Palermo Protocol). The Government has therefore amended articles 600 (reduction or maintenance in slavery or servitude), 601 (trafficking in persons) and 602 (purchase and sale of slaves) of the Criminal Code.

Lately, the *Legislative Decree no. 24/2014 which transposed the 2011/36/EU Directive* has further amended articles 600 and 601, including the new provision to adopt a National Anti-Trafficking plan (currently still under finalisation) and to strengthen protection and assistance measures.

#### **Article 600, Criminal Code:**

*It is punished with imprisonment from eight to twenty years anyone who recruits, introduces into the State territory, transfers also outside of it, carries, gives the authority over the person, houses to one or more people who lie in the circumstances referred to in Article 600, that is, performs the same conduct of one or more persons, by means of deception, violence, threats, abuse of authority or exploitation of a situation of vulnerability, of his/her physical, mental or need, or by promise of giving money or other benefits to the person who has authority over it, in order to induce them or force them into work service, sexual favours or to the fulfilment or otherwise of other illegal activities that involve exploitation or undergo pickup of organs. The same punishment to anyone, even outside of the modalities referred to in the first paragraph, realizes conducted therein against a person under the age of eighteen.*

The legislative framework is completed by a brief reference to the Italian legislation on prostitution. The matter is governed by *Law no. 75/1958 on the Abolition of the Regulation of Prostitution and the Fight Against the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others*, which abolished the regulation of prostitution and introduced new rules for the criminalization of exploitation, favouring and abetting of prostitution. In line with the abolitionist approach, the existing Italian legislation does not criminalize nor forbids the activity of prostitution, but introduced the criminalization of all actions of those who may favour, exploit, or take advantage of the prostitution activity. Several bills have been discussed over the years to modify the Italian framework regarding prostitution. Unfortunately, these initiatives aim more to meet needs and concerns regarding security and governance of urban areas rather than to establish a legal framework that can ensure - regardless of the kind of approach towards prostitution (regulation, abolition, prohibition) – protection of human rights of women involved in prostitution and full implementation of the principle of equality between women and men. It is clear, according to the point of view of professionals, that the public debate on prostitution influences the understanding and awareness of policies and interventions towards women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

As to the quantitative dimension of the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Italy, as also highlighted by the recent report on the implementation of the Convention of the Council of Europe drafted in 2014 by GRETA, the difficulty of monitoring the phenomenon at a national level persists. Currently, the main source of information is based on the statistic gathering the number of women granted with a social and integration project under article 13 of *Law no. 228/2003 on measures against trafficking*

in human beings and article 18 of Legislative Decree 286/1998 on Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning immigration. The source, however, offers a partial vision of the phenomenon (limited to the identified victims). Data from the Department of Equal Opportunities for the period 2000-2012, during which 13 calls to co-finance projects of social protection and assistance were published, refer to 21.795 identified and assisted victims, out of which 1.171 minors. The data refer not only to sexual exploitation, but also to labour exploitation, begging and other forms of illegal activities. The table below summarises the most recent official data (2010 and 2011 notice) with regard to the profile of victims.

**Table 1 - Profile of victims assisted under article 13, Law no. 228/2003 on measures against trafficking in human beings**

	Call 5 August 9, 2010	Call 6 7 July, 2011
Assisted victims	700	971
Male victims	211 (30.1%)	294 (30.3%)
Female victims	481 (68.7%)	664 (68.4%)
Transgender victims	8 (1.1%)	13 (1.3%)
Sexual exploitation	384 (54.9%)	535 (55.1%)
Labour exploitation	91 (13%)	203 (20.9%)
Romania (nationality of victims assisted)	102 (14.6%)	166 (17.1%)
Nigeria (nationality most represented)	236 (33.7%)	308 (31.7%)

Source: Department of Equal Opportunities, Italy

Art. 13 provides for a special support programme for the victims of the offences envisaged by Articles 600 (Placing or holding a persons in conditions of slavery or servitude) and 601 (Trafficking in human beings) of the Penal Code. The programme aims at temporarily a (three-month programme that, when applicable, may be extended for other three months) guaranteeing adequate accommodation, food and healthcare conditions to victims. Public or private accredited organisations offer a set of protection and first assistance measures (accommodation, social and legal assistance, and health care services) to victims of slavery, servitude and trafficking. Once the programme is over, foreign victims can continue to be assisted under the programme granted by art. 18 of the Italian Immigration law.

**Table 2 - Profile of victims assisted under article 18, Legislative Decree no. 286/1998 on on Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning immigration**

	Call 11 March 9, 2010	Call 12 July 7, 2011
Assisted victims	1.955	1.650
Male victims	455 (23.3%)	426 (26%)
Female victims	1.471 (75.2%)	1.198 (72.6%)
Transgender victims	29 (1.5%)	23 (1.4%)
Sexual exploitation	1.402 (71.7%)	1.103 (66.8%)
Labour exploitation	346 (17.7%)	271 (16.4%)
Romania (nationality of victims assisted)	197 (10.1%)	145 (8.8%)
Nigeria (nationality most represented)	951 (48.7%)	765 (46.4%)

Source: Department of Equal Opportunities, Italy

Article 18 provides for a special resident permit to victims of trafficking to enable their participation in assistance and social integration programmes. The Article 18 permit applies to foreign citizens in situations of abuse or severe exploitation where their safety is seen to be endangered as a consequence of attempts to escape from the conditioning of a criminal organisation or as a result of pursuing criminal action against the traffickers. Victims granted the Article 18 permit have to participate in a social assistance and integration programme managed by NGOs and/or local public authorities. The assistance and social integration programmes are funded by The Equal Opportunity Department of the Council of Minister in order to ensure access to social services and educational institutions, access to employment.

With regard to the nationality of the victims assisted in Italy, the main countries of origin are Nigeria, followed by Romania, Morocco and China. Nigeria and Romania together amount to approximately 50% of the victims assisted under the social protection programs. The official data as well as the experience of professionals indicate the relevance of the phenomenon of trafficking in Italy as for girls and women of Romanian nationality.

A distinctive feature of trafficking originating from Romania is the age of the victims, that mainly in the recent years, accounts to a greater involvement of minors exploited in prostitution. Unfortunately, statistics related to the trafficking of minors are not satisfactory due to the fact that the child protection system in place seems to be particularly problematic; minors represent the age group that records a high number of dropouts from shelters and integration projects. A new report issued by Save the Children Italy (*"Small invisible slaves. Child victims of trafficking and exploitation"*, 2015) draws the attention to the fact that the group of children who are mostly at risk/involved in trafficking for sexual exploitation in Italy includes adolescents from Central and Eastern Europe, particularly from Romania. According to Save the Children, the profile of the victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation is characterized by teenage girls aged between 16 and 17 years old, with a prevailing origin from Romania (other countries are Albania, Bulgaria and Ukraine). Minors from Romania are also involved in other areas of exploitation.

### 3.2 Additional methodological notes

The participants to the research were professionals coming in direct contact with victims (case managers, social assistants, social workers) from non-governmental organizations with a mission in providing assistance to victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. A total amount of 15 interviews with representatives of non-governmental organizations, providing psychological, legal and social assistance from Lombardia, Lazio, Puglia and Campania, were made.

### 3.3 Changes in the dynamics of trafficking for sexual exploitation

The changes that have caused a variation in the dynamics of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Italy, as outlined in the previous paragraph, considerably concern the migration flows originating from Romania. The analysis of perceptions and information gathered through interviews with professionals, working in different Italian regions in the field of providing protection and assistance to victims, offer a representation of the phenomenon based on recurring elements of recruitment and exploitation which refer to a non-traditional understanding of trafficking and slavery, as legal concepts linked to sexual exploitation. Many victims suffer conditions similar to slavery, which not necessarily involve ownership of a person, but rather allows the perpetrators to exercise control by deceptive means such as the exploitation of another's vulnerability.

Considering that the number of girls and women of Romanian nationality involved in trafficking increased in recent years, the main changes acknowledged by the professionals interviewed refer to:

- the **recruitment methods** that highlight the direct involvement of persons belonging to the emotional (e.g. the boyfriend) or social/personal (e.g. a friend or neighbour) network of the victim, acting as intermediary for the traffickers;
- the **exploitation methods**, which are mainly based on the establishment of ambiguous areas of

negotiation and voluntariness between the recruiter/exploiter and the victim with limited or no use of violence, abuse and severe limitation of personal freedom and with less cases of severe violence, as compared to previous years;

- the **needs expressed by girls and women** involved in situations of trafficking for sexual exploitation, asking for social and economic integration rather than for physical protection (security) or care services (e.g. psychological support, housing, counselling).

The changes in the dynamics of trafficking for sexual exploitation have led, as acknowledged by all professionals interviewed, to a decrease in the number of victims of trafficking from Romania who apply and have access to the programs of protection and assistance managed by third sector organizations. This change was documented in all the Italian regions covered by the research<sup>3</sup>; professionals in the field consider that this new reality could be interpreted as a general trend of trafficking flows that have Romania as country of origin.

“ Shelters receive less Romanian girls compared to five years ago, because the methods of exploitation in the street have changed. For example, it is assured the availability of a certain amount of cash from the prostitution activity. This did not happen before. They also have more freedom of movement than before.” (IT/P)

In recent years, the access of trafficked Romanian girls to social protection programs seems to be limited to those situations where a limited self-sufficiency of the person is present, very often due to a situation of psychological or psychiatric disorder.

“ Since 2007 we have seen a drastic decrease of Romanian women in shelters and noticed in recent years that the only requests for help come from very instable and vulnerable subjects, unable to manage their life independently, that are very complex cases (...) On an average of 25/30 emergency interventions the number of women is two or three.” (IT/P)

“ Since Romania's accession to Europe everything has changed. The residence permit is no longer needed and it was for women an important reason to start an integration programme. There has been a sharp drop with regard to arrivals in the community, which now is related to very serious cases of fragility” (IT/P)

The request for assistance into shelters can also be associated with the occurrence of severe acts of violence and abuse that the person is unable to cope with, even though, due to the above mentioned changes, these cases are definitely not as frequent as they were in the past. Another situation that determines the entrance into a social protection project is when the person has settled the choice of changing course of life, due to the encounter with a “third party” (e.g. social workers, friends or even a client) and access to services of social protection is the only means, in the absence of own resources, to escape from the situation of sexual exploitation.

“ The two women entering the integration programs are perhaps the most fragile...traumatized by the experience of exploitation...not only for the violence experienced, but mostly for having been affected at their core...emotionally. For some women “it is a job, OK, I do it”, they govern the situation...they have a goal. For other women, defences are less high or had desired another type of project (integration on the labour market and not entering prostitution). A girl decided because she met a client that made her aware of alternatives, she became aware that she could change. In other cases, the reason was a particularly violent episode by the exploiter.” (IT/P)

From the dialogue with professionals, it emerges as a common awareness the fact that the reduced access of Romanian girls in shelters does not actually coincide with a lower incidence of trafficking from Romania, but with a limited capacity of the existing model of integration and assistance to meet the needs of the girls involved in the process of abuse and exploitation in the context of trafficking.

“ Our road unit works in the city of Milan and for years now Romania has been the predominant nationality of the girls. In the case of Romania we talk about girls and women. Romania accounts

<sup>3</sup> Lazio, Lombardia, Puglia, Campania.

*for 60% of contacts and, more or less, every year, we record 400 contacts with girls of Romanian nationality.” (IT/P)*

The changes in the dynamics of trafficking from Romania and in particular the way in which relations are established between recruiters/exploiters and victims make the establishment of supportive relations with the girls and women more complex.

“ *Beginning from the entrance in the EU a fundamental change is to be found in the desire to get into the community. The value of the residence permit reward was relevant. We saw a drop in the integration programs, there is no request to go into long programs”.* (IT/P)

Furthermore, a recurring feature of trafficking from Romania is the mobility (between EU countries and within Italy) of women subjected to sexual exploitation.

“ *There is a high level of mobility and even this does not facilitate the construction of a path of trust, it is less continuative. There is also a higher level of economic sharing and a “bearable” level of physical violence.*” (IT/P)

Romanian girls and women involved in street prostitution in Italy are a constant presence, even if the operators have found that, compared to recent years, lately there has been an increase in the presence of women from other nationalities, as well. In particular a new increase in women and girls of Albanian origin is reported (as occurred in the 1990s). From this point of view, a connection is also identified between the Romanian and Albanian criminality involved in trafficking for sexual exploitation, in the sense that Romanian women and girls are often exploited by Albanian men.

In particular, some operators have made a clear link between the persistence of a high number of girls of Romanian nationality and the fact that the number of minors from Romania in recent years has increased, or at least the number of very young girls compared to the average age of trafficked persons of other nationalities. The young age of the girls subjected to trafficking from Romania is not a feature found only in relation to street prostitution, but also a perception (even though it is a phenomenon difficult to explore) with regard to indoor prostitution.

### 3.4 Characteristics of the phenomenon and vulnerability factors

The interviewees most frequently described their encounters with girls or young women from rural areas, who often experienced situations of family fragility and for whom the opportunity of an economic income (labour integration) has resulted in a (recognizable or hidden) prostitution proposal.

“ *These are young girls, from rural areas, with family situations of distress, situations of breakdown...or even use of alcohol by the father and/or mother. They often experienced violence, generally in the case of step father or brother. Some of them also had the experience of living in institutions in the past. They have generally completed their compulsory education. The proposed migration for work has been transformed into sexual exploitation, predominantly by the boyfriend.*” (IT/P)

The life stories often relate to conditions of economic fragility, which are worsened by the lack of family and/or supportive networks providing a caring and protecting environment to the person facing difficult life situations (e.g. sickness, accidents to family members, unemployment, disability, poverty).

“ *For example a girl...had a history of social marginalization in Romania. She started a relationship with a man who later left her with the responsibility to fully provide for the family...She was alone and without a family...and one day a childhood friend came and asked “but why don’t you come in Italy?”.* (IT/P)

The lack of a supportive environment and the lack of opportunities create a space for action in favour of individuals who, in the name of an emotional relationship or friendship, demonstrate interest and attention and are able to offer an opportunity for change that seems the only real, immediate alternative to the existing situation for a person in situation of vulnerability.

“ They are easy to convince, even without a stable project. I knew her, she made the proposal and I said yes...they say that they were friends, but in reality, from what they tell, you do not feel that it was about strong bonds.” (IT/P)

Parent or family distress, as well as external pressures do not always allow the context to cope with these difficulties. Furthermore, the girls and women involved often have the experience of being a girl or a woman in a discriminating and undervaluing context, which frequently determines their lack of self-trust and incapacity to rely on their own abilities in order to tackle difficulties and problems.

“ It seems there is little maturity, lacking an adult attitude; they are dependent on someone...from home family to someone else. I got the idea that they come from fragile family environments and from a social context that is not capable of supporting the shortcomings of the family fragility... these are projected into adult life without a preparatory pathway” (IT/P)

It is within the family or in the nearest community (school, neighbourhood) that dignity, capabilities and potential of the person are not supported. Often these undervalued women and girls are at the same time entrusted with excessive responsibilities and tasks, which are accepted as a vital “sacrifice” and as a “duty”, in the name of the family.

“ Upon these subjects often the family invests less, but also asks more by the way of giving responsibility...this expectation that the family relies on them... naturally influences their choices.” (IT/P)

Young girls have often dealt with responsibilities related to family management, including responsibilities that should have been fulfilled by the parents (e.g. sustainable livelihood, care for the babies or for people with limited abilities).

“ Family relationships are very difficult ... daughters dealing with the family and not the parents... or reports of violence.”

“ The poverty and the effort to find a job that guarantees the maintenance of the family (low wages compared with the high cost of living).” (IT/P)

In this context, the opportunity to arrive in Italy is a practicable solution to ensure the subsistence of the family, to fulfil family duties or to escape the uncomfortable situation of abuse/violence/discrimination experienced in the family.

“ Daughters feeling responsible for their mothers and at the same time hoping that coming to Italy means escaping the uncomfortable situation in the origin country. They are often mothers themselves or feel responsible for relatives without any possible income or support.” (IT/P)

In addition to the family factors, the main source of vulnerability acknowledged by professionals is the condition of poverty, the limited access to opportunities, the lack of factual alternatives to the situation experienced in the country of origin.

“ The central theme is the need for money...and it starts unconsciously...I think of a 19 years old girl who tells me that she went to school in a village. It was the secondary school and the parents did not work - only the mother. She said: I have to come here for the money...because I want to have what I didn't have and I don't have.” (IT/P)

“ These are girls who come from poverty situations in rural areas, sometimes with situations of psychological distress.” (IT/P)

“ Surely the lack of jobs is a major cause that leads first to look for something better, and also the fact that it is easy to fall in the network...your girlfriend, your boyfriend promises you ‘come with me and it is going to be better’, before you realize that it takes time and is not easy.” (IT/P)

Professionals are aware that the family and the broader social context, where people develop their personality and build their own life project, further strengthen the vulnerability factors.

The family context is often the reality from which they want to escape, to get away from unhealthy relationships, lack of opportunities, discrimination, abuse and violence.

“...often they reject the model of the family of origin and the way of life similar to that of their mothers. That’s also why it is “emancipation”. They do not want to make the mistake of the mother with the first that kissed her...she got pregnant just to be then abandoned.” (IT/P)

Due to the fact that the vulnerabilities are related to parental/intimate relationships, which constitute a natural “asset” and part of the identity for each individual, the professionals pointed out how difficult it is to access and share that kind of information with victims. Victims are not expected to express immediately in what way and to what extent family issues have affected the development of their personality and personal projects. These issues tend to be kept private and protected, hoping in this way to limit the distress caused by the awareness. According to the experience of professionals, to overcome problematic family events and settings, a great level of “psychological reworking” and then a strong level of confidence between professionals and victims are required.

“The family dimension is often related, over time...unhealthy family situations...are present before the economic poverty, situations of separation, of reconstructed families (the father is gone - the mother has a new partner)...there is a family conflict with one or both parents...they keep contact with one part of the family. The figure of the father doesn’t emerge as particularly positive...” (IT/P)

### 3.5 Characteristics and patterns of recruitment

According to the experience of some professionals, an increasing involvement of girls and women in migration projects/proposals associated to the exercise of prostitution in the country of destination is happening.

Despite changes in the modality of recruitment (predictability of the risk of being involved in prostitution) and exploitation (reduced use of coercion, violence or deprivation of freedom) the factors that make girls and women vulnerable to trafficking remain unchanged: girls and women suffer from violence and/or coercion and give their “consent” to the risks associated with the proposal of a better life in Italy, as they have no real and acceptable alternative to the situation experienced.

“The Romanian...often have been convinced by an explicit project of prostitution but in ways that are not acceptable...women in condition of poverty and abandonment in terms of networks and relationships...they are in a condition of strong lack of opportunity that leads to accepting the project...” (IT/P)

“The majority knows what is behind the offer and decide to do it by imagining that it will be for a limited period in the hope of finding another job.” (IT/P)

The condition of vulnerability makes possible to have girls and women at disposal without use of violence or deception. Furthermore the acknowledgement of the risk to get involved in prostitution does not automatically mean awareness of the conditions under which prostitution will be experienced, particularly the fact that beyond the settled spaces of negotiation and autonomy established, the recruiter/exploiter will be able to exercise a high degree of control.

Despite the usual narrative that expresses an increased level of intentional involvement of the girls in the recruitment and exploitative phase of trafficking, which risks to be assumed as the main understanding of trafficking, some operators expressed their concerns about the fact that it is entirely explanatory of the real situation of girls and women involved in trafficking for sexual exploitation. According to the experience of some social workers, even in the presence of an agreement between the recruiter and the victim, the abuse of a position of vulnerability and the exercise of a position of control by the exploiter cannot be excluded.

“ Seemingly the stories are of some awareness...“I made this choice”...but then they are not always truthful. Although there are agreements...through another girlfriend that accounts for to a man (pimp), however there are situations of control.” (IT/P)

With regard to the recruitment phase, it emerges more frequently than in the past the intervention of a female player (often a friend) that acts as intermediary with the exploiter. Very often these are women living in Italy for a longer period of time, who have already gained some independence from the exploiters. The recruitment channel seems to be fuelled by relations of friendship (direct or indirect) with girls who come from the same geographical area in Romania.

“ Lately we have noticed that recruitment is carried out by other women...women who are in prostitution and contacting fellow countrywomen from the same village or town to take them to Italy. Romanian women who are in prostitution, who “rent” the physical space in the street where prostitution is practiced, although maybe they are also still tied to someone. This is the phenomenon we noticed the most in recent years. In the past, girls were much more referenced to boyfriends. It seems, by their stories, that a “feminine” exploitation circuit has been added. They come from the same context, the same country and are attracted by the idea of easy money in Italy. Often girls who arrive live together with the person who made them come to Italy.” (IT/P)

Often, there is still the classic recruitment in the form of emotional relationship; there are girls who come again with the “boyfriend”. Very often they use the story of a friend who works in Italy: “she says you can earn money, and I am going to work with her (it means that the friend takes her share).”

“ Usually we face situations where women around 37 years old come to our services accompanying young girls and pretending they are helping them as friends getting social/health assistance”. (IT/P)

Another element that arises from the experience of the interviewed professionals and that seems to deny or at least reduce the area of consent between the recruiter/exploiter and the victim, is the fact that, once they arrive in the destination country, prostitution is very rarely exercised autonomously and free from any form of control by a third party.

The characteristics of the relationship between trafficker and victim make the interventions in terms of identification, recognition and awareness of the condition of exploitation and abuse experienced more complex. The professionals interviewed have highlighted how often working to overcome these relations of exploitation required to work on those relationships and personal experiences that previously made the person more vulnerable.

“ I want to marry you, I want a future...begin to work...all the women that are here do it...Do it for us. It is difficult to work in these situations because when you open this awareness...you do not know what can happen.” (IT/P)

The experience of professionals confirms that the intervention of a third party (boyfriend, male friend, female friend) seems to be a necessary step. This makes evident that the migration project, including that to enter in prostitution, does not take place in an autonomous way.

“ The recruitment happens mainly through friendship networks (neighbour, friend)...for them it is an opportunity for emancipation...they follow a path that leads to emancipation and they know they must stay within certain systems and accept its rules.” (IT/P)

### 3.6 Characteristics and patterns of exploitation

One of the patterns of exploitation is the high level of mobility of Romanian women who are being trafficked at national and international level. This is mainly due to the choice of the exploiters, who are those who select the places in Italy or abroad, or as a consequence of a temporary break in the exercise of prostitution. The opportunity/permission to have a temporary break in order to spend some time in Romania is often perceived as expression of power of negotiation between the exploiter and the victim.

The relationship between recruiter/exploiter and victim is characterized, in the recent years, within the process of recruitment and exploitation, by a limited use of violence. This influences the perception and understanding of the real condition of exploitation and abuse experienced by the girls.

“ They have a very low perception of the exploitation. There are emotional ties with the exploiter. In the adult segment, exploitation is it even weaker, with more space for autonomy. However, even in situations of greater autonomy, ties continue to exist, such as the payment of the area occupied to exercise prostitution.” (IT/P)

“ In 2009, we experienced an increase of the Romanian girls in prostitution and the conditions of engagement of the girls by the exploiters were characterized by violent and abusive conducts. In the streets we were told that they were beaten, threatened, forced both in physical ways and from a psychological point of view. They were very much conditioned and influenced...threatened. The methods were much more violent. Over time they began to be “softer” (IT/P)

A partial share of the profits with the girls seems to be now a recognised practice.

“ All the profit made was taken by the exploiters and the girls remained with nothing but a few Euros hidden. From a couple of years ago, the boys...also because of the increasing number of girls reporting to the police...they started to soften their approach...allowing to somehow share the profits. This allows the girls to buy something or to send money to Romania.” (IT/P)

The main change, as a result of this different relational modality of the exploiters, determines the low level of perception of the actual condition of exploitation of the girls.

“ In this way, the girls do not feel the condition of exploitation so intensely...even if he slaps me... he is my boyfriend.” (IT/P)

With regard to the nature of the relationship between exploiter and victim, it is confirmed that the conditions of “soft” exploitation proves to be highly effective in terms of maintaining the condition of subjection and abuse. Based on the experience of the operators, it is possible to identify two main situations that are typically the cause of escaping from the exploiter: the use of serious violence and abuse, which makes the situation intolerable for the girl; the intervention of a third party, usually the client, which offers a reason to leave the path, but also a support, and a concrete and immediate perspective of change.

“ To exit from the path ... they would go away when the situation becomes intolerable...” (IT/P)

“ Other times, they get scared and if they are strong they can be successful in escaping from exploitation...I remember a girl who was scared because she knew that they wanted to sell her to someone else. They are young girls...one is 20 years old now and has been in Italy for at least two years. She arrived with her boyfriend who pushed her into prostitution within his group of friends...for her it was difficult because he was her boyfriend, he would make her drink a lot and when she started to refuse he began to beat her.” (IT/P)

“ ...a girl who had come with the boyfriend...“I’ll help you find a job as waitress” ...when they realized that she was a virgin, they wanted to sell her virginity...she was scared...she managed to call 118 and give the number of the street...we intervened and took her away. She stayed a while with us, but then she wanted to go back to her family.” (IT/P)

It emerges the uncertain nature of the relationship that is established within the process of recruitment and exploitation. The practice of prostitution is perceived as a real and feasible chance for girls, in the

short term, to access economic resources and, more generally, it represents an alternative to the situation of social exclusion, discrimination and abuse experienced in the country of origin. In this sense we can speak of “awareness and participation” in the migratory project that has its outcome in the exploitation of prostitution.

The condition of exploitation is fuelled by the condition of vulnerability of the person, against which, as previously noted, the practice of prostitution even though in conditions of exploitation and abuse, still represents a real opportunity for change.

“ Some say that they practiced prostitution in Romania. They have a certain freedom, even if controlled, and have documents, but not full freedom of movement. The exploitation becomes more as a mental than physical submission...this prevents them from perceiving their real situation: “I do not choose, not because I have no opportunities, but because I think I have no power to act” (IT/P)

When they are recruited and they make the “agreement” with the exploiter, girls have knowledge and enough information to know what the final outcome of the opportunity offered will be, but they are not always aware of the characteristics of the exercise of prostitution (with regard to individual consequences and life conditions).

“ The change we notice is that they are aware of prostitution, surely they do not know what the conditions will be...” (IT/P)

At the beginning of the recruiting processes there is a situation of weakness or lack of family support networks, and then the establishment of emotional relationships between the recruiter/exploiter and the victim is the main link that ensures the maintenance of the condition of exploitation. An operator compares some situations of abuse experienced by the women and girls to those that occur in the context of family violence, where despite the episodes of physical and psychological violence, the victim is unable to perceive the severity of the condition experienced and the configuration of situations of great danger and violation of human rights.

“ These are difficult situations from the start...the classic story of their arrival in Italy is the same... the friend/boyfriend who brings her to Italy, loves her very much, but asks her to prostitute herself...” (IT/P)

“ In many cases, there are difficult situations...these are situations similar to those we find in Italy, with women victims of domestic violence, who choose to remain with the husband who loves them even if he beats them...women who cannot leave the husbands who mistreat them. In any case they maintain the wrong perception that their love relationship is still worthy ” (IT/P)

The limited use of force/violence, which initially characterized also the flows of trafficking from Romania, has actually strengthened the tie with the girls and women who live in a condition in which they perceive to have the full power of their own lives. In addition, the more they lack real alternatives to the situation experienced, the more they maintain the link and contact with the exploiter, imagining that they can still dismiss the relationship at any time. This perception makes the conditions of exploitation, distress and abuse experienced more tolerable and, in this context, actually the practice of prostitution appears to be the only real possibility to access a source of economic support, as a temporary job pending a better solution.

“ Exploiters who are smarter give more freedom to go home and send money...this way they consolidate a relationship with the victim: “I work because I save money”...then the perception of exploitation is lower. They have no alternative jobs and do not realize the condition of the violation of dignity. They feel freer and stronger.” (IT/P)

“ Now they are not aggressive, the ability of complaint is reduced because they have greater autonomy...the relationship is consensual...and this reduces the capacity to become aware of the situation of exploitation and the desire to escape. Even if they know that there is someone who takes advantage of their need to make money they are not conscious as they were once...” (IT/P)

Since the rate of exploitation and control is mainly based on building emotional relationships of trust, possible situations of evident “violence” or “coercion” are therefore justified by the girls as episodes of ‘crisis’ that normally characterize couples’ emotional relationship, they are thus perceived as temporary and limited episodes.

“*The emotional binding is a bond that works, the girls believe in it and fall in love...“I do not understand what the problem is”, “he asked me to do it for a short time”, particularly the younger girls. In adult women, instead, it is possible that the bond is more durable...girls who go out every night on the street and the boyfriend is at home (usually he does not work).” (IT/P)*

With reference to the exercise of prostitution, it still involves forms of control by third parties and exploiters. In fact, based on the experience of the operators, it is clear that even nowadays exploitation of Romanian girls is characterized by a high level of control.

“*On the street they are strictly controlled. We can notice that from the life stories, but also from the behaviours of the girls as well as from what happens around: for example, while we are talking with the girl in the street, she receives a phone call that silences her. Of course there are situations of a greater freedom, where the girls stop a few minutes more, but we perceive the control, for example, you may notice cars passing by. There is no danger for us (as operators).” (IT/P)*

There is not a substantial change in the relationship but in the modality that, in fact, enhances the sustainability and permanence of a relationship which is not based on an equal position between the exploiter and the victim. These changes relate to the majority of the cases, however, there are still situations in which the exploiter uses severe violence to strengthen and maintain explicitly and visibly the situation of slavery.

“*Compared to the past, the victims of trafficking have the opportunity to keep some money...but they are still under control. There are situations of women and girls who have been burned to death...situations of violence and control remain.” (IT/P)*

The identification of the conditions of exploitation is complex and requires a very long time, as well as the establishment of a relationship of trust with the girls and women involved. Not always the methods and the high mobility that characterize the condition of exploitation of the Romanian women and girls allow overcoming the apparent situation of normality. The characteristics of the exploitation might only be detected during the projects of social integration and once the decision to cut the link with the experience of exploitation has been made.

“*For a long time the girls have told us a story of independence and freedom that almost convinced us...then we realized the truth...money given to the exploiters...we learnt the truth only when they were really free.” (IT/P)*

### 3.7 Gender and trafficking for sexual exploitation

The gender perspective, as portrayed by the participants to the interviews is reflected through answers as the following:

“*The woman, a single mother at a young age...has more vulnerability. It is a girl who escaped from schooling at an early age (a minor).” (IT/P)*

The gender dimension exists within the description of situations that could be at the origin of a path that leads to trafficking.

“*All women come from socio-economic hardship situations and very poor areas. The stories are not very different; they always have problems with parents...alcoholic fathers, domestic violence situations. The father figure is never described positively.” (IT/P)*

The gender issues are raised with reference to the condition of vulnerability. In particular, they relate to: the status of women within the family and, in connection with this aspect, the experience relating to the role and condition of the mother within the family. In this sense the acceptance of their condition, or at least the perception of normality of the condition lived in the framework of exploitation, is often based on the idea of inevitability of such situation as a condition associated with gender.

“...they are women who do not have full awareness of being a woman. Dad was drunk and her mother had to work with the responsibility to support the family even though she did not count within the family. The mother has no importance and has often been abused...this is the model. They imitate the mother who has sustained the family...they leave and arrive in Italy.” (IT/P)

Professionals also mentioned another relevant factor that reduces the understanding of an abusing relationship, which often occurs within families where no violence or abuse situations are present, but where the emotional and affective part of the parents-children relationship is completely missing.

“The mother worked hard and cared so much for her, but the sensitive and emotional part of their relationship was completely missing. There was an absent father who abandoned both children and mother.” (IT/P)

The emotional condition experienced in Italy in the context of exploitation and abuse is often similar to what they lived in Romania. Many operators have acknowledged that at the origin of their vulnerability there is their previous life experiences lacking completely the emotional which could have given them the possibility to recognise if the support they receive (from friends, boyfriends or any other third parts) is real or not.

“...alone here in Italy, as they were in Romania. A strong lack of love...which binds them to those who use violence towards them. Lack of primary affectivity...enough to accept violence or exploitation in the relationship. The person who baits women knows how to look for vulnerable and weak women to be involved in prostitution...knows the difficult situation of the family or of the person...the Nigerian model operates in a more concrete manner, while the Romanians is much more based on a mental subjection.” (IT/P)

“They tell very little about leisure time, when it comes to friendships it is as if they wanted to deny its importance...they usually talk more about what happens in Italy. They are deprived of social relationships, they never say I miss my friend, I can write to...? Can I contact...?” (IT/P)

Gender is a conditioning factor with the regard to the possibility of creating their own future and reach their aspirations. The proposal of the recruiter, as not fully credible or risky as it may be, is still the only real opportunity for change and progress.

“They are driven by the promise of a future marriage, by the idea to build a family and to have a house with a man and to be able to work and send money back home. Often behind there is an abusive, absent or alcoholic father. Very often the father abused the girl.” (IT/P)

The family experience often teaches that women are called upon to sacrifice for the benefit of the family, giving up their aspirations and taking a position of disadvantage or even suffering.

“...The experience of exploitation is like “salvation” or at least a way to bring out the distress. These women know that they have to sacrifice themselves for the family; it is their duty to go...it is something that should not be questioned. They are mothers who leave their children in Romania because the husbands disappeared. They try to have on-going contacts with their children...it is actually always difficult to figure out who are these children entrusted with. It is painful and difficult to investigate about that” (IT/P)

In a context characterized by low levels of women's employment (in the countries of origin and in Italy, as a country of destination), prostitution is offered as a way to build a project aiming at economic independence in the short term - at least according to the initial idea.

“ In addition to the economic motive, it is also about girls who have had a relationship in the past and very often it is a marriage that ended badly (the husband left or moved abroad and has rebuilt a life). Often, also, they need to send money to parents and children. Many are the experiences of girls who have grown up in public institutions. The prostitution market is an “opportunity” for women ... a short-term project.” (IT/P)

The gender dimension has an impact on the resources available for the realization of their life project.

Prostitution is seen as the only possible and feasible choice, the only chance to free themselves from a situation of poverty experienced and possible distress or abuse in the family.

“ Right now they know they are going into prostitution...they rarely speak of a deception...prostitution as migration choice is linked to gender issues...I can only work as care giver for old people or as a prostitute...I am young and I can earn more money” (IT/P)

“ Between victim and recruiter there is some kind of “agreement”: he/she is someone who helps me to take the opportunity to change and emancipate and also to help the family.” (IT/P)

The situation of exploitation, in a context of origin and destination with no alternative opportunities to the situation, represents the only real possibility of emancipation.

Finally, the gender dimension is relevant in relation to the link with prostitution, which remains the main purpose of trafficking flows. During the interview, a clear link between the phenomenon of prostitution, gender issues and trafficking has been highlighted.

“ The prostitution market demands more and more women...certainly other things also...but it largely requires women. Women in the market of street prostitution are in a situation of economic and social fragility”. (IT/P)

There is a constant and growing demand of female prostitution that is easily fuelled by a high number of women in social and economic fragility.

“ They are young women who have a mother living in poverty in Romania or who work to provide for one or more children remained in Romania. They have a father or a husband who does not work and find themselves alone having to maintain the family. Young women are often young mothers (20 years old) and the child remains in Romania with the grandmother (40 years old).” (IT/P)

When at the origin of the choice to leave Romania there is not a need to ensure the economic maintenance of the family (parents and children), there is often a lack of perspective of improvement and achievement of personal projects:

“ They say they do not see a future in the country, they cannot imagine a future in Romania, cannot imagine a job or a future as a women...” (IT/P)

“ Gender relations are a critical condition. These are girls who marry and become mothers too early without completing a course of study, without having decided what to do with their lives. Prostitution then becomes a means, as any other, to earn money...for example; very young girls do it anyway, thinking that it will not be forever.” (IT/P)

### 3.8 Groups most at risk

According to the professionals interviewed, there are certain categories of women and girls who are additionally exposed to the risk of trafficking: girls and women living in situations of marginalization resulting from poverty; girls and women who lived in a poor family and deprived relationship context in which they are not acknowledged, supported and valued for their skills and individual potential; girls and women living in a family (family of origin and/or formed family) which places on them the responsibility to ensure financial support to the family or the care of others who live in situations of hardship.

With reference to the vulnerability due to the fragility of the family it is stressed that:

“ We must focus on family relationships, family fragility that exposes people to the risk of accepting the proposals for a different life at any cost.” (IT/P)

Even poverty and personal distress make a person additionally exposed to trafficking:

“ Poverty background connects all the girls, also the fact they don't want to return to their country of origin. The level of education is very low.

They are very vulnerable psychologically (we know it from the way they do the activity); it is also true that those who come to the community for assistance are often those who have relevant problems.” (IT/P)

### 3.9 Descriptions of buyers

The dialogue with the professionals did not reveal specific information about the profile of the client, taking into account that the Italian system of contrast, protection and assistance does not include measures to tackle the demand side.

The client is mentioned in particular in relation to two issues, which from the point of view of prevention and combating trafficking appear contradictory: on one hand, the fact that the demand for sexual services and the demand for girls from Eastern Europe fuel the flows of trafficking and make explicit the link between gender issues and human trafficking (from this point of view the figure of the client emerges as a cause that feeds the flow of trafficking); on the other hand, the fact that client can be seen as one of the actor who could play a role in their way out of the exploitation and abuse conditions (both directly by offering support for access to services and indirectly by providing information).

### 3.10 Interventions and knowledge concerning trafficking for sexual exploitation

In light of the changes in the modality of recruitment and exploitation and the consequent difficulties of taking steps towards social protection for women and girls (reduction of the numbers of women and girls entering integration programs), efforts have been made to develop alternative methods of intervention to those focused on “sheltered programmes”. A “territorial project” has been promoted in order to cope with the reduced requests to enter in a community. Beside the fact that Romanian citizens do no longer need to obtain a residence permit, other factors that prevent the entrance in a project of social integration are, for example, the fact that housing is no longer a necessity or, in other cases, the proposal to be sheltered into a community may be refused because the person is afraid to report traffickers.

“ Hence we have proceeded with territorial projects; often the girls already had a place to live...or did not want to report traffickers and therefore did not want to enter social integration programmes. We offered counselling and psychological support without initiating a project in the shelter. We tried to adapt the intervention to the new requirements and needs of girls, in order to overcome the difficulty to enter into the shelter.” (IT/P)

The territorial project is not focused on the shelter/community interventions, but in assisting and supporting their access to specialized or general social services already present in the territory.

“ We call it a soft assistance, through which services are accessed and needs identified. If there are people who decide to leave the exploitation, we support them through social and labour insertion, to access local services. This way it is possible to meet the needs related to health issues (gynaecological, psychological support).” (IT/P)

This approach made it possible to maintain (beyond the outreach work) contacts with the women and girls and to ensure access to services and pathways of individual autonomy strengthening, through social and health services and social inclusion.

“ This has enabled us to maintain the number of contacts and of cases taken over. Let's try to figure out how to stimulate the demand for services from the girls.” (IT/P)

The experience of the territorial project is an operating modality already experienced in Italy (in particular the practice was tested in the framework of interventions to victims of economic exploitation and in particular for male victims), but not always with positive results in relation to the long term sustainability. In some cases the increased autonomy, which is a characteristic of the territorial project, did not promote an effective path of freedom as far as the relationship with the exploiter is concerned.

“ We have experimented projects of territorial support, providing support services to women who were granted with an independent living situation...offering services and interventions as provided by article 18 in the living environment. We have registered that they were interested, but would still not detach from the situation of exploitation. In other cases the girls did not adhere even to this proposal, showing no interest for the soft approach.” (IT/P)

As far as access to shelter is concerned, it is reported that very often those who ask to enter in a shelter are facing psychological difficulties. It is about problematic situations that are not always related only to the experience of exploitation and violence experienced in the framework of trafficking, but also with the traumatic situations experienced during their childhood.

“ They arrive in the community with psychological problems, with problems that are not only related to the experience of exploitation, but also to the experience of childhood in the family or in institutions. In this context the integration project is complex, it is more difficult than that, relating to the sexual exploitation...these disorders are unlikely to be addressed within the community.” (IT/P)

Operators showed that, among those calling for support to organizations in terms of protection and assistance, after exiting from trafficking, repatriation to Romania is commonly requested. These are generally situations of particular fragility, determined by certain pre-existing situations of psychological distress or determined by the condition of exploitation and abuse in which the person is involved after the arrival in Italy. Where repatriation has to be managed in an urgent situation, some difficulties in the organisation of the repatriation are reported.

“ From February to now we have had four women from Romania, two wanted to return back home, one of them remained a few days, for the other girl we had difficulty to contact organizations, she was in a hurry to go back and it was difficult to organize everything. This person was not easy to deal with, from the point of view of behaviour; she returned to Romania and then again back to Italy.” (IT/P)

## **Needs concerning the work in the field of trafficking for sexual exploitation**

With reference to women trafficked from Romania, the professionals interviewed highlighted an emerging trend that is affecting significantly the ability of identification, protection and assistance to victims.

It is confirmed by the professionals interviewed that the Romanian nationality is the most represented in street prostitution (among the EU nationalities), and, as noted in paragraph 2, the number of contacts with Romanian girls performed by street units is continuous<sup>4</sup>; however, there is a drastic reduction in the

<sup>4</sup> To ensure a proactive approach to identify potential victims especially in the area of trafficking for exploitation of prostitution several NGOs manage an outreach work service specialised on THB. The outreach methods aim at more effectively identifying, approaching, and bringing support to trafficked persons involved in street prostitution. Outreach work is the main gateway to provide victims with information regarding the Italian framework to protect and assist victims. Outreach services are mainly

number of girls who have access to a program of integration and social protection.

“ Compared to our service that manages shelters, since 2009 we received only 5 women in social protection and from 2012 to the present date no one...we provided information and counselling but there was no adhesion to the projects.” (IT/P)

From this point of view, the effectiveness of the Italian model to offer programs for protection and social inclusion is seriously reduced. The reality of the past two, three years is in fact that Romanian girls are no longer entitled to social protection projects, or at least the Romanian nationality is disproportionately represented when confronting the number of women in shelters to the number of women involved in sexual exploitation.

Compared with the period of pre-accession of Romania to the EU, where there was a connection between the presence in the street and in shelters, certainly the incentive base of issuing a residence permit for social protection failed. The lack of the need for a permit of stay in Italy may not be considered the only determining factor. In fact, what has changed is the need expressed by women during the exploitation phase. The relationship between the recruiter/exploiter and the victim is no longer profoundly characterized by violent conduct or otherwise restricting freedom, therefore the need for protection expressed by women and girls is less apparent. In this new context, the offer of the social protection program, both in terms of housing solutions and services offered not always meets the actual and pressing needs, in particular those regarding to the maintaining of a source of economic support, even outside of the exploitation context. As acknowledged by professionals, the outreach work is now the main point of contact with victims of trafficking, however building a relationship with victims in the street is more difficult, due to the fact that the outreach work is characterized by irregular contacts (the same unit covers a large territorial area), which are based on very fast talks and also taking into account that the contact between the potential victims and the professionals is done under the surveillance of those which directly or indirectly control them.

“ The street unit...it is a less direct type of work because within a street setting it is not always possible to speak of exploitation. When you're in the street...no one will talk about exploitation... then you will have to try to get a hint from their behaviour (constant presence such as when weather conditions are not suitable, or the fact that they are in the street, even when not in optimal health conditions or refusal of contact or the fact that they will always look around to see if there is anyone).” (IT/P)

The evolution of the methods of recruitment and exploitation has made the social protection program centred on the community intervention no longer responsive to the needs perceived and expressed by the women and girls subjected to trafficking. The community/shelter remains a safe answer for the most complex cases, in which the person perceives, as a priority, the needs related to safety and care by an organized/specialised structure. For those situations where the victims perceive an existing level of autonomy, the community/shelter is an insufficient response to their needs. Instead of the availability of a long term programme of social integration, Romanian women express the need to receive a short term solution, especially with regard to their integration into the labour market.

“ The two girls are happy with the shelter because they need a context of supportive relationships and counselling. They have a strong need of being sheltered and this is why they ask for a social integration programme in the community. Furthermore they do not have documents because they were taken by the exploiters, so they also need administrative support. Other women do not tolerate these contexts of supportive relations. All have experience of deprivation and lack of support, but some do not seek to fulfil these needs...they look for more immediate things like economic autonomy. For the street unit, it is difficult to understand...how to understand if a girl is motivated or not, why...It really depends on the resources they have...many of them want to return to Romania. I went away against my parents advice...I was wrong...and I want to go

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financed by the National Health System as the main information given to women in prostitution is related to prevention of sexual diseases. The goals of the outreach work are: to increase awareness and information about local services regarding health services and anti-trafficking provisions to support victims; increase capacity of NGOs to identify and reach potential victims.

*back...back in Romania she had resources. In the other case, repatriation to Romania has been followed by a re-victimisation...she had no alternative..." (IT/P)*

Another key element identified by professionals, also due to the specific characteristics of the trafficking in women and girls of Romanian origin, is the need for actions to prevent situations of psychological distress experienced during childhood that make people more vulnerable to trafficking.

“ *It would be necessary to prevent upstream...firstly in terms of family, education. Injuries are upstream. More prevention and education at the family level are needed.*” (IT/P)

In the light of the conditions of vulnerability and situations determining the absence of a protection network in Romania, prevention in the countries of origin, for example through increased access to opportunities for discussion and awareness with respect to issues such as the value and the dignity of the person, is identified as a necessary area of intervention. This need is indeed also called for the countries of destination, where prostitution is perceived as normal and inevitable solution for the economic integration of (migrant) women looking for a job.

“ *I do not know the situation in Romania, but I think that the situation of vulnerability is growing, because Romanian girls are numerous. They should talk more...not only with respect to the issue of trafficking, but there must also be an education in relation to the value of one's life...the same in Italy...where we complain of prostitution, but then accept it. Because, in any case, the purchase involves a lack of recognition of the dignity. We do a lot in schools...we are asked to address the issue of trafficking and prostitution; in this instance we provide information on the phenomenon.*” (IT/P)

More generally, the intervention area currently less covered is that of prevention. In fact, the financial funds focus mainly on interventions of protection and assistance and less on the prevention measures, including those aimed at reducing the demand. At least that is the trend until now. The Italian Government is drafting the National Action Plan on Trafficking. The strategic document, in compliance with the guidelines of the directive 2011/36/EU, includes prevention as an area of intervention, although it is uncertain that sufficient resources will be allocated to this extent.

“ *For the prevention we would like a reinforcement of the funding in schools to work in a serious way. Working with schools would be a great opportunity. We did not have particular contacts with clients; neither initiated any specific activity. In the new national plan, due to the transposition of the EU directive, training has been integrated in addition to the activities for protection and assistance. It is part of the National Anti-trafficking Plan, but it does not necessarily mean that it will be supported by financial instruments.*” (IT/P)

## **Obstacles, barriers and particular challenges in working in the field of trafficking for sexual exploitation**

Women and girls from Romania are still one of the national groups most represented; however, in recent years there has been a drastic reduction of those who start a project of integration and social protection after exiting a situation of sexual exploitation. The reduction in the number of girls in the programs of social protection is mainly associated to the changes in methods of recruitment and exploitation.

“ *Now there is a minor subjection and greater “care” of the girls, this apparently conveys an idea of a minor coercion.*” (IT/P)

The ability to move freely as European citizens and the relationship with the exploiter, characterised by higher levels of mutual consensus, have reduced the requests for access to programs of protection and assistance or the adhesion to the proposal coming from the specialised organizations. However, the current economic and social context in Italy does not offer more stable alternatives that can break the relationship with the exploiter.

“ *They ask for help only if the exploiter/boyfriend is very violent or because another girl has entered into the life of the boyfriend. It may also be the case of a girl who recently arrives in Italy and is not able to bear such experience; she asks for help immediately.*” (IT/P)

“ They are decreasing in number; also because of the fact that now they are European citizens and therefore they feel that they can move and live independently regardless of the access to services.” (IT/P)

“ For us now it is difficult to get in contact. Of course we can talk with the excuse of a coffee or health services...but talking with them about leaving is much more difficult because we cannot offer much...what kind of employment do we offer?” (IT/P)

The change of characteristics in the relationship established during the recruitment and exploitation phase, in terms of reduced use of violence and coercion, makes it even more complex for women and girls to be aware of the real situation of abuse and exploitation they experience. The belief that the personal condition lived is only temporary is sustained, that is “the price to pay” before reaching full autonomy and independence. Because of the perception of greater autonomy and control, the project of exiting prostitution and the exploitation condition is eventually developed, designed and produced independently by the women and girls, thus activating their own resources. It also happens that the support of other parties, with whom women have direct contacts in Italy (friends, clients), is sought and obtained. In any case, the main reason for change is the possibility of finding a job, a job that would ensure an alternative ‘economic’ income.

“ When they get stuck in the prostitution life, they experience it as a short-term situation. For this reason, even in the most difficult moments, as much torn down as they are, they resist because there is a time limit. Many girls now try - with personal resources...with other people...attempt to break away when they cannot take it anymore. When inside they set a term for themselves... Meanwhile they make attempts...friend, client, someone to marry...try out other jobs.” (IT/P)

The project of social protection currently offered, as it is structured in terms of duration and type of services, seems not to fully respond to the needs and the project of autonomy imagined by the girls.

“ The attempts to change they make are not based on the proposal coming from specialised organisations and the social integration programme. It happens that a woman that we follow for months on the street, we do not see for a while and know that maybe for a period she is working as a care giver...then goes back on the street...they attempt in various ways, but not through the community assistance.” (IT/P)

In fact, the demands made to the professionals of street units have also changed:

“ We are also asked...can you help me to prepare a CV...or tell us they found availability from a client’s friend who has a restaurant. If they quit the situation of exploitation, they have no problems with the documents as well as with the work placement or the return home...they hardly think about the community pathway.” (IT/P)

Considering that requests for accessing the social protection programmes is decreasing continuously, the main contact channel with women/girls from Romania remains the work through the street units. Despite the effectiveness of the outreach work (unità di strada) in contacting women/girls victims of trafficking, they face high difficulties due the very little time they have their disposal when talking to the victims. It must also be taken into account that, despite their functional presence is “tolerated” by those who control prostitution, professionals and the girls/women are still facing control and observation from the exploiters. Therefore this occasionally and short-term encounters and the lack of a protective environment make difficult to reach the expected results in terms of identification of potential exploitation situation.

“ In addition, bringing out the story in the street context is more difficult than within the community. For instance, the last case we had was a situation of strong control. She could only go out in the evening and was in the street with the exploiter’s partner. This is the case of a woman with four children back in Romania. During the first contact with a street unit, within the few minutes of conversation with the operator - as the woman who was controlling her intervened - she immediately asked for help. The operator, taking the call for help, proposed a health visit. We organized a visit with the doctor in the presence of a mediator. The woman arrived with the other

woman, the one who exercised control over her. The second woman remained outside, while the first one was accompanied by a doctor. Inside, there was also a mediator. In this way it was possible to pick up the call for help and gather more helpful information. Subsequently, the police intervened, during a road check, took her calling for controls related to security.” (IT/P)

One of the factors to which professionals refer in relation to the fact that the Romanian nationality remains among the most numerous involved in the exploitation of prostitution is the fact that the victims have, on average, a younger age compared to other nationalities. It concerns mainly girls, even minors under 18 years. The presence of minors of Romanian nationality in shelters remains constant; these projects are generally very complex. The number of girls, who, after a few days, run away from the shelters, is also constant. In this case, minors are taken away from the exploiters “by force” (the intervention of the police does not result from a request of the person in need), so very often without any form of collaboration or choice decision by the minor. For this reason, very often the community is experienced by the minor as an imposition from which she tries to escape. They are also particularly vulnerable and thus more subject to the constraints and threats of the exploiters.

“ The number of children, even younger than 13 years, remains constant, and there are more and more victims of begging. Last summer we had a peak of incoming minors forced to steal and beg, while from January 2015 we had none. In previous years I have witnessed a higher number. Minors run away, almost 90% (this refers to the first aid and the first assistance). They escape because the police bring them to us and then they run away because they are not aware of the exit path from exploitation. Also given the young age, they are more afraid of the threats made by the exploiters and live the stay in the shelter with greater anxiety.” (IT/P)

In line with the new features of conduct of the exploiters, the demand for intervention from the women and girls who perceive a higher (real or fictitious) negotiating power with the exploiter is reduced. To this perception of autonomy it is then added the fact that to justify the conduct of the exploiter, there is still an emotional bond with him.

“ Little by little, women have also begun to be more autonomous. Now we meet the women and girls, but we cannot make them understand that the boyfriends or pimps are actually actors who take advantage of the condition. There is a love relationship that strongly influences the ability to break the tie. Of course there are girls who are forced just as before (by violence and threats).” (IT/P)

“ The relationship between the victim and the recruiter is very ambiguous, because they have a relationship; they have a future project together, in which case it is why it is hard to open her eyes. Moreover, usually the same guy has more girls on the street and the girls know it.” (IT/P)

A particular challenge in relation to initiatives of prevention and contrasting of trafficking, as well as for the protection of victims, is the emergence of a topic of discussion with respect to the governance of the phenomenon of prostitution in the urban areas. Faced with some episodes of intolerance in some neighbourhoods involved with street prostitution (referring in particular to Rome or other large Italian cities), the issue of regulation of prostitution was raised to local and national level. Beyond the different approaches to the prostitution policy (abolitionism, regulation, prohibition) the debate addresses the issue only from the point of view of safety or of the coexistence within neighbourhoods and metropolitan citizens without any gender perspective in defining these proposals and without the concern for the safety and rights of the women who are practicing prostitution. This means that in the identification of possible solutions and alternatives to the current situation, the gender impact and the rights and safety of women and girls in prostitution are not taken into account and not adequately reflected in policy responses and initiatives.

Therefore, taking into account the opportunity of carrying out this discussion, an association has proposed a different way to address the issue, in order to bring forward a reflection that goes beyond the stereotypes and clichés related to prostitution and trafficking.

“ The municipality has accepted the proposal to conduct a deep-rooted work...especially a work of mediation and awareness of the neighbourhood...informs them of the situation of trafficked persons in the street. We have proposed initiatives of training both to school youngsters and to clients. As for the teenagers in schools...relating with clients who have difficulties in founding relations established on respect...they pay because they do not feel able to manage an equal relationship.” (IT/P)

In general, there is great difficulty in the implementation of measures of this kind both because of the type of issues to address, as well as because awareness actions, with a view on prevention, have very few resources dedicated. Projects currently funded have very little room for interventions of prevention and awareness that can somehow affect the demand by discouraging it.

Despite the persistence of a high and important number of women and girls from Romania present in the street, the interviews reveal that, in recent years, the interest and concern about trafficking for sexual exploitation has seen a reduction in the public. One of the factors that determine the change in the approach to the phenomenon is due to the reduction in cases of “severe” violence among the women and girls originating from Romania. It is not perceived as a priority in terms of the intensity and frequency of forms of violence and coercion used by the exploiters, compared to other nationalities that have instead these characteristics. The question of maintaining a high political priority to trafficking emerges in fact as a general issue. During some interviews, it was reported as a critical element, in terms of enhancing interventions of victims’ protection, the fact that the issue of trafficking is not currently a priority on the political agenda and for the law enforcement.

### **Unexpected elements, key points and recurring topics**

The link between the exploiters and the women and girls is consolidated by a relationship based on a context of superficial autonomy and freedom, in which the woman acquires the perception, although aware of living a particular situation, to be able to govern and decide on their life plan. This inevitably makes less urgent for the victims the need to get protection and security from specialized organizations.

The dialogue with the professionals brings about a certain level of frustration with respect to the ability to offer access to services and measures which could represent a lever for girls to overcome the situation of abuse and exploitation, particularly when it is not perceived so. This difficulty is particularly expressed by operators with reference to the incoming groups from Romania, while for other countries - for example, reference is made to the reality of the Nigerian girls - the current structure of social protection programs is a proposal that is still proving effective and able to break the relationship with the exploiter. Evidently, the condition of acceptance and acceptability of the experience of exploitation - fuelled by the absence of consistently violent behaviours, the forms of economic sharing and the existence of emotional ties with the exploiter - is significantly limiting the ability of identification and support for victims of trafficking originating from Romania.

Among the operators, there is awareness of the difficulty and complexity of the fact that the effectiveness of the interventions of protection and assistance also depends on the ability to break up some ways of thinking and/or attitudes, rooted in unequal relations or otherwise uncomfortable and abusive relationships, which the women and girls have previously experienced in the family, or more generally during childhood. These are experiences that affect the ability of the trafficked person to recognise and understand the elements of abuse of dignity and denial of rights that continue to endure, despite forms of conquered autonomy.

## Interviewee's general and gender awareness

Gender issues have been recalled by the professionals during the interviews in relation to several aspects that can still be traced to a single issue, namely that of a position of vulnerability. This is not only in relation to the recruitment phase (in this case the gender is clearly identified as one of the main factors that increase the risk to of marginalization and discrimination experienced in the country of origin) but also to exploitation (in this case the gender is the basis of the establishment of not equal relations and the reason why there are not real alternatives to the condition experienced). Given the recognized importance of gender issues in the analysis and design of prevention, contrast and protection of victims, a strong difficulty was highlighted in terms of sensitivity of the public opinion and professionals in this respect and therefore a limited integration of practices, particularly in relation to prevention interventions in countries of origin (aimed at potential victims or to the main social groups that should ensure a secure environment) and in destination countries (aimed at clients and the public in relation to the understanding of the phenomenon). The little relevance in facts is also a consequence of the limited ability to raise financial resources directed to addressing the gender dimension within the interventions financed in combating trafficking.

The status of women is widely raised in relation to the condition of vulnerability. The girls, in a context of non-recognition of the equal dignity and equal opportunities between women and men, are charged with an economic responsibility with respect to the family of origin (parents and/or relatives) or with respect to the constituted family (husband and/or children). The degree of participation in the labour market, and more generally to the economic and social life, in the country of origin, as well as in the country of destination, is perceived by the operators as a key factor not only in terms of protection, during the recruitment phase (Romania), but also with respect to the possibility of freedom from the ties with the exploiter (in Italy).

The gender dimension is also called upon by the professionals as a factor affecting access to employment opportunities in the framework of the integration projects, following the exit from trafficking. In fact, women who are victims of sexual exploitation in the process of social integration must often face multiple discrimination that is based on nationality and gender. To the risk of multiple discrimination it is also added the fact that in Italy the opportunity of economic integration is further reduced by the general framework that marks low levels of female and youth employment, such as structural factors that characterize the Italian labour market. In this sense, some operators have referred to the difference between protection and assistance for sexual exploitation and economic exploitation. With regard to men involved in economic exploitation, the exit path is less complex because the labour market offers greater opportunities than those for women.

### 3.11 Conclusions

*Changing public perception and the priority degree in the political agenda with respect to the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings*

The recent migration dynamics that have affected Italy (in particular the groups originating from countries in Africa and the Middle East, in which they incur situations of persecution or humanitarian/democracy emergency, as well as flows related to economic migration) have changed the general perception of the public and operators (in particular police forces and public bodies) in relation to the phenomenon of trafficking.

The current “Italian emergency” concerns the management of the arrivals on the coasts of Sicily and the management of migrants applying for asylum or humanitarian protection. This resulted in a decline in the attention to the trafficking of human beings, both due to the quantitative dimension of the “new” phenomenon (arrivals and assistance of refugees) and for the fact that frequently the term ‘trafficking’ is used indifferently for either migratory flows characterized by exploitation (trafficking) as well as for those characterized by crossing the border without documents (smuggling of migrants). In recent months, therefore, the term human trafficking is used and linked to migration flows involving irregular economic migrants and refugees and not to the criminal phenomenon, such as defined by the Palermo Protocol and Directive 2011/36/EU. It is also clear that in an environment of zero tolerance towards undocumented immigration, as a reaction to the daily arrivals of hundreds of citizens of third countries, by many the rejection of policies, approaches and services based on the concept of solidarity, hospitality and respect for human rights is invoked. Regardless of the reduced interest in trafficking, that also seems to be linked to a substantial weakening of the Department of Equal Opportunities (responsible for the coordination of anti-trafficking measures), the integration between systems of protection concerning asylum seekers and those in favour of the victims of trafficking should in fact be strengthened and developed, also due to the fact that it is possible that within the flows related to international protection situations of trafficking emerge.

*Trafficking for sexual exploitation fuels the market for prostitution (street and apartment) within which the Romanian girls represent the largest group with reference to the EU countries and second only to Nigeria.*

Girls and women of Romanian nationality still represent the most prevalent national group (between EU Member States) among the contacts of the street units. The importance of this national group seems to find justification in the fact that one of the characteristics of the flows of trafficking originating in Romania is the young ages (including minors under 18) of the girls recruited and sexually exploited in Italy. The average age of the victims of trafficking is generally lower than those of girls from other European and non-European countries.

*In recent years, however, the number of girls and women who have started a process of social integration with the support of specialized organizations has been drastically reduced.*

The access of Romanian girls victims of trafficking to social and integration programs appears to be limited prevalently to situations of reduced autonomy of the individual, such as in the case of psychological or psychiatric disorder, or of use of severe coercion, violence and abuse by the exploiter that make the exploitation condition “intolerable”.

*The phases of the recruitment and exploitation are increasingly characterized by awareness regarding the risk to be trafficked and involved in exploitation of prostitution that affect the perception of the abuses and forms of control to which girl and women are subject*

In light of the recruitment methods (based not on acts limiting individual freedom but on proposals to improve the economic and social status) the risk of involvement in a process of exploitation in prostitution appears predictable. Even with regard to the exploitation, the conduct of the exploiters is cha-

racterized by a reduced intensity of violence and a partial (to various degrees) share of the incomes from prostitution. In this context, the use of a “soft” method reinforces the effectiveness of the relationship of subjection, impacting significantly on the ability of the girls to perceive their condition as an experience of exploitation and abuse. The girls met in the street by the associations show a condition in which they have the perception of having full power and control over their lives, and then consider the experience as a “temporary” and “acceptable “solution” to access new opportunities for social and economic integration.

*The requests expressed by the girls and women of Romanian nationality involved in situations of exploitation in prostitution are increasingly oriented towards the needs of economic integration rather than of security and physical protection and care*

A recurring theme emerging from the dialogue with operators with regard to measures of protection and assistance of trafficking victims (of Romanian nationality) is that of the need to revise the procedures to ensure that services respond and meet the demand and needs of women victims of trafficking. It clearly emerges how the evolution of the models of recruitment and exploitation of flows originating from Romania brings out the need for interventions that are more focused on opportunities of social and working inclusion and not only on the aspects of security and physical protection from traffickers or other criminals.

*Interventions for prevention, protection and assistance to victims must take into account gender issues and their impact in increasing vulnerability to trafficking (both in relation to recruitment and to exploitation)*

During the dialogue with professionals constant reference was made to the status of women and how this affects the ability to build real opportunities in order to realize a project of autonomy which can make the person less vulnerable to proposals of “economic independence” which occur through the practice of prostitution in conditions of exploitation. The life stories of the girls and women, as reported by the operators, show how important the personal experiences related to childhood or adolescence are with respect to the ability to perceive the situation of exploitation. During the interviews it was made clear that experiences related to situations of discrimination and abuse experienced during childhood, especially in the family, are referred to gender equality as a factor of vulnerability to trafficking but also as a factor conditioning the ability to gain awareness of the situation of abuse and violation of human rights experienced.

It is clear to operators that actions are required not only to overcome traumatic experiences related to the recruitment and exploitation in the context of trafficking, but also with reference to traumas experienced in childhood or adolescence. However, there is an awareness of the limited capacity of the services which intervene occasionally and for a short time (particularly in the case of street units) of being able to influence and promote a process of re-reading and overcoming of experiences and traumas.

*The sustainability of the exit from exploitation can be achieved through the support of specialized social services*

The experience of the operators, however, confirms that areas of vulnerability persist which require appropriate action to ensure an exit from the condition of exploitation that is sustainable over time based on an effective enhancement of human dignity and individual skills. There are, in fact, reported experiences of exiting exploitation independently from social protection programs, which are achieved by the girls with their own resources or with the support of third parties (often customers), which, however, often have as a result living conditions or precarious work that often culminates in the re-victimization experiences. The accompanying and the creation of opportunities of access and integration in the economic and social life - based on overcoming discrimination which hinders the exercise of civil, social and political - are necessary to reduce the perception (in the country of origin and in the country of target) that in fact the practice of prostitution represents the only real and viable possibility of overcoming their own poverty and social exclusion. Of course the ability to test new interventions must take into account

the need to move within the regulatory guidelines governing the provision of funding for operations of protection and assistance for victims of trafficking.

*The reinterpretation of the regulatory and programming framework of the interventions of protection and assistance for victims of trafficking represents a challenge for the Italian government and the third sector working both in terms of combating the phenomenon and promoting equality between women and men.*

The dynamics that currently characterize flows from Romania are for some aspects specific and therefore not relevant to the needs of trafficking victims from different nationalities in comparison to those from Romania. In destination countries an element of complexity, with respect to the ability of associations to plan and carry out identification, protection and assistance for victims, is the fact of having to take into account the different needs expressed by the victims from different nationalities. The need for personalization and then adaptability of services is felt as necessary in order to take into account cultural diversity, the different methods of recruitment that characterize “national” flows (during the interviews it clearly emerges the distinction and differences between the women and girls on grounds of nationality). It is clear that such personalization ability encounters a limit related to the fact that these pathways and opportunities are subject to legislation and regulations for which there are therefore predetermined conditions of access, maintenance and termination of benefits; and also with respect to human and material resources available to the associations.

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#### Legislation

Legislative Decree no. 286/1998 on Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning immigration

Law no. 228/2003 on Measures against trafficking in persons

Law no. 75/1958 on the Abolition of the Regulation of Prostitution and the Fight Against the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others

Italian Criminal Code

# 4. National research reports: Spain

## 4.1 Overview of the current situation concerning trafficking for sexual exploitation in Spain

### *Available data*

According to Eurostat, from 2010 to 2012 there have been **1.964 victims of trafficking into Spain, including all purposes of exploitation.**

Over the three years (2010, 2011 and 2012), more than 70 % of suspected traffickers were male. Similarly to the statistics on victims, around two thirds of suspected traffickers were EU citizens (69 %). The top 5 EU countries of citizenship were Bulgaria, Romania, Belgium, Germany, and Spain.

Citizens of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain had a relatively low registered victim prevalence rate, despite the higher absolute numbers of victims registered in these countries.

Data of 2014, provided by the Spanish Public Prosecutor (Madrigal Martínez-Pereda, 2015), show as follows:

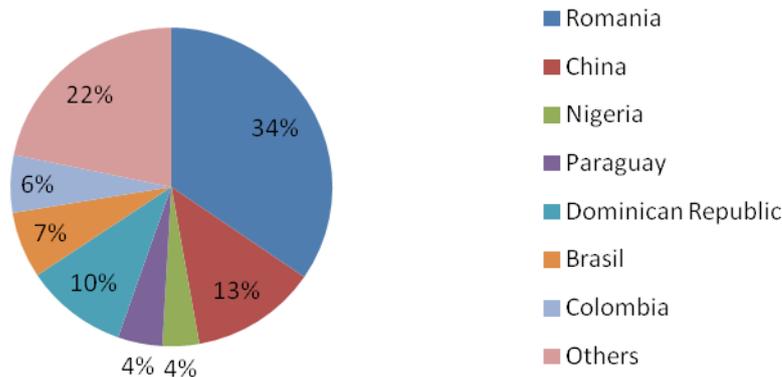
- Regarding follow-up judicial proceedings of trafficking of human beings, that is, cases where it is considered that there is evidence of trafficking, in 2014 they were related mainly to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (154 = 91,66% over a total of 168). Moreover, the number of proceedings started during 2014 increased a 19,37% over 2013.
- Concerning victims, during 2014 the number of victims of sexual exploitation has reduced. The total number was 1,428. Of this figure, 192 were actually identified as victims, 727 were considered in a situation of serious risk and 509 were considered potential victims. Most of them have a non-Spanish nationality (93,83 %). Victims of Romanian citizenship were the larger national group among victims, both concerning sexual exploitation (493 victims = 34,52 % of the total) and labour exploitation (131 victims = 75,72 %).
- As for people who have been investigated, the number of detainees and investigated persons has also increased.
- A total of 27 sentences were passed: 25 on trafficking against human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation (14 guilty, 6 partially guilty and 5 not guilty).

Most victims of trafficking into Spain for the purpose of sexual exploitation are women of Romanian citizenship. The 2014 Spanish Public Prosecutor report describes the cases of 1,428 victims with “enough indicators or signs of trafficking” for sexual exploitation (according to the Prosecutor’s analysis and based on different sets of UN and Spanish official indicators).<sup>5</sup>

A 98.7% of the 1,428 victims were women. Out of these 1,428 victims, 493 were Romanian (34%).

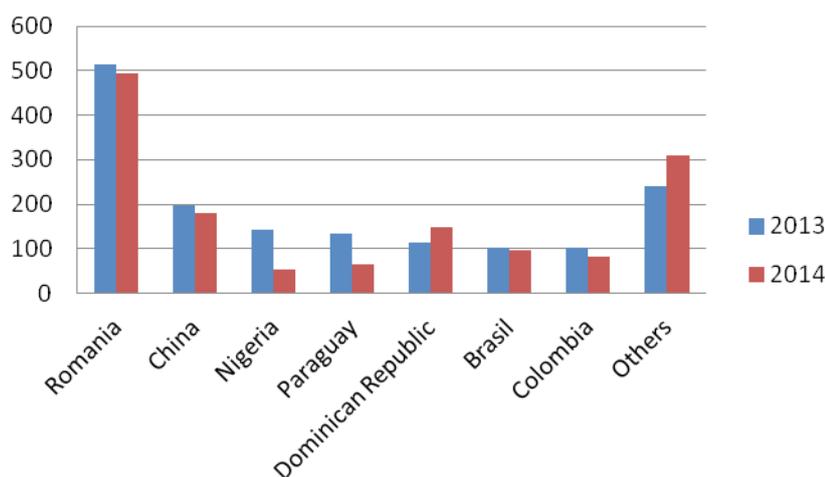
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<sup>5</sup> The Public Prosecutor includes in this total figure of victims “potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation”, a term used to describe “those practicing prostitution in a situation of ‘consented procuring’, that is, according to their rules or guidelines imposed by a sex industry business owner and apparently accepted by the victim” (Fiscal de Sala Coordinador de Extranjería, 2015: 2).



Nationality of victims of THB for sexual exploitation, 2013. Source: Own elaboration based on Fiscalía General del Estado, Sección de Extranjería. 2014.

The latest two yearly reports of the Public Prosecutor include annexes with details on these victims, which allow for comparison. Figures show a very slight decrease of Romanian victims (515 in 2013 and 493 in 2014), which is not significant compared to the important drop of Nigerian and Paraguayan victims, which the report attributes to the actions against criminal networks trafficking with women of these nationalities.



The 2013 report of the Public Prosecutor includes a map with the Romanian region of origin of 323 victims.



- Regions with 35-79 cases.
- Regions with 18-24 cases.
- Regions with 11-12 cases.
- Other regions: 10 or less.

Regions of origin of victims of THB for sexual exploitation with Romanian nationality, 2013. Source: Fiscalía General del Estado, Sección de Extranjería. 2014.

The average age of the 55 follow-up judicial proceedings which were opened during 2014 with Romanian nationals as victims is 28.2 years. The larger group is again that of women until 25 years old (108 victims).

The report describes different circumstances of trafficking recruitment during 2014: through false promises of occupation, being sold by family members and boyfriends, seduced and recruited through the Internet. The report on cases of 2013 also describes circumstances of threat and kidnapping.

Once arrived, they are “forced to practice prostitution with violence and threats”. Exploitation circumstances include retaining documents, depriving them of food for a while, reclusion or freedom of movement, constant surveillance, rape, forcing them to use drugs and even marking them with tattoos.

### *Legal and political approach to trafficking in Spain: from the international and European framework to the domestic initiatives<sup>6</sup>*

The International and European framework has played a crucial role in promoting policies against trafficking in Spain. The two main international documents on THB, the Palermo Protocol and the CoE Convention, were ratified by the Spanish State during the first decade of this century. The **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children** (Palermo, 2000), which was ratified by Spain in December 2003, forced the inclusion of the crime of THB in domestic law.<sup>7</sup> The **Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** (Warsaw, 2005) was ratified in 2009, ordering a complete and structured system to fight THB, and deepening aspects related to the prevention, investigation and international cooperation, as well as the protection of and assistance to victims.

Regarding EU law, Spain transposed the **Directive 2004/81/EC** on residence permit issued for third-country nationals who are victims of human trafficking or who have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, and who cooperate with the competent authorities. Spain has also recently incorporated the **EU Directive on Trafficking in Human Beings 2011/36/EU** into national law, after the formal request of the European Commission to do so (at the time of the expiration of the deadline in 2013, Spain had not incorporated it).

In Spain **the first reform took place in 2009** with the adoption of a series of norms promoting legal precepts to fight against the crime of THB and address victims’ needs. These norms mainly refer to the modification of the immigration law (regarding third country nationals) and the criminal code.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the adoption in 2008 of the **National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation** (2009-2012) represents the main step taken in Spain at a policy level. The plan was finally renewed in 2015, after more than two years since the finalization of the previous plan.<sup>9</sup>

The 2015-2018 Plan articulates its measures around 5 priorities: reinforcing prevention and detection; developing identification, protection and support to victims; expanding knowledge and analysis of the phenomenon to articulate an effective response; intensifying the prosecution of traffickers, and improving institutional coordination and participation of the civil society.

6 This section of the report is based on previous research conducted for the project “Combating Trafficking in Women for Labour Exploitation in Domestic Work” (2013-2015), HOME 2012/ISECAG/THB/4000003900, coordinated by the University of Nicosia and funded by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime (ISEC) Programme of the European Union.

7 The Palermo Protocol is the first international legal text that establishes a definition of THB and the obligation for the signatory States to adopt “such legislative and other measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences the conduct set forth in article 3 of this Protocol” (art. 5.1, Palermo Protocol).

8 The main legislative modifications were the Organic Law 2/2009 of 11 December, which modified the Organic Law 4/2000 of 11 January on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social Integration, and the Organic Law 5/2010 of 22 June, which modified the Criminal Code and which entered into force on 23 December 2010.

9 This delay is one of the signs that there is no clear political priority towards trafficking in human beings in Spain, as shown by research carried out with the project “Combating Trafficking in Women for Labour Exploitation in Domestic Work” (2013-2015).

A **Framework Protocol for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking** was adopted in October 2011, with the main objective of establishing “operational guidelines for the detection, identification, support and protection of victims of human trafficking, to foster coordination among the institutions involved in these processes and to define the mechanisms for the relationship among authorities with responsibilities in the field, along with the processes for communication and cooperation with organisations and bodies with proven experience in attending to victims of trafficking, in particular those which provide comprehensive support and are involved in public administration programmes for victim support and protection”, as stated in Article 1.1. Research carried out with stakeholders working in this area (within the project “Combating Trafficking in Women for Labour Exploitation in Domestic Work” 2013-2015) shows that the Protocol was considered as a **step forward for a comprehensive approach to THB**.

A **wide range of governmental bodies and private organisations** are involved in the mechanisms foreseen by the Framework Protocol. Several bodies can participate in the detection of a victim of THB: the Law Enforcement Agencies, the Labour and Social Security Inspectorate, and private organisations. By contrast, the identification of a possible victim of human trafficking shall be performed only by the Law Enforcement Agencies (of the national police and the police of Spanish autonomous communities). The Public Prosecution Office shall always be notified of the detections and identifications, and is in charge of coordination.

Regarding **victim’s treatment**, the Framework Protocol establishes guidelines on the procedures to follow when a potential victim is identified:

- The police unit shall provide the victims the necessary information on their rights and the support measures available.
- Presumed victims in an irregular administrative situation shall be informed of the possibility of being granted rehabilitation and reflection period, an assisted return to their countries of origin, or a residence and work permit based on exceptional circumstances (see below in the document).
- The police unit shall inform the victim of the possible risks and protection and security measures that can be adopted, but the victim has the option to reject them.
- If the victim agrees, she or he shall be provided with a referral to the competent regional or local authorities dealing with social support or the services of organisations and bodies with proven experience in attending to victims of trafficking.

In the **case of third country national potential victims without the legal residence permit**, the Framework Protocol details the procedure for granting a rehabilitation and reflection period. These 30-day days (minimum) are granted for those third country nationals who are in an irregular administrative situation and for whom there are “reasonable grounds” to believe that they could be victims of THB.<sup>10</sup> The period “must be sufficient to allow the victim to decide whether to cooperate with the authorities in the investigation of crime” (Article 59 bis.2, Organic Law 2/2009). According to the law, during this period the person is allowed a temporary stay, all administrative sanctioning processes are stopped, and the competent authorities are obliged to ensure the subsistence and the safety of the person concerned.

Where applicable, the competent authorities can declare the victims free of administrative responsibility and give them the option of an **assisted return to their countries of origin**, or provide them with a **residence and work permit based on exceptional circumstances**. This exception of administrative responsibility is foreseen in two cases: because of the cooperation of the victims with the competent authorities in the investigation of the THB crime, or in response to their personal situation (Article 59 bis.4).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Introduced by Article 59 bis of the Organic Law 2/2009 of 11 December, which modified the Organic Law 4/2000 of 11 January on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social Integration.

<sup>11</sup> The Council of Europe (2005; art. 184) considers the following reasons in order to issue a permit due to the victim’s personal situation: “victim’s safety, state of health, family situation or some other factor which has to be taken into account”.

Despite this precept, civil society organisations are critical of the precept in that there are still some gaps in the protection of victims' human rights, particularly when they are foreigners with an irregular administrative situation. In this case, the **administrative situation of the possible victims plays a crucial (negative) role**. Furthermore, if, at the end of the rehabilitation and reflection period, the victim does not decide to cooperate with the authorities in the investigation of the crime (Article 59 bis.2), a legal procedure concerning her/his irregular administrative situation can be issued.

The Spanish Ombudsperson report (2012) shows concern on the effective implementation of the recovery and reflection period, stressing that "there must be a clear distinction between two phases. First, the victim should re-establish herself, feel safe and recover physically and psychologically. Only when this first phase has been completed successfully, and always with the support and advice of a specialized organisation, can the second phase be addressed. In this second phase, the victim should be informed that they will have the opportunity to cooperate with competent authorities". Additionally, there are complaints that the **number of rehabilitation and reflection periods requested and granted remain very low**.

The Framework Protocol also establishes that several bodies can participate in the detection of a victim of THB, but **the identification process can only be performed by police units**. Specialised civil society organisations criticise their exclusion of the identification process, but also recognize some good practices of "mixed teams" between the police and NGO professionals.

According to the GRETA report (2013) a **Monitoring Committee** was established in June 2012 for the follow-up of the Framework Protocol for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking, adopted in 2011, but it is unclear whether this committee is active.

### *Making progress?*

It is quite clear that important progress was made in the anti-THB legislation as well as in the protection of the victims in Spain. Organisations working in the field recognise that until recently, THB was not identified as a specific crime and there were no specific legal mandates for institutions such as the prosecutor's office, the police or the labour inspectorate, and therefore they seldom coordinated their activities.

Notwithstanding these positive developments and the efforts of many actors involved in fighting against the crime and supporting victims, these organisations claimed that THB is still not a priority in the political agenda of the Spanish government, especially when approaching the protection of the victims.

In another sense, only very recently, in 2014, a **National Rapporteur** for THB was designated. This could represent a step forward in guaranteeing coordination and responsibility. In fact, the GRETA report (2013:23) on this issue stated that: "There is no single institutional structure in Spain in charge of developing and coordinating anti-trafficking action for all types of exploitation and all victims of trafficking. In addition, there is no independent mechanism (e.g. national rapporteur) in charge of monitoring the implementation of anti-trafficking policy. GRETA notes that considerable advantages could be drawn from appointing an independent national rapporteur."

## 4.2. Additional methodological notes

For the research activities of the project, interviews were conducted with **7 Romanian women who had been victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation** and **18 professionals** working in support services to victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in different cities of Spain.

All interviews with women were face-to-face and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Each interview was conducted by one of the members of the research team involved in the project.

Regarding the time of interviews and their location, the researcher always adapted to the needs and availability of the interviewees: a small number of interviews were carried out on the SURT premises and the others were conducted at the organisations where professionals worked at.

The interview guidelines were prepared in line with the common scripts prepared by the partnership, but adapted to the individual expertise/circumstances of each interviewee. Scripts were used as guidelines for semi-structured interviews rather than strict questionnaires, in order to allow spontaneous issues to come up and assess their relevance for each interviewee.

All the interviews were conducted in a general environment of trust. All interviewees signed the confidentiality form, and all the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for their analysis.

Regarding the analysis, every transcript was accurately analysed, in order to identify the relevant elements presented in the common analysis template of the project, and reflected in the sections of this report.

Sampling was carried out with snowball technique. The first phase of interviews was dedicated to interviewing professionals and the second one to interviewing victims of trafficking. The basic criterion for the selection of organisations to be interviewed was those that worked with victims of trafficking in Spain. Special care was taken to include organisations from different regions of Spain, in order to reflect different territorial realities.

Snowballing started by reaching organisations that had worked previously with SURT (in Catalonia) and CPE (in Spain) in projects related to trafficking, and contacts provided by the Socio Educational Assistance Service (SAS) of the City Council of Barcelona.

The contact with victims for later interviews was provided by the professionals interviewed and their organisations. Reaching victims was the main difficulty during fieldwork, which ultimately limited the number of women interviewed to 7. Even though there was high interest among professionals on the issue and continuous contact was established with several organisations, several factors limited the interviews that were finally carried out: unavailability and reluctance of victims to participate, their over-victimisation risk, as well as the fact that simply there were no Romanian women at the shelters run by the organisations interviewed.

The reduced number of women interviewed was tried to compensate with a higher number of professionals participating in the research.

In order to differentiate in this report the quotes from interviews with professionals and from interviews with victims, particular codes were applied: SP/P stands for a professional working in Spain, while SP/V stands for a victim exploited in Spain.

## 4.3. Research results based on interviews with professionals

### 4.3.1 Identification of interview and interviewee

The following table presents the profile of interviewees and their organisations.

Organization	City/Village	Region	Position in the organization	Areas of expertise of the interviewee	Areas of expertise and main activities in the field of trafficking of the organization
<b>Socio Educational Assistance Service (SAS), Municipality of Barcelona (managed by an NGO)</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Psychologist	Psychological support to women who are practicing or have practiced prostitution on the street. 3 years' experience (previously, 6 years' experience as an educator in the same service). She provides support to the team and individual therapeutic support to women, structured in 4 topics: violence, changing occupation, sexual and reproductive health and how they live the stigma of prostitution. Two formats are provided: structured intervention of 16 individual visits, following the 4 topics, and intervention on the street to reach women who do not go to the office.	"The only municipal service supporting women in the context of prostitution and victims of sexual exploitation"  Multidisciplinary team (social educators, social workers, health agents and psychologist) doing street intervention with women practicing prostitution and supporting women who are practicing or have practiced prostitution who are referred from public services and NGOs.
<b>Jere-Jere Project, Cáritas Diocesana Valencia</b>	Valencia	Valencian Community	Coordinator of the project since 2015	Social worker, working with Romanian women since 2007.	Programme providing support to women practicing prostitution on the street and possible victims of trafficking, offering alternatives for personal autonomy and occupational integration. The programme provides comprehensive support in health and legal issues, and accompaniment to social, training and employment programmes provided by other services. The team is multidisciplinary, including educators, social workers and Nigerian mediators (the main target group).
<b>Public Health Agency of Barcelona</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Community health agent, mediator	Psychologist	Mediation with Romanian population, health education
<b>Socio Educational Assistance Service (SAS), Barcelona City Council (managed by an NGO)</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Coordinator	Long experience as social educator, then as coordinator and team manager	See above
<b>Catalan Police (Mossos d'Esquadra)</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Police agent, member of the Central Unit of Human trafficking	Police investigation, contact with courts, interviews with potential victims referred from NGOs to identify them	Identification of victims and investigation of cases of trafficking.
<b>Hospital Drassanes and Hospital Vall d'Hebron</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Intercultural mediator	Mediator Health agent with women exercising prostitution	Experience providing support to women practicing prostitution at roads. Providing counselling and training to prostitutes on sexual and reproductive health, in cooperation a network of organisations of the Raval neighbourhood. Awareness-raising of the general public on trafficking.

<b>Solidarity Foundation Amaranta - Asturias</b>	Gijón	Asturias	Lawyer	Lawyer counselling victims Practicing attorney	The organization was established in 2006 by a nuns' community. It has now offices in six Spanish cities of different regions. In Asturias, activities with victims of trafficking are fieldwork to assess the situation of women and offer support, a shelters and support for victims for their integration. They provide support no health, labour and legal issues.
<b>SURT</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Coordinator of the project	Social worker	Surt, a women's foundation, cooperates with SICAR in their programme for the recovery, empowerment and occupational integration of women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The individual 2-year process also involves EXIL, providing psychiatric support and psychological therapy. SURT deals with the training and support for job search, and cooperates with empowerment sessions.
<b>Amaranta Solidarity Foundation - Granada</b>	Granada	Andalusia	Social worker since 2006 and since 2010 coordinator of both the service supporting victims of trafficking and another support service for victims of violence.	Social work and coordination	The organization was established in 2006 by a nuns' community. It has now offices in six Spanish cities of different regions. In the Southern city of Granada, the organisation has two services: a shelter for trafficking victims and support to victims living in their communities after they leave the shelter. The shelter also houses women with their children and has a specific space allotted to trafficking victims who are minors and for their circumstances cannot live in residential care facilities for minors. The organisation in Granada employs a multidisciplinary team: director (a nun), coordinator, one social worker, three educators, one psychologist and one cook. In the past year they provided support to 27 people, including women and minors.
<b>Vagalume Project (Oblate Sisters and Cáritas Diocesana Santiago de Compostela)</b>	Santiago de Compostela	Galicia	Social educator and project coordinator	Social educator, coordinator of support projects to women practicing prostitution, 10 years' experience.	The organisation provides support to women practicing prostitution, including victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Its activities are: fieldwork to establish contact with women in and around the city (clubs, flats), support service on health, labour and legal issues, training, a flat to provide temporary housing to women wanting to stop practicing prostitution, psychological support for single mothers. Multidisciplinary team including: 2 psychologists, 1 social worker, 2 social educators and a coordinator (a nun).

<b>Alumar centre (Oblate Sisters and Cáritas Diocesana Ourense)</b>	Ourense	Galicia	Psychologist and coordinator	Psychological support and therapy to victims, and coordination of management of the whole centre	Programme providing support to women practicing prostitution and trafficked women. It has a day centre, a shelter flat and a mobile unit to fieldwork and approach women practicing prostitution. It also provides social support, legal counselling, basic competence training and vocational training.
<b>Àmbit Prevenió</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Mediator from 2007 to 2010 with Romanian women practising prostitution	Providing support to Romanian women practicing prostitution, translating and acting as a link between women and institutions/organisations. She also participated as interviewer and coordinator of fieldwork with women practising prostitution in Catalonia.	Organisation providing support to women in risk of social exclusion at the Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona, including women practicing prostitution and victims of trafficking, but not focused on trafficking.
<b>Concepción Arenal Centre and Madrid City Council (managed by a consultancy firm)</b>	Madrid	Madrid	Two professionals: coordinator of the Centre and gender equality officer of the City Council	Psychological counselling and coordinator of service.	Comprehensive support service since 2004 to women practicing prostitution and victims of trafficking. It provides support (health, social, legal issues), a mobile unit for detection of victims (coordinated with the police) and a shelter for 10 women and minors, and coordinates with other municipal services to provide training and occupational integration.
<b>EXIL Association</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Psychologist	Psychological support to victims	Organisation providing support to victims of violation of human rights (victims of sexist violence, asylum seekers...). For victims of trafficking, it provides psychiatric and psychological support. The team includes 2 professionals and has worked for 5 years.
<b>SICAR cat, Sisters of Adoration</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Social educator	Individual support to victims regarding training	Organisation with 7 shelters (19 spaces in total) and an office providing legal, social, occupation, training and health support to victims of trafficking, assisted return to countries of origin.
<b>SICAR cat, Sisters of Adoration</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Lawyer	Legal counselling to victims on issues such as recovery of documents, support during criminal process	See above
<b>SICAR cat, Sisters of Adoration</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Two professionals: Pedagogue and social worker	Coordination of services and social work	See above
<b>SICAR cat, Sisters of Adoration</b>	Barcelona	Catalonia	Social educator	Social educator for emergencies and shelter of victims	See above

All the professionals interviewed were women. This is related to the fact that services providing support to women are very highly feminised.

As described in the methodology section, an effort was made to include different cities and regions in Spain and cover different territorial realities.



It should be noted that most of the organisations interviewed are NGOs related to religious Catholic charity programmes. Many have an origin in a religious community of Catholic nuns (Oblates and Sisters of Adoration), which have historically provided support to women practicing prostitution. Others are related to the charity organisation Caritas. Even though these organisations had religious origins, the professionals providing support now are not religious and their activities do not include any kind of indoctrination.

The organisations consulted were NGOs, except in the case of three institutions (police, health agency and hospital) and one consultancy firm subcontracted to provide a public service. The services provided were mainly related to counselling and support to victims of trafficking on health, social and legal issues, as well as provision of shelters.

It is worth noting that some of the organisations deal both with prostitution and trafficking, and in fact services on trafficking for sexual exploitation were developed over the years.

The main position of professionals in their organisations is coordinators, as they were senior professionals with longer experience in their organisations and knowledge of different types of services provided and, hence wider knowledge on the reality of women. Professional backgrounds of professionals were mainly in Psychology, Social Work, Social Education, Law and Mediation.

### 4.3.2 Changes in the dynamics of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Despite the diversity of cases of Romanian women trafficked into Spain for their sexual exploitation, professionals perceive some common elements and the evolution of the phenomenon. Changes related to recruitment are described in the relevant section.

A general perception is the increased ability of professionals to identify trafficking over time. This makes it difficult to assess if the increase of victims supported by the services is an actual increase or just a consequence of an increased ability for detection by professionals, which may have been developed in line with the development of legal instruments, higher public opinion awareness and establishment of expert training and organisations.

“ We have always worked in context of prostitution but we were beginning to hear about trafficking, something that we hardly knew we were talking about, you know. In 2008 a few trafficked women began to appear, one or two a year, three a year... Last year we had 15 (...) Figures are excessive, from my point of view. Depending on the source, there are many women and many minors. But then in our services the figure is quite less.” (SP/P)

“ The phenomenon of trafficking continues to be the same. Maybe in my case at the beginning I didn't have such an idea [about it] or had little knowledge of the phenomenon and its magnitude”. (SP/P)

As some professionals mention, the apparent increase in trafficking for sexual exploitation is also related to migration patterns in Spain.

“ Trafficking has changed related to the migration phenomenon. (...) The founder of the Sisters of Adoration talked [in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century] about schoolgirls working in prostitution, but many of them if we analyse it according to what we now understand as trafficking, they would probably be trafficked women. What happens is that they were Spanish and they were trafficked from the countryside to cities. It was internal trafficking.” (SP/P)

Concerning Romanian victims, most professionals describe changes in terms of how Romanian nationalities may have been prevalent over other nationalities in some periods. Some professionals describe a common pattern where the number of Romanian women at services was higher around ten years ago, then the numbers decreased in favour of Nigerian women, and now women from Eastern Europe (Romania, but also Albania) are present again. It may be difficult to infer a general pattern from these perceptions, as they are based on the referral mechanisms of each organisation, which may vary locally, and often depend on specific police operations against trafficking in a certain area. It should be contrasted with other sources: for example, the figures by the Public Prosecutor show higher numbers in the latest years (see first section).

“ At the beginning we had received more women from Eastern Europe and now are receiving more African women.” (SP/P)

“ In 2013 there were almost no Romanian women. They were all Nigerian. In 2014 there were Romanian and Nigerian women as victims of trafficking.” (SP/P)

“ At the beginning [2008] there were mainly women from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. A couple of years ago the number of Sub-Saharan Africa increased, especially Nigerian women. (...) Now the number of African women has moderated and Eastern European women have increased a bit. So now we have kind of a balance.” (SP/P)

There are different perceptions about the accession of Romania to the EU as related to trafficking. For some professionals, the accession of Romania to the EU facilitated trafficking. For others, it had a reverse effect.

“ As transit becomes easier, the number of Romanian women has increased greatly.” (SP/P)

“ The profile is very diverse, but within some common characteristics. First there were Romanian women and then, when Romania entered the EU there was an enormous change and suddenly there were no Romanian women. Obviously (...) because they couldn't do anything with the issue of irregular immigration, which is a bit how they recruited potential victims of trafficking.” (SP/P)

Professionals also associate changes in trafficking patterns to changes in law enforcement practices, such as increased prosecution.

Regarding the profile of women, certain professionals stress the increase of minor victims in the past few years, or women with children.

“ But in recent years we are finding very young, very young victims, who probably come to Spain when they turn 18 or 19.” (SP/P)

“ And now what we see is, on the one hand, younger and younger girls”. (SP/P)

Some professionals do not make a clear distinction between prostitution and trafficking, and it is difficult to grasp the specific dynamics of trafficking regarding some elements, such as the urban and rural areas where trafficked women practice prostitution. However, the interviews show that the areas are very different in different cities and regions and are related to the socioeconomics of each area. In rural areas, street prostitution is less common than road prostitution and road clubs. In cities, street (old parts of town, city centre, and industrial areas) clubs and flats may all be present, but the dynamics are local.

Over time, police control has increased and this has meant that women keep changing the areas where they work or the exploiters force them to move.

“ If they see that there is a lot of control, now I think that sometimes there are women that suddenly disappear and change to distract”. (SP/P)

### 4.3.3 Characteristics of the phenomenon and vulnerability factors

Professionals described in the interview the specific elements which differentiate trafficking of Romanian women from trafficking of women from other countries. They are mainly related to specific recruitment patterns (see next section).

Interviewees also described several common traits related to the background of victims, which increase the trafficking risks. The main elements are: poverty, low educational level, age (most are minors or very young), and so-called “broken homes” and family violence. In some cases, and related to low education, women who are not so young had low-skilled and precarious jobs. Some have children very early in life.

“ And this above all, low education, poverty... Well, social exclusion, and with some women, dependents, children or relatives: mothers, fathers, and so on.” (SP/P)

“ In general terms, broken homes, many conflicts, a situation of domestic violence and gender-based violence exerted by these women’s fathers to their mothers. And a situation of total vulnerability leading them to practice prostitution even in Romania”. (SP/P)

Related to economic issues, it should be noted that some interviewees say that it is not extreme poverty what makes women vulnerable to trafficking, but wanting to improve living standards.

“ We have observed that the key is poverty. Poverty and lack of expectations in Romania itself.” (SP/P)

### 4.3.4 Characteristics and patterns of recruitment

As mentioned above, what professionals stress about the specificities of Romanian victims are mainly the recruitment patterns, which focus on Romanian family clans and trusted acquaintances and “fake boyfriends” than on organised crime networks. However, the police source contacted during this research maintains that an increased development and organisation of networks from Romania has been detected over time.

“ We’ve seen that this situation has changed. In general terms, Romanian women also came with Romanian people, but we have seen on the one hand that some of the Romanians have started coming with people from other countries, such as Albania or Bulgaria. And there began to be some mixture, even though clans are really are not divided, but we have begun to see that there is such a mix of nationalities”. (SP/P)

“ At the beginning the dynamics were mostly family clans. (...) They relied more on the exploitation of their female relatives. (...) But they were very local groups and, therefore, the police worked

very locally. (...) With changes in the Criminal Code article 318, of course these women were excluded because as Romanian citizens they did not fit that article. So, of course, they were a bit helpless in this regard. I saw that the phenomenon was growing and they were also used by other networks of Bulgarians or Albanians who used these same women for this benefit, because having no problems in this regard, penalties were very low. Entering the new Article 177.bis, which already come all women, they have seen that the Romanians, well, organizations have begun to organize themselves more and get more benefit in this regard. (...) Now, going to be criminal organizations, it is our job to deal with this". (SP/P)

The complicity of relatives both based in the destination countries and countries of origin is suspected by the professionals interviewed in they talk about the "national lie", where families welcome the money they received from their trafficked female relatives, but they seem to be blind about their source of income.

“ Another issue is that they don't want to see it. Because sometimes the accomplice is an uncle, I don't mean the whole family, but...” (SP/P)

A remarkable recruitment pattern, which makes intervention especially difficult, is that based on affective relationships between the victim and the trafficker/exploiter.

“ And we've also seen this phenomenon, so called "other boy", where many women arrive with a partner, in a state of infatuation that is perpetuated throughout some ambiguous time, because they are partners who bring them with the promise that they will work. (...) I mean, they come with a life project not so blindly as before, right?" (SP/P)

As seen in the previous quotations, psychological elements play an important part in these recruitment patterns: trust for family members and infatuation and love relationships. Motivations to recruit women are mainly promises of a job and a better life. In the case of boyfriends, a project of couple's life and children.

Regarding deceit in the promise of a job, interviewees describe both cases of full deceit (women are not informed that they will practice prostitution) and also partial deceit, in terms that the actual working conditions are not clear beforehand. Some professionals describe changes, but these may be limited to local level.

“ They're not deceived regarding practicing prostitution anymore, but what it happens is that they are deceived regarding the conditions.” (SP/P)

“ Many of them are now more aware than before about what they will do, but they come to work with the prospect of earning enough money to build a house and go back to Romania”. (SP/P)

Retention of documents, which is very common in victims who are third country nationals, is not so much among Romanian victims since the accession to the EU.

#### 4.3.5 Characteristics and patterns of exploitation

Interviewees describe cases where the recruiter and the exploiter are the same person and others where the roles are taken on by different people. In the first case, after recruitment and (in some cases) transportation to the destination countries, the recruiter disappears and leaves the victim with an exploiter. This is mainly the case of trafficking based on the promise of a job and not so common when there is an affective relationship with the recruiter, but there are also cases where the relationship is broken up and the "fake boyfriend" leaves the victim with a different exploiter.

“ When there is a job offer they often change from hand to hand: an acquaintance offer her and when she arrives there is a change. In the case of the partner it is often the same partner, but not always. There have been women arriving here and finding out that her partner has other women and he takes her to a club or somewhere.” (SP/P)

Exploiters are mainly men. Often professionals describe different people involved in patterns of exploitation, so that the main exploiter is the one receiving the victim's money, while other controller figures also collaborate in the surveillance.

The main exploitation strategies described by professionals are:

- Control and surveillance, but not total reclusion
- Physical and psychological violence
- Threats to the family

As mentioned above, exploiters try to “move around” victims in different areas to make detection and police identification more difficult.

For some professionals, means of control have changed over the years.

“*And we have begun to also see that the forms of pressure and coercion by pimps and exploiters, have been changing too. Whereas before coercion was very much physical, now it is becoming more psychological. Once women were not getting any income from prostitution when they were being exploited, but in recent years, we've seen that these people leave them some money so they are not on the verge of denouncing or leaving the situation*”. (SP/P)

According to professionals, victims manage to escape and leave trafficking situations through different strategies, such as establishing trust with acquaintances, which act as confidants, or through clients with whom they establish a romantic relationship. However, these “rescuing” clients may ultimately become also exploiters or their relationships may be based on gender-based violence and abuse.

Several professionals agree that debt is not used for coercion in the case of Romanian victims, unlike what happens with victims of other nationalities, such as Nigerians. When there is debt, there is no fix amount.

#### 4.3.6 Gender and trafficking for sexual exploitation

The obvious gendered fact concerning trafficking for sexual exploitation is that due to patriarchal structures, sexual exploitation concerns mainly women victims.

Furthermore, there are several main gender-related elements that were identified in the research. First, professionals stress the role of romantic love in recruitment patterns and how young girls consider having partner as a main goal in their lives.

“*There is an overwhelming presence of the idea of romantic love. How could I leave my partner, with whom I have constructed [a life]. Well, I think that we could say that romantic love is the biggest pimp. What is stronger to [get rid of]*.” (SP/P)

“*[Romantic love] has very much to do with the kind of society they come from, which is in a kind of duality: a country opening to the world and, you know, having access to a lot of information and romanticisation of life, right? Many aspects of globalisation, films, mass media. And these are women expecting to find someone who will rescue them and get them out of the whole economic situation they are in, and they fantasize a lot. (...) They lose some of their phantasies when they get her, but they still expect in their life some kind of rescue*”. (SP/P)

Secondly, interviewees describe how girls have a different socialisation in the family context in the country of origin, which limits their opportunities in terms of education, leads them to precarious jobs and job segregation.

“*Lack of education or of opportunities to have access to training in their country. Many Romanian women who come and are victims of trafficking have life patterns which are strongly marked by a sexist tradition, right? ‘You are a woman, you can't study, you have to marry, have children early... Their life story is strongly directed. Not having the possibility to do other things because you are a woman*”. (SP/P)

At the same time, this strictly limited gender role concerning public life includes taking on extra responsibilities over care of the family. Professionals clearly situate gender as a relevant factor in the over responsibility women take on to maintain their families in the home country, through their submission to exploitation.

“ [On Romanian society] “These are very traditional societies where the woman still has quite a specific gender role as caretaker: the woman taking care of the whole family. And if she is not able to take care of the family physically, then she does it by sending money for another woman to take care of them. It’s very common for women to take on all family responsibilities. (...) Many Romanian women not only send money to their children, but to other people’s children, cousins, nephews... (...) The woman considers that she does not take care of them no one will, which is true, because in Romania there is no health system, not a welfare state well established, accessible and universal. (...) So I think this is the most important thing: issues of motherhood and care”. (SP/P)

An interviewee describes this extra responsabilisation to a utilitarian conception of the woman’s body.

“ I’m not a gender specialist, but well, this has to do with..., I don’t know the word, education in their environment, in their country, the image they have of themselves as a person depending on a male figure. The issue of [lack of] self-care has to do with this. They don’t consider themselves important, even though they carry the weight sometimes of income. It’s considering themselves a simple object. The issue of sexuality is like a sexual machine, they don’t take into account their sexuality at all. (...) In other countries or with other women if they have a partner, he does not want her to practice prostitution, here it’s the reverse. This sounds like old times, but the thing is that he stays home spending money, making money out of prostitution, and she gives out her body”. (SP/P)

This is also related to social shame associated to prostitution and the stigma that pervades the life of ex prostitutes trying to find other occupations.

“ Gender issues, to the extent that you are not able to tell your mother how you make a living. And this girl sometimes she did not have money to eat but she had to send a bicycle [to her family]. Who are you, a universal provider?” (SP/P)

#### 4.3.7 Groups most at risk

Groups at risk may be inferred from the description of personal and family backgrounds of victims provided by interviewees and included in section 4.3.3 above. Another especially vulnerable group are Roma women.

#### 4.3.8 Descriptions of buyers

It was difficult to collect information in the interviews on the profile of buyers of sexual services of victims. Some information was collected from women’s interviews (see relevant section).

“ Buyers in Spain are very diverse: 18-year-old kids, married person with family responsibilities, because we have seen minivans with pushchairs, old people, men of all kinds”. (SP/P)

“ Buyers are very occasional, tourists, for example, coming to Barcelona for the weekend and there is a mere use of women’s body and that’s it. Or they are very old men who probably have their wives at home and they see the opportunity to have access to a young body for very little money”. (SP/P)

Others, but not the majority, are a kind of “saviours”, which offer to women housing and being their stable partners. This kind of men may end up being violent with women and exploit them again.

#### 4.3.9. Interventions addressing trafficking/victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Needs, obstacles and positive/negative examples

As described above, many of the organisations interviewed develop comprehensive programmes providing support to victims in a variety of areas (and describe the need to provide services from this comprehensive lens). Even though their expertise is intervention, interviewees also described the need to carry out improved prevention activities to reduce the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual exploitation, and focus on very young women, as the most vulnerable group.

“ Bulgaria and Romania are large countries, where there is much disparity between those who have money and who don't. And people who do not really have resources are many and are in situations of great exclusion. I would say that computer exclusion, educational, social... People in isolation, in rural areas and making campaigns are very difficult, as in Nigeria. There are, but they reach those who can read, who have access to the media. (...) And for those with emotional or family fragilities or whatever, as if is very easy for someone to hook them with the promise to bring them and give them a happy life, they don't identify themselves as victims of trafficking and this campaign, even if it reaches them, they don't see the message as directed to them”. (SP/P)

Professionals also mention some good practices concerning campaigns, even if they are not focused on Romanian victims.

“ I also know of campaigns by other organisations, Caritas, who has worked in high schools, but this was more related to relationships between women and men, sexuality and equality. (...) Metges del Món also has videos on trafficking victims. (...) There are also audio-visual materials by religious organisations, Oblates and Sisters of Adoration have very good materials. (...) But it is not about Romania and Romanian women, but a general awareness-raising tool. We also do awareness-raising talks when we have the requests”. (SP/P)

Professionals are also critical of victimising campaigns and comment on the need to carry out prevention not only at a large scale, but also at a micro-level, developing individual contact with women.

“ This is grassroots work, based on individuals. I think that campaigns are very victimising, with chains and all that, and they [victims] don't recognise themselves there. (...) A campaign is what I do, micro-politics with them, helping them to think, with their daughters, on the issue of motherhood (...), of contraceptive methods. To consider themselves as subjects with rights in that situation, unlike their grandmothers. It is very subtle and very, very slow”. (SP/P)

Another stressed element was the need to cooperate with organisations in Romania.

“ Working with countries of origin (...), that is, going there and talk to organisations, even to women, because this changes your point of view completely. (...) Working networks are also at international level”. (SP/P)

“ I see many more organisations from Romania working on this issue than organisations from Bulgaria”. (SP/P)

Concerning intervention activities directly benefiting victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, the comprehensive perspective adopted by professionals shows a global concept of the process of social reintegration in all its aspects, promoting coordination and educational intervention to reach those women that may not come directly to organisations. Some specific needs are highlighted, such as the need to combine both residential support (shelters) and external support, to provide continuous and accurate information on sexual and reproductive health, and to provide legal counselling and support in order to fight against the secondary victimisation women suffer when they enter the legal system.

“ Many women, especially those who decide to stay in Spain and get a life, so to speak, they are more and more integrated socially, but they still have demands. (...) In legal procedures they are revictimised. Then we saw a bit the need to provide these women with counselling within the legal procedures, that is, particular accusation”. (SP/P)

“ They arrive here for health issues: abortion or sexually transmitted diseases, or serious illness. (...) Also food issues, it is odd to see how badly they eat.” (SP/P)

Regarding obstacles, barriers and particular challenges addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation, professionals stress the difficulties to detect themselves cases of trafficking of Romanian women during intervention fieldwork, it seems a more difficult issue than with victims from other countries of origin.

“ Unlike what happens with other nationalities, for us it is very difficult to detect Romanian victims of trafficking and this is because they are very inaccessible. (...) We work with apartments and clubs and the percentage of Romanian women reached through our approach and then in the social integration project is very, very low. It is a really closed collective, they don't participate. Even at clubs they are separated from the rest of women. So basically the Romanian victims we work with are those referred by police forces. (...) And out of Romanian women, those with Roma ethnicity are very, very difficult to reach”. (SP/P)

“ When you reach them at clubs and places where prostitution is exerted they are not very sociable... They're unfriendly, often they don't want to talk to us because there is usually a [female] controller. So they are very difficult to reach”. (SP/P)

However, for another professional there has been an improvement in the intervention with Romanian women:

“ At least Romanians, coming from a country where support to these target groups is non-existent, they don't expect to find no one here helping them. Over the years they've seen that this support exists, that someone may support and not judge you. Maybe now it's much easier to work with this group.” (SP/P)

Another obstacle described is that women only tell about their trafficking experience once they leave it, when they want or are able to make changes, but it is extremely difficult to intervene in a previous stage.

Psychological violence exerted on victims makes it also very difficult for professionals to intervene, as it makes intervention a longer and more delicate process of self-identification and recovery. A parallel issue hindering self-identification is the existence of some degree of autonomy in their exploitation.

“ [Now] violence is more psychological, it is exerted through coercion and infatuation and difficulties of intervention are those of psychological intervention rather than those of an educational intervention. What happens is that these women are not open to deal with these issues. So the work is very slow, and the best results, so to speak, are with women who are in a more difficult situation of exploitation. Those in more ambiguous situations, where they practice prostitution and give a very important part of their income to their partner, pimp or whatever, but keep part of it and have more or less autonomy (...) are the most difficult to solve. (...) This is address on a daily basis, talking to her so that she questions why she has no freedom to have her health card or to participate in any activity”. (SP/P)

“ They don't understand very much either the concept of trafficking. (...) Very often I had doubts if women were really mistreated or if they had this concept of protection that 'he is the boss and, of course, if I make a mistake, then...'. They thought that they deserved a punishment, somehow.” (SP/P)

Regarding positive initiatives described by interviewees, one is the participation of Romanian mediators with appropriate training and experience working with Roma women:

“ She was a person who is aware of their situation, plus her background as a social educator. This helped us a lot because she was not just anyone, but someone with a professional background, with understanding and knowledge. (...) This was a before and an after”. (SP/P)

Coordination with other local organisations is also key to address needs that can't be covered inside one organisation (providing protected housing, collaboration with the police) through cooperation with other organisations in the area.

Lack of the training of professionals is also considered an uncovered need that could improve intervention. As for police forces working on issues of trafficking for sexual exploitation, some interviewees are critical of their lack of training and awareness, and the tendency to secondary victimisation. One of the interviewees also suggested their connivance with club owners, if not exploiters.

“ There are no professionals that are sufficiently prepared to support these women” (...) “In the Castelldefels-Gavà road, all this area, the local regulations fine girls. So police cars stop and fine them, but then they don't see that this girl is a minor. Or they don't ask if she is exerting [prostitution] voluntarily or forced by someone. (...) There are security forces which are paid by the clubs (...). When there are inspectors at the clubs for inspection agents act as informers. (...) Then the club owner makes the girls in irregular administrative situation disappear.” (SP/P)

“ I think that [identification] this is an issue that should be improved. We detect many women with evident signs of trafficking victims but as there is no identification, the woman is there at an *im-passe*”. (SP/P)

The legal instruments and judicial system also pose obstacles for victims:

“ There is no law regulating..., just as there is an integral law for gender-based violence, there is no law regulating [trafficking]” (...). If the girl manages to escape. She will come up against public administration. (...) So she may declare or she may not. And when she does, she doesn't go through the whole procedure because the girl gives up when she doesn't see herself protected enough, fearing retaliation [by exploiters]”. (SP/P)

Economic needs are also key. As positive experiences, training and offering alternatives for occupational integration are described, and social benefits are suggested.

“ A social benefit during a certain period until the woman is able to lead a new life. And this is currently limited or non-existent.” (SP/P)

As victims often want to return to Romania, cooperation with organisations in Romania is essential to guarantee security:

“ I think that organisations are now more sensitised, are we? And sometimes we do returns which are more secure than some time ago, as there are now organisations in home countries which take care a bit that the person does not run any risks. (...) There are many deficiencies still because we still don't know really where she is in her home country. I wish we could investigate or the police could do some kind of action in the home country.” (SP/P)

Regarding occupational integration in Spain, the interviewee stresses that victims are often forced to carry out jobs in specific sectors with poor conditions:

“ It is very limited and they trap the women we work with. They all end in domestic work or taking care of elder people o with jobs that are near labour exploitation.” (SP/P)

This same interviewee also described the difficulties to work with women after they get out of trafficking.

“ When this happens they are very, very confused, you know. (...) Of course many things are cut short this way, broken dreams, as I say. You have an idea of coming and then you have it cut short, but you can't go back to your country without nothing to offer, can you?”

#### 4.3.10 Interviewees' general and gender awareness

Most interviewees had a deep knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Similarly, the degree of gender awareness was also very high in most cases.

## 4.4. Research results based on interviews with victims

### 4.4.1 Identity of the interviewee

All women interviewed are young (21 to 34). They all currently live in Catalan cities, except one of them, who lives in the autonomous community of Madrid.

They were all born in Romania and were trafficked to Spain in the past 15 years, when they were teenagers. The youngest age was 14. This matches patterns described in previous literature describing that victims of trafficking from Romania are mostly very young.

Most of them had primary or secondary education. None had university studies.

The majority of women interviewed were unemployed or had precarious jobs. Only one of them had a steady job.

Most of them are currently single and half of them have children.

Their self-representation varies greatly depending on the stage of recovery they are in. Some women show a very low self-esteem, while others focus on their inner strength and have positive future plans for their lives.

“ I feel, say, good and bad. I don't feel happy nor bad. I just feel very lonely. (...) I don't know if you're going to say I'm crazy, but I'd like to die. Because think I'm not worth a thing”. (SP/V)

“ I think that all the workers think the same: that I am very mature for my age and I also think that the course. Not being afraid of saying 'No, I'm worth more than that'”. (SP/V)

### 4.4.2 Personal and family-related background

The personal and family-related background of interviewees have some common traits, which match those profiles that professionals describe as the most vulnerable to trafficking.

The parents of most interviewees were separated or divorced. Most of them describe their childhood as an unhappy period, with just an exception, where childhood is described as a happy period, until a disgraceful event happened. Violence is usually described as very present in family life.

“ With my mother it was a bit as not having a childhood, I don't know. Of fears...Well, she had an illness and you had to live with her illness. And then her character. She was also a person a bit..., with a lot of character, she wouldn't give you... What my grandmother gave me my mother didn't give me at any time. (...) It was tense. And my aunt, when I was almost a teenager, also a bit tense, not very pleasant. And with my father... Well, with my father as if he didn't exist. A totally non-existent relationship”. (SP/V)

“ I guess my mother also was battered when she grew up and she beat me more than my brother. She beat me every day. She hated me. (...) [And she did not treat your brother like that]. No. Well, I helped her cleaning the house and cooking”. (SP/V)

“ I was a bastard kid with no mother nor father. There was no love from mother, father nor siblings. I have always been alone”. (SP/V)

“ I have amazing parents. They gave everything to me. Just like all children, I had everything I wanted and needed”. She describes her stepfather as “her father because he raised me”. (SP/V)

Absent parenthood was also registered in the case of a woman who was in a care institution until she was 14 and made a direct transition into living to her partner. She associates her isolation to her vulnerability to recruitment.

“ As I wasn't on speaking terms with no one in my family this boy started helping me and said: 'Don't worry, today you're coming to my house and tomorrow we'll see what we do'.” (SP/V)

The relationship with family members after the victims leave trafficking experience remains complicated. Many women do not keep in touch with them, and there are also descriptions of how the families benefit from their earnings.

“ My mother said she put all the money in the bank, every week. Bollocks! My mother was like my second pimp. (...) Always with the same story that she is tired, that the grandmother is feeling bad and they don't have food... (...) When I was working for myself I gave her 1,000 euros monthly. (...) I wanted my mum to save to buy a house outside the city. When I watched films about farms I saw myself, with twenty horses or thirty pigs and fifty sheep. (...) And you realise you lost years of life, your youth. Excuse me, but I was left sucking dicks. I have lived, yes, I can't lie. I eat well, dress well, but of course that' was it, nothing else”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.3 Living conditions and significant events

Some interviewees, but not all, describe a life of deprivation. Some were in extreme conditions of poverty.

“ We lived in a building with no doors or windows, but we then went and put doors and windows bit a bit”. Now she reflects: “When I remember this sometimes I'd rather be eating from the garbage can or making adobe or looking for scraps, but I was happy. (...) If I could turn back time I wouldn't care about poverty, just being with my siblings and my mother”. (SP/V)

“ If you have to go on a school trip, [my mother said] no. (...) As the poorest kids in class. And my schoolmates laughed at us. (...) I was finishing primary school, right? Then he told me and my brother that we had to start working because my father [her mother's partner] was not going to support us”. (SP/V)

Others describe a situation of low living standards, but not extreme deprivation, and the will to increase income and therefore living standards.

“ The way it enthused me was by winning 600 EURO per month, which in 2001, compared to Romania, was 6 times more”. (SP/V)

Most interviewees were very young when they were recruited and had not worked previously nor emancipated from their family. Others had carried out unqualified jobs.

“ I was unemployed, after working for ten years at a factory”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.4 Gender roles and expectations

A gender-relevant life event of many of the women interviewed is the role of romantic love in their lives, both in terms of their recruitment by traffickers and in their partnership experiences are large. Some had early marriages and were married while minors, an issue that women explicitly associate to their bad relationship with the family.

“ It is really a very strong thing when a boy wins a girl's love. What would you tell the girl? (...) Because love gets her and what do you say to love? Why are you in love with this one? (...). However, she sees that this love has to do more with money because he goes to the casino.”. (SP/V)

“ I fell in love with this boy, this lady's son. We were together since I was 13, for a year. They matched us and it hurt me a lot when my mum told me I wasn't a virgin because I went to bed with this guy the day we started. We have a different culture than here”. (SP/V)

“ I was in a residence since I was 9 till 14. When I was 14, I had a friend/kind of boyfriend, as you want to call it, and as my relationship with my family wasn't good, we started dating, the usual thing. Until I was 15 and we went to live together”. (SP/V)

Some interviewees have clear gender awareness.

“ [Describing her experience as a victim of intimate partner violence and how her women's rights were not protected]: “He didn't hit me just once, abuses started because in Romania there is no protection for the woman. And you had no right to go to the police and if you went it maybe fucked you up”. (SP/V)

Others overestimate progress concerning gender equality.

“ In the past a woman had to put up with her husband even if he was a batterer, a drunkard, or whatever. She had to put up with it because otherwise people laughed and pointed at her and this was shame for the family, in villages”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.5 Social background and relations

Interviewees do not provide much information about social relationships or any close friendships, other than family members, partners and recruiters. Some cases are of particular isolation, with a very limited social background because she lived in a care institution during her childhood.

Confidants appear in some interviews as key figures helping them to escape exploitation. However, it is the role of “rescuing” clients and organisations that is stressed.

“ There was a co-worker who was from my own village and I told her, because I trusted her more and knew my mother, I told her that she beat me and mistreated me and she gave me a card to call a minors' care centre”. (SP/V)

“ He took me to the street and there I met a client who helped me to leave, after a lot of time”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.6 Characteristics and patterns of recruitment

The experiences of trafficking of the women interviewed are diverse in terms of length and intensity. Some of them were only recruited once and exploited for a short time, while others had several experiences of trafficking, even in several countries and locations besides Spain (Turkey, Italy).

“ I was sold five times from pimp to pimp”. (SP/V)

Recruiters are consistently acquaintances or fake boyfriends, as the professionals interviewed also described.

Concerning recruitment patterns, in some cases, women were recruited with the promise of a job, with deceit: women are either not told that they will practice prostitution or they are misguided about the conditions.

“ I know a family of Turkish Roma who propose to come to Spain to pick up fruit. (...) And we found a different thing.” (SP/V)

“ As you are thin, you don't have cellulite'. I remember the comment. He said: 'It is a pub where you may walk around with a miniskirt, sexier dress and then there are men that afterwards invite you to drink at the bar'. (...) 'Walk around a park'. He said that: 'A square, a park. And have drinks. The boys invite you". (SP/V)

In other cases, they are completely deceived and then forced to practice prostitution with violence.

“ [Experience in Istanbul] ”. “There was a massive house, very big and of course there were like 20-30 women. (...) They were all inside cells”. (SP/V)

“ ‘You have to come to Spain and work as a prostitute’ And I said: ‘Me?’ This wasn’t the deal’. ‘You will earn a lot of money’, he said. ‘No, no, no. I want to go back, I had to leave my job, my life and all this’. And he locked me in and beat me. (...) I was very scared because besides when he touched me... If a man touches me I am afraid already, right?’” (SP/V)

In some cases, partners were the recruiters or handed the woman over to the recruiter, using the affective relationship to increase her vulnerability.

“ [The recruiter was her boyfriend’s father] “I don’t know what went through my mind but I paired up with a Roma boy and his father I didn’t know he was a pimp”. (SP/V)

“ We were at a restaurant, we had dinner and at the end the one who was my partner wanted to break up right away. In this group of friends who trafficked with women there was one called Marcelo who saw that I was very scared and didn’t know what to do”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.7 Characteristics and patterns of exploitation

Exploitation is exerted through different means.

Most of the women interviewed were trafficked into Spain before Romania entered the EU and traffickers retained their **documents**.

Different ways of controlling victims are also described, by the exploiter or other controlling figures.

“ [The man] collected the money and controlled everything. (...) All the girls left our bags there on the table. After you left the bag and the money on the table you went in and you took your clothes off. (...) He passed [his hand] so that you didn’t hide anything. I didn’t like this at all”. (SP/V)

“ There were on the street many Romanian girls, around 50, and they know about this... I saw that they talked that I had ran away. (...) All the girls looked at me.” (SP/V)

“ You had to be 15 minutes, I think... 15-20 minutes and... You didn’t take your top off, from your waist up... And he paid 10 EURO for the hotel and 20 for you. And after 15 minutes, then the thing stopped and out”. (SP/V)

Threatens to family in home countries were also described:

“ [Threatens to] my family I didn’t care about, because I didn’t have anyone. Well, I had my father, but I didn’t care. But myself, I had to protect myself, a bit. And trying to get out, but I couldn’t do next-day.” (SP/V)

Physical, sexual and psychological violence are also present. Reclusion is also used, but in some cases women are allowed to work unaccompanied.

“ He told me: ‘Look, this girl has left and if you liked you could be my partner and work less and that’. (...) Then there was more abuse. It was without condom, he almost forced me and I was afraid as well that the other girl found out or said: ‘Look, now he wants to be with me’. (...) You had to hide it a bit.” (SP/V)

“ Very often I said ‘How am I putting up with this guy?’. (...) He was the typical jealous guy afterwards: ‘Why did you stay so long in bed?’ ‘Did you like it?’ (...) Whore insults. (...) And he didn’t want me to go with young people. (...) It was love-hate fights. (...) Hard fights, a lot of shouting. There was no physical aggression, but a lot of mistreatment”. (SP/V)

“ If you don’t bring money, you won’t eat and then they will beat you, they will beat you up”. (SP/V)

“ [Locked in a hotel] He came, brought me food... (...) He beat me, he kicked me on the back, pulled out my hair”. (SP/V)

Exit from the exploitation situations, as it has been mentioned, was mainly achieved through the complicity of clients, acquaintances and street educators of organisations providing support to victims.

#### 4.4.8 Descriptions of buyers

The women interviewed did not provide a lot of information about their clients, but some general descriptions and opinions (related to how they view prostitution) were collected.

“ Men from the street. They came from different nationalities and races, different ages, that went for this”. (SP/V)

“ [How was the relationship with them?] It depends. Because I think that every girl chose her clients. I never went up with a drunken man or with a drugged man. (...) I said no and it was no. (...) And I always tried to find, not find, but go up with people more... older, more responsible... More normal people, not with those that made you feel insecure or that they could hurt you or whatever”. (SP/V)

“ If you are smart woman you can have seven or eight old men in love with you. And sum up, if you tell each one ‘my mother is dying or I have five children in Romania and no food for them’ they help you”. (SP/V)

“ There are risks, you may be ill, people beat you, he [the pimp] beats you up because you’re not making money and there are thousands of men that are beating you”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.9 Evaluation of services and support

Women interviewed have a general good opinion about the support received from different organisations.

“ [Description of translation and support by NGO to denounce]: “At all times I was protected and without fear”. (SP/V)

“ When they offered cleaning courses....When you start, you think that the trainer is very boring. You think that because you consider yourself very important, but it is not like that”. (SP/V)

However, experiences with justice are not so good.

“ Those who say that there is justice, it’s not true, there is no justice. Because he was in jail for one year and he got out. Because in the last trial it was his word against mine and the lawyer I had I didn’t meet her and never saw her. (...) And if you go to trial with a minor you don’t even know, what do you know to win my trial? There were some things he said that were not true and the lawyer was not there to do her job. That’s it. He was only one year in prison”. (SP/V)

#### 4.4.10 Prevention of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Women interviewed provide especially advice for young girls and regarding the situation in Romania.

“ In Romania there should be more border control. (...) Police should note that when a man goes out with ten women she is not going out to pick up bananas. Let’s be sincere. (...) There should be more controls and more controls in the cities because policemen are corrupted in Romania. You pay them 500 or 1000 and it is enough for them to turn a blind eye. (...) ‘As the pimp is paying me, I turn the blind eye’. (...) Protect women more and dismantle prostitution networks,

*as they do here. (...) There was cooperation between Spanish and Romanian police, and several networks were dismantled and there were raids here. (...) Because there was pressure from the Spanish police". (SP/V)*

“ *And girls should not trust so blindly. Those who do not want to be in this world should not be so reckless and believe everything they are told. (...) If you want to take to another country to pick fruit or whatever I have to sign the contract in Romania. (...) You leave feeling safe and you know you are going with a company and not a family. (...) Not a family you barely know about. (...) [People] paint the world with rose-coloured glasses and when you arrive in Spain you are not going to find a rosy life, you are going to find hell, as I found". (SP/V)*

Some of them even take personally the interest to talk to vulnerable girls and try to help them leave the situation or avoid entering it. One of the trafficked girls became later professionally a street educator in an anti-trafficking service.

“ *Sometimes I go out on the street and talk to the girls, when they look as they're not right. Because as a 34 foreign woman, you realise that in the end you are going nowhere." (SP/V)*

#### **4.4.11 Life outside the trafficking experience**

All women interviewed are glad both of having escaped trafficking and prostitution. However, as described in the table of interviewee's profiles, they are still in the process of rebuilding their life: only a few of them have stable jobs and income.

Some women reflect on their experience from a positive perspective and remark how surmounting obstacles has made them stronger:

“ *You realised that fears do not exist. You shouldn't be afraid of anything. You should take care about things and people, and know how to do things." (SP/V)*

Future plans are often simple wishes to have “normalised” and quiet life.

“ *Having my apartment, being with my son happy. And have a job. (...) I don't want anything else, no one coming to hurt me anymore". (SP/V)*

It is also relevant to mention how rebuilding a life after the experience of sexual exploitation is not easy, due to the stigma attached.

## 4.5 Conclusions

According to judicial data, Romanian women are the largest group of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Spain (34%). However, the data only accounts for a small part of the reality. Given the difficulties to measure human trafficking and the limited data available, this qualitative study, despite its limitations, provides relevant information about the experiences of Romanian human trafficking survivors exploited in Spain. It also shows significant coincidences with the results of previous studies on the exploitation of this target group in other destination countries.

### *Recruitment patterns*

An example of the shortcomings of official data is that they do not clearly show that victims are very young. According to judicial data, the average age of Romanian women sexually exploited in Spain is 28 years and the largest group of victims is that of women under 25. However, the results of this study show that many girls are recruited when they are underage and may then be exploited for several years before being identified as victims.

This research shows two main patterns of recruitment of Romanian women. In the first pattern, the recruiters are mainly relatives or friends who promise jobs and income in the country of destination. In the second common pattern, the recruiters are so-called “lover boys”, men who start a relationship with the victim, promising a life together according to traditional gender roles, a nuclear family and an improvement in income and living standards.

Both these recruitment patterns, which seem to be more prevalent among Romanian women than among victims of other countries of origin, are very invisible and make detection and identification very difficult for Spanish professionals. An element contributing to this invisibility is the fact that there are some shared features between these human trafficking cases and those of other forms of gender-based violence, such as intimate partner violence and family violence.

For some professionals, these overlaps facilitate the understanding of women’s trafficking as another form of gender-based violence, in a country with high public awareness to intimate partner violence and extensive support services to these victims. However, coincidences also may pose a challenge to the definition of each particular case in women’s support services and the provision of adequate protection to victims, guaranteeing their security.

### *Vulnerability factors: gender aspects*

The study confirms that the main risk factor to trafficking for sexual exploitation is being a woman, in several ways.

First, the myth of romantic love, a gendered construct, increases girls’ vulnerability to trafficking. One of the professionals interviewed described romantic love as “the biggest pimp”. Growing up with the patriarchal myth of romantic love and considering that having a partner is the main objective of one’s life and a measure of success as a woman makes girls vulnerable to seduction and abusive relationships, including trafficking.

A relevant figure is that of the trafficker known as “lover boy”, who establishes an emotional relationship with the victim, gains her trust, seems to provide her with care and promises her a life in common in the destination country. The bait of romantic love is essential to recruit the victim, but also to maintain exploitation, as with intimate partner violence. When a concept of love integrating submission and violence is naturalized as an integral part of the relationship, it is much harder for women to identify themselves as victims and exit the exploitative situation.

Another gendered risk factor is that girls’ socialization limits educational opportunities and leads to precarious jobs concentrated in certain female-dominated sectors. In communities with few job opportunities, girls are more vulnerable to recruitment through the promise of a well-paid job and income in the country of destination. The reasoning behind is the same to voluntary migration.

This is intensified by other vulnerability factors: lower socioeconomic status, low level of education, negligent care in childhood, gender-based violence in the family environment (both family violence and intimate partner violence), precarious and low-skilled jobs (in the case of the older victims), teenage motherhood and belonging to the Roma community.

Concerning socioeconomic status, vulnerability is not linked only to cases of extreme poverty, but also to the will to improve the standard of living. This may be facilitated by the fact that consumption patterns are a defining factor of worth in the community and a fundamental element in the development of gender identity in adolescence. These economic objectives may also increase the risk of trafficking. In these cases, the recruiter is usually a family member, a friend or acquaintance.

Sometimes women are deceived as to the type of job they will perform: they are not informed that they will exert prostitution and are told instead that they will work as domestic servants or waitresses. In other cases, they may be aware that they are to provide some kind of sexual services, but the job is vaguely described and they do not know in advance the specific working conditions.

Finally, exploitation may be linked to women's requirement to take care of their families. While women have a limited role in the public sphere, women bear an over-responsibility regarding family care, both in terms of performing care tasks and also providing financial support to their families living in the country of origin. This pressure to be the main breadwinners, associated to traditional gender roles, increases their vulnerability to recruitment and maintains the exploitative situation. In some cases, family members in the origin or destination country may ignore or tolerate the situation of exploitation.

### *Exploitation patterns*

Women are exploited in different spaces (streets, clubs and private apartments) and exploiters try to move around victims from different areas to avoid police identification.

Exploitation may be imposed through control and monitoring of the victims, by exploiters themselves or other controlling agents. It is significant to note that even though there are cases of total isolation, more often women have some freedom of movement. Violence (physical, psychological and sometimes sexual violence) and threats to the family were also identified, but the psychological elements and psychological manipulation have a significant main role in patterns of exploitation. Trust on family members and infatuation within relationships act as controlling elements perpetuating the exploitative situation.

### *Improving intervention*

Romanian victims seem to have less contact with services than women of other nationalities, even though they are the largest nationality group among victims. This may be related to the particular identification challenges associated to the recruitment and exploitation patterns described above, such as the establishment of affective relationships with traffickers and the prevalence of psychological violence as an exploitation strategy.

Raising awareness on trafficking from a gender perspective and improving training of professionals on the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon may increase the ability to detect cases and provide better support. The participation of qualified Romanian-speaking professionals, aware of the reality of the country of origin and the phenomenon of trafficking, and improving cooperation with specialist organisations in Romania are also key to make progress, as they will improve the prevention of trafficking and the knowledge of the phenomenon and provide a follow-up of victims returning to Romania.

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#### European Union

Council Directive 2004/81/EC of 29 April 2004 on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings or who have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, who cooperate with the competent authorities [2004] OJ L/261.

Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA [2011] OJ L 101/1.

#### Spain and Catalonia

Plan Integral de Lucha contra la trata de mujeres y niñas con fines de explotación sexual 2015-2018. Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality.

Ley Orgánica 2/2009, de 11 de diciembre, de reforma de la Ley Orgánica 4/2000, de 11 de enero,

sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España y su integración social.

Ley Orgánica 5/2010, de 22 de junio, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 10/1995, de 23 de noviembre, del Código Penal.

Circular 2/2011 sobre criterios para la unidad de actuación especializada del Ministerio Fiscal en materia de extranjería e inmigración, Public Prosecutor Office.

Protocolo marco de protección de las víctimas de trata de seres humanos, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, Public Prosecutor Office, General Counsel of the Judicial Power.

Protocol de protecció de les víctimes de tràfic d'èssers humans a Catalunya, Catalan Government.

# 5. Conclusions regarding the trafficking for sexual exploitation of Romanian women and girls exploited in Italy, Spain and Romania

Human trafficking and sexually exploited Romanian women and girls are still present in Italy, in Spain and in Romania, even if the amplitude of the phenomenon in the destination countries fluctuates. In the past years, both Italy and Spain reported an increase in the number of sexually exploited victims (even a reappearing of the phenomenon – in the case of Spain) from Romania. Many of them are exploited in Romania or in other countries while they are still underage.

The analysis of the research results in the three countries has led to certain common conclusions.

## **Trafficking for sexual exploitation is a highly gendered phenomenon.**

The present research emphasises a series of contexts and characteristics present at a social, family and individual level, which prove the importance of approaching the phenomenon from a gender perspective.

The most visible proof of the fact that trafficking for sexual exploitation is defined by gender factors is given by the overrepresentation of women and girls victims among the general group of human beings subjected to trafficking. The results are in accordance with the national statistics (in all countries that are partners in this project), as well as with the international statistics. The overrepresentation of masculine solicitors of sexual services is just as well-known, but less visible (or less declared). What is interesting, but not surprising, and should be further investigated, is the fact that out of all the investigated themes, the researchers found the least amount of information regarding to this aspect. Concerning the traffickers, the present study reflects on other studies and statistics, according to which the majority of traffickers are men.

The impact of society's patriarchal attitude is reflected by the values associated with women within society, an aspect which marks the aspirations of young girls. The professionals in every country emphasise the following:

- The overrepresentation of vulnerable girls in their families – being educated to bear the responsibility for the members of the family (often for their parents as well) or to contribute financially without having been supported by the family to gain the abilities necessary for the labour market;
- The life aspirations of the vulnerable young girls and women are often reduced to finding a life partner and starting their own family. Guided by these values, they risk to precociously form couples, minimising the importance of analysing the relationships on criteria such as equality and mutual respect. Or, lacking the role models that could have offered the signs of balanced and healthy relationships, many marry very young and/or become teenage mothers.
- The excessive responsibility given to women for maintaining couple and family relations, seen by many girls and by their mothers as a trans-generational burden, including the tolerance for violence against women within the family;
- The inheritance of mistrust in accomplishments based on education or careers, especially if the girls are part of marginalised groups.

These experiences occur in the form of factors of vulnerability to recruiters who, according to the researchers in the present study, also represent an important obstacle in identifying the situation of abuse and exploitation of the victims or the establishment and maintenance of their faith in the possibility of changing their life course.

### **Risk or vulnerability factors**

Investigating the factors of vulnerability to trafficking, besides the aforementioned gender inequalities, the following aspects have been identified: dysfunctional family relationships – from the existence of all forms of violence within the family, to relationships characterised by emotional, physical and/or educational neglect, abandonment, poverty, lack of real opportunities that are accepted by society and that would ensure an income that would sustain a decent livelihood (which are even more visible in the case of the ones from marginal groups, from Roma communities or who suffer from certain illnesses or disabilities), lack of formal education, lack of life abilities, lack of assertiveness.

### **The changes of human trafficking for sexual exploitation regarding victims from Romania**

The researchers identified similar characteristics regarding the most important aspects of the changes that had occurred:

The traffickers/trafficking rings efficiently and rapidly adapted to the economic, legislative and socio-political changes: in order to avoid taking legal responsibility for human trafficking, they use more sophisticated recruiting and exploiting strategies. As it was already mentioned in other more recent studies (Anino anu and colab., 2012<sup>12</sup>, Rijken and colab., 2015<sup>13</sup>), they resort to recruitment based on personal relationships and, using more or less refined manipulation techniques, they induce the feeling of trust to the victims. In the past years, the recruiters/traffickers often tell the potential victims that they would work in the sex industry without offering any additional details, thus fuelling the young girls' hopes that they would lead a prosperous life in which they would provide sexual services for a short period of time, only in the beginning. The use of force or other forms of coercion (a criteria that is necessary in defining human trafficking, according to the Palermo agreement and to the national laws in Romania and in Italy<sup>14</sup>) in the recruitment phase is very difficult in these situations. The traffickers monitor and control the victims, but they offer them a certain degree of freedom of movement and they share part of the profits (even if the part is minimum), reducing their chances to prove the exploitation and binding their connection.

Another change that was identified by the researchers is represented by the increase in the number of cases in which the recruitment of the young girls and women involves members of their entourage. They can be members of the family, friends, neighbours who liaise between the victims and the traffickers. The roles of the people whom the girls and women trust/trusted and the intensity of the connections thus created between the traffickers and the victims constitute a challenge for the specialists who want to provide victims with social services and/or to capacitate them in order to support their exit from the exploitation situation.

The destination countries also report a change in the victims' need or willingness to reach out to the general or special social services or available for them. The women and girls feel less in danger; the traffickers gave up the use of physical violence or rarely use it, also the threats or other abusive manifestations appear to be less harsh and, in this contexts, the women and girls consider the insurance of income as the most important aspect.

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12 Aninoşanu, L., Baldoni, E., Castelli, V., Dolente, F., Laszlo, E., Stoian, G., Ulrich, L. (2012), *Hopes, for Sale. Qualitative research regarding Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Romania and Italy, from 2007 to 2011*, CPE – Center for Partnership and Equality, Bucharest.

13 Rijken, C., Muraszkievicz, J., van de Ven, P (2015). Report on the features and incentives of traffickers and on the social interaction among them, [http://trace-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/TRACE\\_Deliverable-3.1\\_Final.pdf](http://trace-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/TRACE_Deliverable-3.1_Final.pdf)

14 Spain does not have a special law regarding human trafficking. The definition of trafficking in the Spanish Criminal Code reflects the conditions established in the Palermo Protocol, but also adds "abuse of a position of necessity".

We can consider that the tendency of “mellowing” the phenomenon is an accomplishment from the viewpoint of the victims’ interest (compared to the severity of the violence suffered by the victims at the beginning of the 2000s), but we now face new challenges. The specialists are preoccupied with the way in which they can adapt the services or the means of approaching the victims who are still in exploitation situations.

### **Human trafficking is no longer a priority for the national public or political agenda.**

This aspect is emphasised by the researchers in Romania and in Italy. The consequence of this aspect no longer being a priority is that the funding of specialised services was reduced, which leads to the disappearance of the services, the reduction of the possibilities of forming specialists who could come into contact with the victims and the slower adaptation of anti-trafficking strategies at a national and international level. The increasingly challenging delimitation between the prostitution phenomenon and human trafficking for sexual exploitation, the recognition of the identification and distinctive elements imply the necessity of discussions and debate on the topic of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as on the topic of sex industry as a whole.

### **The development and adaptation of complex intervention**

The specialists in Romania assert the urgent necessity to create specialised services in the regions where no such service exists, to elaborate and apply proactive strategies and community interventions. The specialists in Italy and Spain are more preoccupied with adapting the existing services to the needs of the victims from Romania. As it is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, even if the number of victims from Romania considerably increased, the number of victims who are assisted has decreased. In the case of underage victims who were freed from their exploitation situation, the specialists are confronted with their escape from shelters and their refusal to collaborate.

### **The necessity of continuing the prevention activities**

At a national level, the information and prevention activities are best developed and deployed in a coordinate manner in Romania and the destination countries. But the majority of the campaigns focus on the potential victims, very few of them also including the caregivers and the people around the vulnerable young girls and even less include the solicitors. The respondents asserted the necessity to include programmes of accountability for the solicitors and to develop programmes that focus on increasing the quality of life in the country of origin.