

Innocenti Working Paper

Young People's Voices on Child
Trafficking:
Experiences from South Eastern Europe

Mike Dottridge

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Young People's Voices on Child Trafficking: Experiences from South Eastern Europe

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Summary:

Mindful of the important contribution that young people can make to our understanding of the issues that concern them, in 2005 and 2006 UNICEF arranged for children and young people who had been trafficked while under 18 years of age, to be interviewed in their home countries.¹ Interviews were conducted in Albania, Kosovo, Republic of Moldova and Romania. Each of the children and young people described their lives before recruitment, their experiences during exploitation, and how they got away from the traffickers. They also spoke of rebuilding their lives once they were free. The interviews formed part of a broader assessment of strategies to counter child trafficking in the region.²

Each child's experience is unique, yet the different views and perceptions presented provide important insights into what trafficked children endure. The aim of this report is not to identify regional trends or patterns or presume that the experiences of the 31 children interviewed (30 girls and 1 boy) represent the reality of all trafficked children in the region. Rather, the report is intended to stimulate thinking and action, based on the active participation of children and young people. It provides individual children a platform to willingly share their experiences and perceptions, understanding that where there is such willingness there are likely to be benefits for those who participate. Much of the information from the interviews with the 31 children and young people confirms findings from previous research³, in which children were not the sole informants. The information also offers some new perspectives.

The study was limited to children who were trafficked before reaching the age of 18, who received institutional assistance during their recovery, and who were willing to talk about their experience and to participate in the study. Since these care institutions focus on providing assistance to victims of sexual exploitation, and are designed to shelter girls and women, with one exception, all of the interviewed children and young people were girls.

Specifically, the study:

- Illustrates, through concrete examples, the complexity and dynamics of child trafficking.
- Provides insight into how the children and young people perceived the assistance they were offered.

- Identifies the extent to which the participating children and young people, at the time they received assistance, had been questioned about their views and given the opportunity to participate in decisions regarding their situation.
- Provides an understanding of the importance of listening to children and young people and involving them in the design and implementation of actions to prevent and address child trafficking.

The report indicates that some of the children and young people were particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including trafficking, due to multiple forms of violence and neglect at home and in institutions. Poverty, domestic violence and abuse and parental alcohol addiction were broadly reported as interrelated factors. In many cases, violence was directed towards the children and their mothers, and took the form of physical or psychological violence or sexual abuse, or both. Without support or safe alternatives, many of the children responded to family violence and other problems by leaving home.

Many of the children interviewed had made a deliberate choice to leave home. Some of them had made concrete plans to go abroad for work or for other reasons. Most of the children and young people felt strongly that they had known little about trafficking and the risks associated with travelling abroad before leaving home. They felt they had been left on their own to find information or get advice that could have helped protect them.

These interviews highlight the importance of ensuring that, in order to protect them from harm, children need access to information about the risks and challenges of leaving home or migrating to another country.

The children and young people interviewed had varying levels of education at the time they were trafficked. Some had dropped out of school or never attended school.

The decisions for leaving school were directly linked to insufficient household income where many children reported that they had to take on various household chores or felt compelled to contribute to the family income. Some of the respondents reported that they saw little benefit in remaining in school.

Poverty and a general lack of opportunities were associated with the vulnerability of the interviewees. However, a considerable number of the children did not consider themselves as economically poor and did not lack livelihood opportunities. While attention needs to be given to identify the complexity of vulnerabilities and risk factors, comprehensive work needs to be done to protect all children from exploitation and abuse, and to ensure the prevention of child trafficking from this broader perspective.

While all the children and young people in the study experienced exploitation in different ways – often while migrating or moving between places – not all had experiences that fall under the international definition of child trafficking. In some cases, it could not be clarified if the children had been recruited and moved with the intent of exploiting them, in others, exploitation took place locally and would therefore be defined as commercial sexual exploitation rather than trafficking. The complexity of child trafficking often makes it difficult in practice to distinguish between trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse of children. This highlights the need to ensure that child trafficking is viewed in the broadest possible manner and addressed within a child rights framework. This will help

ensure that all children who have experienced any form of exploitation and abuse are supported, not only those in a position to prove that they were trafficked.

The testimonies of the children and young people in this study also reveal that professionals who had the responsibility to protect the children, in accordance with national and international standards, did not always meet their obligations. Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ('the Convention'), to which all countries in the region are party, recognizes that "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." Testimonies from half of the children interviewed indicate an absence of protection by professionals.

Under article 12 of the Convention, that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Most of the young people interviewed in this study felt that their views were not always taken into account. Furthermore, some of the interviews suggest that the guiding principle of the best interests of the child, as afforded by article 3 of the Convention, may have been neglected.

Finally, this report demonstrates that when children who have been trafficked are given the opportunity to make their experiences known and to express their views, they provide important insights. They are 'experts' on the factors that make children vulnerable, their reasons for leaving home, and their special needs regarding prevention, assistance and protection. Children and young people have an important role to play in helping to identify areas for intervention, design relevant solutions and act as strategic informants of research.

The report is organized into three sections that highlight the various phases of the trafficking process. Practical recommendations have been identified at the end of each section. These are intended to inform the protection of children who have already been trafficked and a broader group of children who are at risk of, or are victims of, various forms of exploitation and abuse.

Keywords: Child participation, children's agency, child protection, child trafficking.

Acknowledgments:

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Within the IRC, the study was overseen by Susan Bissell, with overall guidance provided by IRC Director, Marta Santos Pais. Lena Karlsson and Daja Wenke have seen the study through to its completion. The report was edited by Alexia Lewnes.

ABBREVIATIONS

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EU	European Union
NGO	non-governmental organization
SEE	South Eastern Europe
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF IRC	UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2. Methodology	2
2. CASE HISTORIES	9
2.1. Life before being trafficked.....	9
2.2. The trafficking experience.....	22
2.3. Repatriation and recovery.....	36
3. A Human Rights-Based Approach To Child Trafficking – Key Findings And Lessons To Inform Policymaking	48
3.1. Key Findings	48
4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE RESREACH PROCESS	51
ANNEX: Children First: A Child Rights-Based Approach To Trafficking	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	58
ENDNOTES.....	59

Figures

Figure 1: Family environment before the trafficking experience: children’s self assessment.....	9
Figure 2: Complexity and inter-relation of vulnerability factors: the overriding importance of domestic violence.....	10
Figure 3: Methods used by traffickers to control the children.....	27
Figure 4: Main actors involved in ending the trafficking experience.....	28
Figure 5: Repatriation processes	36

Tables

Table 1: Interview details.....	5
Table 2: Age of respondents when first trafficked and at time of interview.....	5
Table 3: Children’s school attendance at the time they were trafficked.....	12
Table 4: Forms of exploitation and movement.....	22
Table 5: How the trafficking process started.....	23
Table 6: Views of the children and young people on their repatriation process.....	37
Table 7: Respondents’ living situation at time of interview.....	40
Table 8: Respondents’ comments on their interview.....	51
Table 9: Children still worried by their experiences at time of interview.....	52

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

There is a dearth of information about violence against children, including trafficking, that actually comes from children. This gap has resulted in the development of responses that have often been ad hoc and sometimes even counterproductive. Historically, this has been true in the discourse around child labour and other forms of exploitation, though in the last decade child labour research that is child-centred and engages children themselves has grown in scope and number. This publication *Young People's Voices on Child Trafficking: Experiences from South Eastern Europe* intends to contribute to existing research on child trafficking by adding the perspectives of affected children and young people.

The study builds on a broad UNICEF IRC research agenda on child trafficking that began with an analysis of the situation in Africa, was followed by research in Europe and Central Asia, and will continue with a currently underway study on child trafficking in South Asia.

This report presents information and quotations from 31 children. It recognizes that the participation of all children, especially those with concrete experience of trafficking situations, is crucial to the prevention, early identification and elimination of child trafficking. It is hoped that this initiative will stimulate further research and, in a modest way, provide some guidance for policy and practice.

Terminology and definitions

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, (the 'Palermo Protocol') contains the most widely accepted international definitions of trafficking in human beings and child trafficking. It was adopted in November 2000 by the United Nations General Assembly to supplement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime

Article 3 on 'Use of Terms' states:

- a) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;
- (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;
- (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Even though the Palermo Protocol was developed specifically for transnational cases of human trafficking, the definition itself does not include reference to border crossing. It applies therefore also to cases that take place within the same country.

Victims of trafficking are often forced, threatened, coerced, or deceived during the trafficking process. However, the definition of trafficking in the Palermo Protocol establishes the trafficking of children as a special case. Any child recruited and transported for the purpose of exploitation is considered to be a trafficking victim – whether or not the child has been forced or deceived in any way.

Some children are trafficked directly from their family home or place of residence, while others leave home first and come under the control of a trafficker later on, sometimes after they have already arrived in another country. A number of the young people interviewed for this report left home in search of better opportunities, either within their own country or abroad. In this report, the term ‘migrant’ is not restricted to individuals who travel outside of their own countries.

Those who make money from the commercial sexual exploitation of children (or adults) are generally referred to as ‘pimps’. Since there is no similar term that can be applied to employers or others who make money from trafficked children, the term ‘trafficker’ is used generically. It refers both to the individuals who recruit and transport children with an intention to subsequently exploit them, and those who make money out of the children’s activities while they are being exploited.

1.2. Methodology

The questionnaire

Consultations with the children and young people participating in this study took the form of one-on-one interviews using a standard questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect information that could help improve existing efforts to prevent child trafficking, including re-trafficking of the same victims, and to assist trafficked children in their recovery. A number of resources were used in developing the questionnaire, including the experiences of shelter staff who had interviewed trafficked children and health professionals who had assessed the medical issues and other practical needs of child victims of trafficking. A handbook for professionals working with child victims of abuse and human trafficking published by UNICEF⁴ and other relevant research guidelines⁵ were also consulted while the questionnaire was prepared.

Early in the process, it became clear that information routinely collected by professionals did not provide a complete picture of children’s trafficking experience. The concerns of police to identify and investigate crimes, and of health professionals and social workers to assess the children’s immediate needs, explain the focus of the interviews. There is also a tendency to focus on the abuse experienced during the trafficking episodes. Most interviews of trafficked children, therefore, do not look at a child’s situation before being trafficked. Such investigation may reveal the reasons (direct or indirect) a child may have ended up under the control of a trafficker, or shed light on the child’s subsequent recovery. Understanding what

happens to a child after exploitation can help determine whether the procedures followed and assistance provided were appropriate, and whether due consideration was given to the child's views, mindful of the child's best interests.

The questionnaire was designed to fill in these gaps. Part 1 contains basic questions about the child's experiences while being trafficked. These were to be answered by a professional who had been involved in providing care or assistance to the child in a shelter in the child's home country after the trafficking experience. Part 2 focused on the child's experiences before and after being trafficked and was to be answered by the children themselves. The questionnaire contained some 150 questions – one third directed to the person providing care to the young person (Part 1) and two thirds addressed directly to the young person interviewed (Part 2).

Dividing the questionnaire into two parts had ethical and practical implications. First, it was crucial to avoid any risk of asking the children to repeat details about abusive personal experiences, which they had already recounted in detail to health professionals and, in some cases, also to police. It was felt that this could open up old wounds and create further trauma. Second, it was important to avoid lengthy interviews to avoid overburdening the respondents. Keeping the interviews focused on particular periods of the trafficking process helped to ensure that questions were thoroughly answered, particularly questions asked towards the end of the interview about the young person's experience after being trafficked.⁶

Informed consent

All the children and young people were asked whether they would like to participate in the research. Interviewers were instructed to read a standard explanation to them before asking questions, and adjust it to fit the respondent's apparent maturity. Interviews began with the following statement:

We would like to ask you some questions to help find out whether recent attempts to prevent children from being abused affected you at all, and also want to find out whether the assistance provided to you and other children/young people who have been abused is as appropriate as possible.

There was also an explanation about how the information provided would be used, which specified that the child's name or any personal details that might identify the child would not be made publicly available or used in any reports for publication. After this explanation, the interviewers stated:

You do not have to answer these questions, or you can decide not to answer a particular question. Are you happy to listen to the questions and to try and answer them?

The participants were also informed that additional information would be provided by a staff member who was well acquainted with their case. All participants were given an opportunity to object to this or to provide the information themselves, although none did. Neither, however, did any of the young respondents ask what type of information was being provided about them. While this might mean that they had confidence in their care staff, it also suggests that they may not have felt sufficiently empowered or in control of their lives to challenge people they perceived to be in a position of authority.

If the respondents were 18 years or older at the time of the interview, they provided formal written consent to the interview and the use of the respondents' information by UNICEF. For children under 18 years old, a person "with current responsibility for the child" was asked to give formal written consent for the child to be questioned. Initially it was intended that the

person giving consent should be “legally responsible” for the child, (i.e., either a parent, permanent guardian, or someone who had been given formal temporary guardianship of the child). However, in practice such legal appointments were not always made. This was particularly the case for children who had parents or a permanent guardian but were still living in a shelter and were reluctant to return home. In these cases, those who organized the interviews were instructed to obtain consent from the person temporarily in charge of the child’s protection and care, such as the director of the shelter.

Protecting privacy

Although the interviewee’s real names were noted at the time of the interviews, each interview was promptly assigned a reference number, which ensured that any subsequent communications about the responses given in the course of interviews would not contain a reference to the child or young person’s real name. It is important to note that many of the respondents indicated that they wanted to provide information and did not necessarily want their identity hidden. Several spoke out as proud survivors of painful experiences – survivors who wanted their voices to be heard both to influence government policy and give hope to other child victims.

The interviews

The interviews were conducted in the interviewee’s native language and were structured as an informal conversation between two people (interviewee and interviewer) with no third party present. Notes were taken during the interviews and the responses were transcribed in the language in which the interview had been conducted. The responses were subsequently translated into English. None of the interviews was tape recorded.

All interviews were conducted by women, including the interview with the one boy who participated in the study. In Kosovo and the Republic of Moldova, staff who had worked in the shelters where the respondents had received care (and where some were still living), interviewed the children. In Romania, where respondents had been identified in different parts of the country, UNICEF arranged to have the children interviewed by one person, a sociologist who visited each location and met each of the respondents for the first time. This eliminated the need to train several different care staff. A similar approach was taken by UNICEF Albania, which assigned a psychologist to interview young people in different shelters throughout the country.

It was assumed that interviews conducted by staff the children and young people knew and those conducted by persons whom they did not know would illicit different types of information. It was considered that the participating children and young people might be more inclined to talk openly with someone they knew and trusted than with an interviewer who was meeting the child for the first time, although this hypothesis was not shown to be true. It was also reasonable to expect that an interviewer who was already familiar with the child’s experience would be able to obtain more detailed information about sensitive episodes than a stranger. In a few cases, care staff did in fact provide valuable details that a child had omitted, both deliberately and unconsciously. However, in many cases, independent interviewers were able to identify significant, previously unidentified factors, which helped professionals to better understand a child’s situation.

The children and young people interviewed

Thirty-one children and young people – 30 girls and 1 boy – were interviewed in Albania, Kosovo, Republic of Moldova and Romania between September 2005 and June 2006 (*see Table 1*). Two of the 31 respondents were identified as belonging to the Roma minority and were nationals of two different countries.

Table 1 Interview details

Country	Albania	Kosovo	Republic of Moldova	Romania
Number of children interviewed	8	6	8	9
Profession of the interviewer	Psychologist	Shelter manager	Various case managers (psychologists)	Sociologist

The children and young people interviewed were 10 to 17 years old when they were trafficked and 13 to 24 years old when interviewed (*see Table 2*). More than one third of the respondents had turned 18 by the time they were interviewed. While some children had been under the control of traffickers for only a few days, others had remained under their control for extended periods of months or years. For one girl (A1), the trafficking experience continued for seven years.

Table 2 Age of respondents when first trafficked and at time of interview

Age (years)	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	21	24
Number of children first trafficked at age	1	1	2	-	5	8	7	7	-	-	-
Number of children interviewed at age	-	-	-	1	-	3	7	8	10	1	1

Note: Total of 31 children.

Half of the children had been trafficked within their own countries. The other half had been trafficked to destinations in seven other European countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Russian Federation and Turkey. Several of the children were not trafficked directly from their home country but had already been living in a European Union (EU) country at the time they were recruited for trafficking.

The participating children and young people were all nationals of the countries in which they were assisted. Their stories reflect the following trafficking patterns of children who were:

- trafficked within their own countries;
- recruited in their own country and were destined to be taken abroad, but had escaped or were intercepted before they could be trafficked abroad;
- trafficked abroad and subsequently repatriated under official government-to-government protocols;
- trafficked abroad and had returned to their own country under their own steam, but had subsequently come to the attention of the authorities or decided on their own to seek assistance; or
- residing outside their own country (with or without legal travel documents) at the time a trafficker took control of them and subsequently trafficked either within the same country or to a third country.

The selection of respondents

For the selection of respondents, UNICEF Country Offices worked closely with agencies providing assistance to trafficked children in each of the four countries. These agencies provide residential care for victims of trafficking (mainly women and girls) and one of them also cares for children who had experienced other forms of abuse.

Three key criteria were used for selecting respondents:

- they were trafficked before reaching the age of 18;
- they had received assistance or care in a shelter operated either by the government, an international organization or a non-governmental organization (NGO) in one of the four countries; and
- they had expressed willingness to talk about their experience and to participate in this study.

Limitations of the data

The aim of this report is not to identify regional trends or patterns or presume that the experience of the interviewed 31 children represents the experiences of all trafficked children in the region. Rather, the report is intended to stimulate research and new policy approaches, and to inform action that is based on the active participation of children and young people. It also provides individual children a platform to describe their experiences and perceptions.

This study has intrinsic limitations that are common to any other study on trafficking. The complex, dynamic and clandestine nature of the phenomenon poses enormous challenges to collecting good quality, up-to-date, reliable and comparable data. In addition, the study has a number of inherent characteristics that strictly prevent the generalization of its findings.

Illustrative and individual, not representative

The 31 children and young people who were interviewed are a very small sample of those trafficked under the age of 18. They are not assumed to be a representative sample, either of children identified as victims of trafficking and who have received assistance in these countries, or of the wider – and undefined – group of all children who have been trafficked from those countries. For the same reason, no attempt was made to compare or contrast the data from these interviews with patterns and trends of child trafficking reported for the South Eastern European region and beyond.

Furthermore, the study is oriented towards children who received institutional assistance during their recovery.⁷ This selection through shelters means that certain groups of trafficked children were not included in the interview process, notably:

- Children who have been trafficked but have not been identified as such, and as a result, have not sought or received assistance from child protection agencies. The experiences of those children and young people might be very different, particularly in the process of recovery and reintegration.

- Children who are known to have been trafficked but who have been assisted in ways other than through residential care or who have not been included in any other formal assistance programme.
- Children who have gone abroad, been trafficked and exploited, and who either remain there in a situation of exploitation or who have, after escaping or coming to the attention of the authorities, remained in the country to which they were trafficked.

Services reflect social biases

Why is residential care for victims of trafficking usually tailored to meet the needs of women and girls who have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation?

One reason may be that police and other professionals often assume that ‘human trafficking’ is always linked to forced prostitution and that mostly women and girls are affected. As a result, women and girls trafficked into sexual exploitation are more likely than boys and men to be identified as victims of trafficking and referred to shelters and other services. There is also often a social denial of the sexual exploitation of boys due to perceptions of masculinity. This explains why many shelters are not suitable for boys or girls who have experienced other forms of exploitation or abuse.

Given that residential care for victims of trafficking is generally focused on sexually exploited women and girls, the decision to restrict the study to children who received assistance in a shelter increased the likelihood that the respondents had been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Due to a strong gender biases in existing victim assistance structures, boys who are trafficked for sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation are hardly referred to those shelters. In fact, all but one of the young people participating in this study were girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Another important limitation to note is that the questionnaire and interview process were designed for use with young people who had been trafficked between ages 15 and 17. Although this was not stated explicitly in the questionnaire, it was not surprising that it was mainly children in this age group who were considered suitable to be interviewed. This means that certain forms of trafficking to which younger children are more vulnerable, such as trafficking for the purpose of begging, are not discussed in the context of this study.

Finally, the study did not include a control group. This means that the risk factors revealed in the interviews with trafficked children can neither be confirmed nor denied.

Limitations in the accuracy and detail of the information

This study has the inherent limitations of any study based on interviews. The interviews reflect the children’s subjective reality, which in some cases differed from information from various other sources (e.g. case managers and law enforcement files). This was particularly the case with regard to their recollection of dates and numbers. Reasons for these discrepancies are diverse: they may reflect a conscious decision made by the child, interview fatigue or even forgetfulness. They may have something to do with the child’s relationship with the interviewer, the conditions of the interview, the child’s interpretation of past experiences, as well as her or his physical and psychological condition. Trauma, taboos or shame can all influence how a child responds. Furthermore, any interview is a presentation of self, and people select to disclose information that they feel is more relevant or desirable.

The fact that some respondents were much younger when they were trafficked is likely to have further influenced their perception of events. This may be the case because they did not fully understand the complexity of what was happening to them, were not involved in the decision-making process, or because the information they received from adults (e.g. parents, teachers and police officers) or peers was misunderstood, incomplete or simplified. Because traffickers often rely on deceit and threats to control children, a child's understanding of what is happening may be further distorted. Information becomes especially ambiguous in cases of cross-border trafficking, when children end up in a country with a different culture and language. There may also have been flaws in the information received from various other sources.

A number of young people who were interviewed made serious allegations about the corruption or inefficiency of agencies that had a duty to protect them (police, immigration services and social services). However, no effort was made to follow these up or to obtain comments from the services concerned. Any allegations were consequently reported as they were made.

Despite the study's limitations, the young respondents' experiences and comments provide a wealth of information about what happens to children before, during and after they are trafficked – information that is often not revealed by reports analysing trafficking patterns, thus also failing to inform the development of relevant laws and policies in the region.

2. CASE HISTORIES

2.1. Life before being trafficked

Family situation

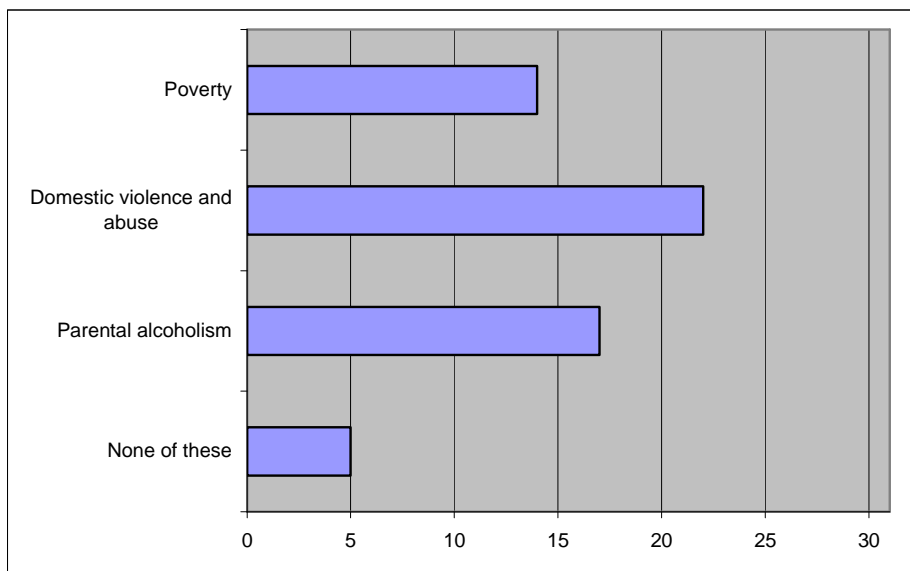
The children and young people interviewed came from very different backgrounds: about half lived in small village communities; the other half lived in small towns or larger cities. About 50 per cent of the respondents had been living with both birth parents, seven had been living in families with a step-parent and eight were in single parent families, living with their biological mother or father. Only one child had been living for many years in a residential institution.

The vast majority of children and young people (22) reported coming from families that experienced domestic violence and abuse. Less than half of the children (14) described their families as 'poor'. More than half of the children (17) also stated that one or both of their parents were addicted to alcohol (see Figure 1).

Figure 2 demonstrates that poverty, domestic violence and abuse, and parental alcohol addiction were often reported as interrelated problems. Parental alcohol addiction was always connected to domestic violence and abuse and was reported mainly by the children in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. But the children living in these households were not always poor. In fact, alcohol and violence dominated family life in about half of the non-poor families of the children interviewed.

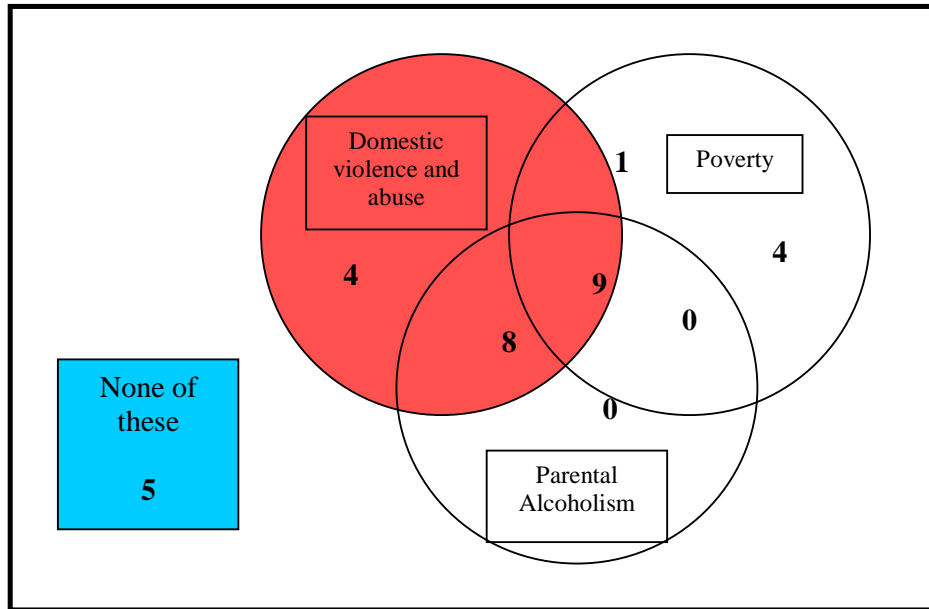
There were also some respondents who were trafficked from families that were neither violent nor poor. These children had not made the decision themselves to leave but had been abducted or deceived into leaving their homes.

Figure 1: Family environment before the trafficking experience: children's self assessment



Note: Total of 31 children. The graph represents the number of children and young people who mentioned these specific aspects of their family life. In each country there were children who mentioned multiple aspects among poverty, domestic violence and abuse and alcoholism.

Figure 2: Complexity and inter-relation of vulnerability factors: the overriding importance of domestic violence



Note: Total of 31 children. The graph represents the number of children and young people who mentioned these specific aspects of their family life. In each country there were children who mentioned multiple aspects among poverty, domestic violence and abuse and alcoholism.

In the interviews, the children and young people described what poverty, work, violence and abuse, and their parents' addiction to alcohol meant in their daily lives.

Poverty

Most children who identified their families as poor (14 children) in the interview said their families relied on social assistance, including social welfare income (e.g. disability pension or child allowance), borrowing and irregular income earned from unskilled jobs in the informal sector.

We were accumulating debts to the State (for payment of the utilities) and we had to keep moving to worse and worse apartments. But by selling the apartments we were making money, and yes, we did not have enough room but we had money to buy clothes every month.

I did not have anything to eat or to wear and did not attend school.

I had no money either for food or anything else or for clothes. I wanted to earn money.

Working children

Many of the children reported they had to take on various household chores or felt compelled to contribute to the family income. Some also reported they were sent out by a parent or guardian to borrow, beg or make money in other ways, including through commercial sex. In some extreme cases, children became the main breadwinner or took on the role as head of the household.

In 2002, my older sister married and moved to her own home and I was left alone with my parents. It was very hard for me. I had to keep the house by myself because my mother is an alcoholic and used to go away from home for days. My father is very strict and I had to learn how to cook, to wash, to do everything in the household, while my father worked in the field.

Starting with the age of 16 my life turned to disaster. We had no money for bread but a lot of small debts to neighbours. My mother started pressuring me to go to the city and ask friends for money. Meanwhile, I met another girl who, at the disco, introduced me to all kinds of boys. All the money I earned was brought home and the entire family lived on it. My mother pretended to know nothing. But she did not ask me where the money was coming from, when should it be paid back, etc. And instead, she put pressure on me to bring more.

I've been working since I was a little girl and I've tried to do everything for my parents to love me. At 12 years old I was doing everything that needs to be done in the house, I was taking care of my brothers and sisters. My mother was ill. She had a caesarean operation and didn't do anything anymore. My youngest brother was ill and my mother stayed with him in the hospital, so I cooked, I washed the clothes and the children, I cleaned. Even the neighbours in the apartment building noticed and wondered how I could keep the house for the entire family.

My father would call them (business owners) on the phone and I had to go and collect the money. Or, my father would call the priests and they allowed me to beg in front of the church... I also did all the chores in the household because my mother came tired from work and all she did was cook. I was doing all the rest and I was taking care of the little one, too. And when I came with the money, my father used to give me a beating and say that it was short, that I had stolen some for sure. And my mother would let him. She was just like him. If he didn't start a fight, she would start it.

[While living in a Western country] My mother said she was ill, my father [an invalid] was begging sometimes, and I was working selling newspapers. We found all kinds of supplies in garbage cans. My mother went to the cans only when my father made her... Life was so bad... Until one evening when my father told me to go and make money, to walk the street. I refused and my mother said to me to come to my senses and they both trashed me with a crowbar.

Domestic violence and abuse

A significant number of the children interviewed (22) reported that they had experienced some form of domestic violence and abuse or neglect. In many cases, the violence was directed by male family members against the mother and child or by both parents towards the child. Domestic violence took the form of physical or psychological violence and/or sexual abuse. In some extreme cases, children were raped, and in one instance, a child's mother was murdered by her father.

My father caught me hanging around with some guys in a bar so he beat me badly and burned my hair, and then I ran away from home.

Later on, I woke up again because my father was trying to rape me, but since I refused he beat me up and raped me. He would shut my mouth with his socks and he threatened me that if I tell anybody about this he would kill my mother and sister. He didn't rape me again but he beat me up many times.

My father used to hit my mother frequently. He used to hit me as well.

My mother joined a sect and started to beat us up. She said she was taking the devils out of us. She was giving me the worst beatings, because she said I had more devils in me.

My stepfather couldn't stand me, my real father believed all the rubbish about me and was saying that I was not his daughter, and my mother... maybe I've made mistakes too, but I say she is the one to be blamed, because she has taught me nothing, she didn't take care of me, she wanted to sell me for 500 Euro to a man.

Alcohol addiction

Of the children and young people interviewed, 17 reported that alcoholic parents or other family members had threatened their safety and well-being. The testimonies indicated that alcohol addiction was linked to domestic violence and abuse.

I had troubles with my parents as they drank alcohol and told me to earn money.... My father hit my mother, sometimes it was vice versa.

My mother died when I was 10 years old. I lived with my father and my elder brother. Often my father got drunk and everything they earned was spent on drinking. My father treated me badly very often. He called me bad names and sometimes beat me.

Until I was 6 my life was happy. I was living with my grandparents in an apartment building, in a two-room apartment. My mother was coming and going and making a lot of trouble for my grandmother, especially when she got drunk and needed money.

In these homes, children reported experiences of chaos, fear, abandonment, denial, abuse and real or potential violence, inflicted by the very people who were supposed to care for them. Early on they learned not to depend on their parents to meet their needs but instead to rely on themselves.

Education, information and awareness

School attendance

The children and young people interviewed had varying levels of education at the time they were trafficked. Some were still attending school, others had completed compulsory education, still others had dropped out of school or had never attended school (see Table 3).

Table 3 Children’s school attendance at the time they were trafficked

Children still attending school at the time they were trafficked			Children not attending school at the time they were trafficked			
Before completing compulsory education	After completing compulsory education	Sub-total	Never attended school	Dropped out before completing compulsory education	Dropped out after completing compulsory education	Sub-total
3	6	9	2	9	11	22

Note: Total of 31 children. Data provided by case managers in each of the countries.

All six respondents who had completed compulsory schooling and continued with their education had not left home on their own initiative, but were abducted by traffickers or others who abused them. Three of these children came from ‘better off’ households, while two others came from ‘poor’ families according to the respondents’ own assessments of their household’s income level. Only one of these six children came from a household marred by domestic violence.

As a child, I lived with my family and I was very happy and my family always supported me. I went to school and I was an excellent student so my father was proud of me.

Nine of the children and young people interviewed had dropped out of school before completing compulsory education, and nearly all of them reported they had come from

households characterized by the children themselves as poor and violent. Two of the children had never attended school.

The children reported leaving school for a variety of reasons. In most cases, their decisions were directly linked to insufficient household income.

I did not regularly attend school because I didn't have clothes, notebooks and shoes.

I dropped out of school because there was no money for anything. I was ashamed in front of my schoolmates.

I would have liked to go on with my studies at a high school but my parents said they would not have money to support me.

Some of the respondents reported other reasons for not wishing to remain in school.

I was addicted to computer games, to the Internet. I was wasting days and nights. I was missing school until they failed to promote me. From that point on I didn't want to go to school anymore.

I started the ninth grade and two weeks later I asked my father for some money and he refused. So I didn't go to school any more and instead I just hung around in [city] where I met [boy's name] and I dated him for a year and a half without the knowledge of my family.

The teachers were getting on my nerves.

Only one child who had dropped out indicated that there was any official follow up by the school.

School representatives came to ask why I do not study. My mother said I didn't have anything to study.

Several children had been sent to schools for 'children with special needs' where, regardless of how well they performed, they would not be able to obtain a degree that would enable them to continue on to higher education. The children's perception of such schools was that they labelled students as abnormal or learning-disabled and that it was better not to attend them at all.

Information, knowledge and awareness

The children and young people were asked whether they had received any advice or information before being trafficked that might have helped them to protect themselves from exploitation and abuse, including trafficking. The questions focused on whether they had received specific information about sexual abuse or trafficking, information about working in another country or advice about precautions to take when going abroad. While some had heard vague stories about trafficking or even knew of other young people who had been trafficked, others had received general information about the risks of sexual assault or harassment in the context of their home cities or communities.

Most of the children and young people felt strongly that they knew little about trafficking before leaving home. They felt they had been left on their own to find information or get advice that could have helped them. Furthermore, they indicated that the little information that was available was often based on hearsay and was therefore inaccurate and incomplete. All children indicated that schools did little to provide relevant information to protect them from trafficking.

I never had any information from anyone.

Nobody told us anything.

Before? Before I had not a clue.

I've been through a lot and I've learned a lot. Everything I know now I've learned at my own expense.

Information on risks of sexual abuse

A vast majority of the young respondents said that at the time they were trafficked, they did not know how to recognize the risks of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking, or how to control these risks. For all of these children, the trafficking experience represented a painful learning process.

Only 11 children had received any information on the risks of sexual abuse, nearly all through informal networks (peers, mothers or other female relatives or neighbours). Only six of these children had a vague understanding of how to protect themselves from sexual abuse and what to do if they were abused.

Of course I knew I could be raped if I walk at night or go with unknown boys to apartments. I was careful not to do something stupid.... I knew one must hit the violator on the testicles if he attacks you, to throw something into his eyes, as well as to tell to the police.

Our teacher talked to girls from our class about sexual issues, she told us not to walk at night as we might get into trouble.

Sometimes my mother told me to be careful not to be raped by somebody.

Only what my sister (23 years old) told me, that is: to be a good girl and be careful not to get pregnant.

I heard from my cousin who is a teacher but I didn't pay attention to her words, thinking that she does not love me, but later on I realized the importance of her words, but it was too late.

Taboos related to sexuality, and feelings of shame associated with sexual exploitation, appear to also have played a role in keeping some of the young respondents uninformed.

I declared everything, both at the police and at home. I cannot say I have problems, but I feel they have grown colder to me. It would have been better to keep my mouth shut and everything would be fine now. Like about my cousin who sold me. Nobody had told me she was a prostitute, that she was recruiting girls.... In the village, my grandmother was saying that this cousin was alright, a good girl and she was going to school. After what happened they were asking me why I left with her, like I did know!... Well no, I didn't know because they hadn't told me anything so I can be on my guard.

Of the children and young people interviewed, only 15 had received minimal information about sexually transmitted infections (including HIV and AIDS) and knew of ways to protect themselves. (Although using this information effectively is difficult, if not impossible, in a situation of sexual exploitation, it is a clear indication of just how uninformed these children were about the risks they faced.)

I knew only what we were taught in biology class at school plus the need to use a condom to avoid getting pregnant [not as protection against diseases].

At school, from the media, TV, movies. I was afraid of AIDS. I talked to clients about using condoms. Most of them refused, were insulting me.

Information on risks when working abroad or away from home

Many children interviewed made a deliberate choice to leave home. Some of them had made concrete plans to go abroad for work or for other reasons. Their stories highlight the importance of ensuring that children have access to information about leaving home or migrating to another country in order to protect them from harm. Yet out of 31 interviewed children only 12 children had received some information before being trafficked about the risks associated with travelling abroad and living away from home.⁸ Most of this information came from informal networks (e.g., siblings who had been abroad, neighbours, colleagues, friends) and from television. Only one of the children thought that the information she received had influenced how she behaved and reacted later on, although it was clearly not effective enough to prevent trafficking.

Of the 15 children who were trafficked across borders, no child reported receiving accurate information about life abroad, including from their parents, and the majority had been presented with inaccurate rosy pictures about life abroad from the people who had trafficked them.

I had no warning information before leaving home. I had imagined that this foreign country would have been a marvellous place with flowers, trees and parks everywhere; with nice homes and good people dressed smart. Rich people.

I wasn't given any information about the risks before travelling abroad, either at school or elsewhere. My mother provided some vague warnings, but without providing information about risks.

Two respondents mentioned that they had been advised to try and get a job abroad via an employment agency. But one explained: "I didn't try; I did not trust agencies. They demanded a lot of money".

Few of the children knew what basic precautions to take when travelling away from home or abroad: only three of the respondents had taken a telephone number with them in case of an emergency. None had taken a photocopy of their passport or identity document.

Insufficient and incomplete information on trafficking

The children's responses indicated that the little information on trafficking they did have access to was incomplete, unclear and perpetuated myths about the phenomenon. In some cases, children lacked reliable information because their main source of information was their trafficker or others who were involved in exploiting them. Any information these children received was used to manipulate, influence or control. Other sources had not warned them of these potential risks.

I remember that once a neighbour of mine who had been in a foreign country told me that she had seen girls standing underneath the bridge and being beaten by some others. In fact, I did not ask her for more details and I did not understand quite well why they had to stand under the bridge and why some people would beat them.

It did not influence my decisions because I received too little information.

My classmates talked about it, the girls from the factory spoke among themselves. They knew about the prostitution of our girls in a foreign country. However, they knew nothing of this kind about the capital. I knew for sure that I should not trust any promises if these were related to that foreign country. I would have never gone there. But I went to the capital ...

I knew that girls are sold from TV and newspapers. But this time it was my cousin, I had never thought she would sell me. I thought that only strange people can sell, not your own relatives. My parents had some second thoughts that I could be sold, but my cousin swore everything would be all right

Finally, many children and young people indicated that they simply dismissed the little information they did receive because they felt that they would know better than to allow themselves to be deceived in such ways.

I was so sure of myself. I never believed that something bad would happen to me though I have heard previously that bad things might happen.

I read about this in papers, saw it on TV, but I have never thought that it is so simple to sell and cheat people.

Yes, I have had information regarding sexual abuse and STDs. I was informed in school and through some pamphlets, too. But I never took them seriously; I never thought these things would ever touch me.

Some children were aware of the risks of trafficking, but did not seek or receive any advice or information on what they could do to protect themselves, other than remaining at home. Yet many children felt that staying at home was not an option. Without alternatives, these children had no practical means to protect themselves.

I was given no advice nor did I try to get any. I knew I would be an illegal worker and I was counting on my girlfriend and her acquaintances to find work for a lot of money. But I did not have any information.

I did not need any advice because I needed money quickly, clothes, telephones and money to buy a computer so everybody could see how well I could manage on my own.

I had only two alternatives: to commit suicide by poisoning myself or to go abroad. I thought better work as prostitute than bearing the difficult situation I was in. Then, I was sure that if somebody would force me to work in the street, I would work only 2-3 days and I would have been able to run away from them because I am clever.

The ‘changing point’

When children described their lives, many said, “My life was good before...” or “I was a happy child until...” In these cases, a particular experience or event had precipitated a crisis that pushed the child into a situation that increased his or her risk of being trafficked. The types of changes that appear to have had the greatest impact include a change of residence or of family composition, or in the child’s own interaction and relationship with friends and peers. Often, a series of such experiences and events occurred, which added to already challenging living conditions

- Family moving from an urban to a rural area

Life was good. We were living in a house in the city. We had everything we needed. It was nice. In 2003, we moved to the countryside. Life is harder, duller, at school it is less fun. I got bored with this life and decided to go back to the city.

My family sold their city apartment because too many debts had accumulated and they could not afford it any longer. We moved to a house in a village. After moving to the countryside, my parents did not cover the costs of my commuting to school and I dropped out after completing the 9th grade.

- Divorce or parental separation
- Parent or other family members migrate to work abroad

My mother went abroad. She was not getting along with my father. I had to do all the work around the house and wasn't happy.

- **Death of one parent**

I had a normal life. At that time, I was 14 years old and I went to school and did sports. Also the economic situation of my family was good. Everything changed when my father died. My mother has mental problems and after my father passed away she became sicker. She yelled at me for no reason. She blamed me for not doing the housework and spending a lot of time outside the home. I used to get up very early every morning to do the cleaning until 8.30, the time that my mother would get up. Then she started to shout at me about the fact that I hadn't done anything and she used to hit me. When my older brother returned back from work he used to hit me too, as my mother complained to him about me. He would believe her rather than me.

- **Introduction of a step-parent**

We were a happy family before the death of my father. Mom remarried. I felt I was betrayed for that man.

The first two weeks were very good but later on things started to change, and I started feeling jealousy towards my step-mother So my father started treating me very bad, he would beat me and tell me that I must love my step-mother if I want to live with them as a family.

My step-father tried to kick me out of the house.

- **A relationship not accepted by the parents**

When my parents learned about my relationship, they forced me to break up with him, because he was from a family that used to have a lot of problems in the past. Because I resisted breaking up, both parents started to beat me and kept me closed inside a room tightly bound with a rope in my bed for about two months. They feared that I might run away with him.

- **Peer violence**

At the placement centre, it was nice until I got fed up because there were some older girls who used to beat me up and swear at me all the time. My sister who also stayed there could not take my side because they would have given her a thrashing too. My sister ran away from the centre and a few days after, I ran away, too. I only told a girl who we got along well with that I was leaving to look for my sister.

At the age of 15, I met through my schoolmates a gang of men They were fierce, ugly, full of scars, pock-marked, and were swarming around the school where they were recruiting girls. I was afraid and refused all their advances. I was scared of their threats. I did not file a complaint with the police and was ashamed to tell my parents. My mother realized something was not right because I was not going out anymore; I was making a detour to go to school. Still, I couldn't believe and she couldn't believe that anything bad might happen to me if I ignored them. But two boys from the gang kidnapped me.

It is obvious from the children's testimonies that most of them did not realize the risks they were facing once these major changes affected their lives. This was in part due to a general lack of information, knowledge and awareness of the dangers of trafficking. But placing them at even greater risk was the fact that many of them were left on their own and did not have a person or institution to turn to for advice. Others consulted with siblings, friends or peers, which, in some cases, led them into even more risky situations. Lacking support in protecting themselves, they became rather easy prey for those who chose to deceive, exploit and eventually traffic them.

Leaving home

Without support or safe alternatives, many of the children responded to family violence and other problems by leaving home. The age at which these children left home varied significantly, and ranged from 10 to 17 years.

More than half the respondents (17 out of 31) made a deliberate choice to leave home; a majority of them felt pressured to leave, to a varying extent, by their situation at home. Once they left, some had no place to go and stayed on the street for a while. Others made plans to migrate to a specific destination, and still others were hosted by friends, peers or extended family members. In many cases, the first contacts made in the initial phase after leaving home led them into exploitation and abuse, including trafficking.

Leaving home to escape domestic violence and abuse

Of the children and young people interviewed, 12 left home to escape from domestic violence and abuse. The circumstances in which children left home varied. Some left home after a period of neglect, abuse, or being forced to work hard to earn money. Others were fleeing direct threats and violence.

The situation at my home was unbearable. The step-father continued to abuse me sexually and this was the reason I decided to leave home. When I left home, I was around 14-15 years old. A neighbour of mine proposed me to go with him abroad. There we could get married. He would work while I had to take care of the house, cook and clean. At the time I decided to leave home, I was just happy to do that and I couldn't think of anything else. Life at my home was impossible.

In fact, I have been thinking a lot to run away from home, but sometimes I felt sorry about my step-mother, sometimes she was good with us. That night, I was very nervous.... But I was very afraid of the 'lover' of my step-mother. I hadn't thought of anything, I just wanted to go away, I had nothing to lose.

One afternoon, I went to have something to drink with a friend of mine and her fiancé. Her fiancé was a drug dealer. It was her birthday, so we stayed long together, until 8pm. While getting back home, my brother saw me and followed me. He stopped me and started beating me in the street. After he left, I wanted to get back home but was afraid that he would keep hitting me, so I decided not to return home. I stayed for nearly two weeks at the house of a friend of mine. Then I went to the capital to stay at the house of my cousin. There I met two friends of mine, one 23 years old and the other 19 years old. They promised to send me to Greece. I have a lot of relatives there. So I decided to go with them, since I couldn't get back home anymore. In Greece I thought at least I would go to school. I was 14 years old.

I fell in love with him...when my family learned about that and also of the fact that I had sexual relationships with him, they wanted to kill me. My parents very often started to say to me "we will poison you, like [an acquaintance] did to his daughter" or "we will drown you in the well and will say to others that our daughter has run away from home." Finally, they decided to lock me inside home. I remained locked inside for about four months and one month I was bound in the bed. One day while my father was in hospital, I was alone at home with my grandmother. She helped me. She cut the rope with which I was bound in the bed. I decided to run away from home. My life was in danger. My parents were ready to kill me. I didn't think of anything, I just wanted to go far away from home. I went to a cousin of mine and I remained at his apartment in the city for about ten days. Then, he brought me to a bar-restaurant in the capital. The owner of the bar provided me a job. There were other girls working there. I was about 16-17 years old at that time.

The departure was not always clean cut and, sometimes, particularly in the case of younger children, involved repeated returns and departures:

I ran away from home when I was 12 years old.... I stayed on the street for a week. While I was out on the street many people abused me sexually and physically. After a while I went back home and my father tried to beat me again but I didn't let him. Than I ran away a few other times and I stayed on the street for a while, and then I went back home again. But my father continued beating me so I would run away again and this lasted for a while.

Leaving home for work or for other reasons

Some children and young people said they left home because they wanted to earn money and believed their prospects would be better somewhere else – either in their own country or

abroad. In the cases of older adolescents, departure was relatively well planned but turned out badly.

I left to work as a housekeeper and earn 500 dollars a month.

I was going to earn money by working in a bar.

I was promised that I would be selling at the market and earn 50 dollars.

My friend promised me that [an acquaintance] would find us a job. I thought I was going to work as a cook or do the dishes at a restaurant in [the capital city of a nearby country].

I had a boyfriend five years older than me. He suggested we should marry. I worked as a seamstress at a clothes factory in [a town]. I wanted to earn money for the wedding and foolishly I left for [the capital city of a nearby country]. I wanted to earn money as a cook in [that city], as I was promised.

I met a friend who said he could arrange for us to leave, to make money fast. He had been abroad before (to visit his mother in [an EU country]) and knew what's what. I was curious to know how things were outside, I wanted to go see how it is, to buy a computer and designer clothes, not like these ones here from the flea market, and come back.

Some convinced themselves that they were just taking some time away from home and embarking on a journey for some fun or even a holiday.

The only reason why I left home for the first time was to have fun and didn't think anything else.

My cousin told me she would give me a pleasant vacation.

These children clearly stated that they felt they were making their own decisions and acting independently. Yet given the difficult circumstances that many of them faced at home, the lines between voluntary and forced or coerced are easily blurred. Many types of coercion, some quite subtle, and force influenced their decision-making process. A decision that might appear to be voluntary under a particular circumstance might have not been made at all or been different had circumstances been different.

Policy recommendations:

What can be done to prevent child trafficking

These recommendations are based on the broad body of UNICEF IRC studies on child trafficking⁹ and reconfirmed through the voices of the children and young people quoted in this study.

The vast majority of children and young people (22) reported coming from families that experienced domestic violence and abuse. More than half of the children (17) also stated that one or both of their parents were addicted to alcohol. Without support or safe alternatives, many of the children responded to family violence and other problems by leaving home.

- National child protection systems should be developed and made operational by the government at the national and community level, framed by and based on children's rights. At local level (e.g., at the level of a small town or municipality or a group of villages) authorities should ensure that systems are in place so that social workers, teachers, police officers and others with information or responsibilities for children work together, exchange information on a systematic basis and have standardized responses

whenever there are signs that a child might be experiencing abuse or is in danger of being abused. Such systems must ensure that the child's best interests are a primary consideration in every decision and action and professionals need to be held accountable for dereliction of duty. These professionals also need to be trained in how to consult with girls and boys of various ages and backgrounds.

- National child protection systems need to address the root causes of child trafficking, such as gender discrimination, patriarchal structures, and other social, economic and structural factors. They need to recognize the inter-linkages between various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, as violence in the family makes children particularly vulnerable. Support needs to be given to families and communities through livelihood opportunities, family counselling, drug and alcohol prevention and rehabilitation, parental education (for fathers and mothers) including positive discipline, and information about child rights and child protection issues. Child sensitive and child-friendly reporting mechanisms (including help lines) need to be made available and accessible for children.
- Safe alternatives should be developed by state social services in association with civil society and non-governmental organisations, for adolescents who chose to leave home or who are unwilling to return home due to a history of ill-treatment, including as witnesses of domestic violence. Residential institutions should always be an option of last resort.
- Children and young people need to be consulted and meaningfully involved in the design of the various components of the child protection system, as well as in the monitoring of its effectiveness.

Of the 15 children who were trafficked across borders, no child reported having received accurate information about migration and the majority had been presented with inaccurate rosy pictures about life abroad from the people who had trafficked them.

- The danger of being trafficked by relatives, peers or someone the child is already acquainted with is real and must not be underestimated when raising awareness about the risks of trafficking. Information and awareness-raising about the risks of sexual abuse and exploitation and trafficking should therefore also aim to dismantle the myth of 'stranger – danger'.
- Information campaigns about human trafficking need to reflect the complexity of trafficking and raise awareness in the broadest possible manner. Information also needs to target the buyers of sexual services to inform them that sexual exploitation of children is a violation of human rights.
- Child-friendly and age-specific information, in local languages, needs to be made available and accessible for children. It needs to be developed together with children and young people who have experience on the issues. This can include, for example, safety booklets, radio programmes and community theatre.

Nine of the children and young people interviewed had dropped out of school before completing compulsory education, and nearly all of them described their family environment as poor and violent. Two of the children had never attended school. The decisions for leaving

school were directly linked to insufficient household income. Some of the respondents reported that they saw little benefit in remaining in school.

- Inclusive systems are needed to ensure that all children are registered and do attend school, including children belonging to minorities and marginalised groups. Similarly, these systems must respond if girls and boys drop out early, not simply by penalizing the children or their parents, but by interviewing the child and investigating the household's circumstances and determining what type of support they might need, including livelihood options. Standards and mechanisms should be in place to ensure that children do not experience violence and abuse in the classroom or school environment.
- Life skills should be taught in every school, including information and discussions about gender, sexuality, HIV and AIDS. At a suitable age, children should also be given information about the different forms of abuse, the responses that may be appropriate, and where they can turn to for help. Teachers should be trained in child participatory methods and children should be given the possibility to influence the school environment.
- Alongside conventional career advice, schoolchildren and graduates in countries with high rates of emigration should be given guidance on how to check whether offers of jobs abroad are genuine and safe to accept, and what practical precautions they can take to protect themselves.

2.2. The trafficking experience

Characteristics of trafficking cases

Roughly half of the respondents had been exploited abroad and half within their own countries: In Kosovo, all children and young people interviewed had been exploited internally; in the Republic of Moldova, all respondents had been exploited abroad; in Albania and Romania, half the children had been exploited abroad, the other half within their own countries. Due to the selection process, which restricted the study to children who had received assistance or care in a shelter, nearly all respondents had been sexually exploited¹⁰, while some reported multiple or changing forms of exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation, begging and petty crime (see Table 4).

Table 4: Forms of exploitation and movement¹¹

Country	Albania	Kosovo	Republic of Moldova	Romania	Total
Number of interviewed children	8	6	8	9	31
Main form of exploitation					
- commercial sexual exploitation	8	6	7	8	29
- begging	1	-	1	2	4
- theft / petty crime	-	-	-	3	3
Movement					
b	3	6	-	6	15
- across borders	5	-	8	3	16

Note: Total of 31 children. Some children reported multiple or changing forms of exploitation.

Differing definitions

All children and young people who participated in this study were classified as victims of trafficking in their home countries and were consequently referred to shelters for assistance. From the interviews, it is not fully clear if all 31 children met the three major criteria highlighted in the international legal definition of child trafficking.¹² Some children described situations where they were sexually exploited for commercial purposes rather than trafficked. Not always was there a third person involved in recruiting and moving these children for the purpose of exploitation: Some children left home and started working in a bar, where they were subsequently sexually abused and exploited.

The case of the only boy who was interviewed illustrates how national authorities in both origin and destination countries apply different definitions when identifying and classifying children: The boy had travelled with a young adult, slightly older than himself, to a Western European country to earn money by stealing. He had accepted a loan from his companion to finance the trip and was supposed to repay the costs from his earnings. When he came in contact with the authorities of the destination country, he was arrested as a juvenile delinquent and spent time in prison. Upon return to his home country, however, he was identified as a victim of trafficking and referred to a shelter.

These 31 children's experiences illustrate that reality does not always fit neatly into the definition of child trafficking provided by the Palermo Protocol. The real situation of these children is much more complex. Their subjective perception of exploitation and abuse often varies, making it a particular challenge to fully understand the dynamics of exploitation and abuse when children are moving from one place to another.

The beginning of the trafficking process

Although each child’s personal and family circumstances differed, recurrent patterns emerged as children described how and where the trafficking process started, how they had met their trafficker, and what role the trafficker had in the children’s departure from home. The majority of the respondents left home on their own initiative or were convinced to leave by the trafficker. Some children were abducted by force (*see Table 5*).

Table 5: How the trafficking process started

Routes to being trafficked	Number of children
Left home on own initiative and subsequently came under the control of a trafficker	13
Left home after being deceived or enticed away by a trafficker	13
Involuntary departure and abduction	5
Total	31

Note: Total of 31 children.

Left home on their own initiative and subsequently came under the control of a trafficker

Children left home on their own initiative for various reasons – to escape abuse, to travel, to look for work or seek adventure. Among those children who left home on their own, some fell under the control of a trafficker almost immediately, while others were on their own for while.

I got bored with life at home and I decided to go to a nearby town. I walked and hitch-hiked there, then to another city where I slept in the marketplace and ate walnuts directly from the tree. Then I decided to go further. I went to another city and yet another one, where I met [*the trafficker*].

I told my mother that it would be all right – that I was going to wash dishes, to work as a cleaning woman or as a waitress, that I could do all these things. I knew how to keep house, I was resourceful and I could cook by myself. But I knew it wasn’t true, and instead, together with my girlfriend that we would be dancers, like my sister.

I wanted to visit other towns. I met a friend and went to her flat and I spent 10 days there. She was 33 years old and she was bringing her boyfriends in her flat, but she didn’t allow them to touch me, saying that I was too young. They took my friend by force to work in a bar. She advised them to take me as well, which is what happened.

Left home after being deceived or enticed away by a trafficker

Thirteen children were deceived or otherwise enticed by a trafficker to leave their homes. These were mostly children who were eager to find work for a short period so that they could earn money quickly for very concrete purposes, including to pay for a wedding, designer clothes, a computer or school equipment. All these children reported that their families were experiencing some financial difficulties, and were especially susceptible to deceptive traffickers who lied about job offers and opportunities.

I thought that I was grown up and could earn money to support myself. A woman from the village called me and suggested I should go to the capital. Her husband was there and could help me find a job. I knew

that the capital was a very rich city. Many people from our village had been working there. So, yes, I believed her. She promised they would find a job for me, to do repairs in apartments.

I wanted to earn money for the wedding, and I foolishly left for [the capital of a neighbouring country]. My friend promised me that an acquaintance would find us a job there. I wanted to earn money as a cook.

I left to work as a housekeeper and earn 500 dollars a month.

I was promised that I would be selling at the market and earn 50 dollars.

I was given only good promises. I was promised work as a salesgirl at the market. I was supposed to sell citrus plants. I was happy that I could earn a lot of money and be able to ensure my own living. I was worried only by the fact that I had to give back my debts for the identity card, train ticket, pocket money.

After I had been in [an EU country] with my parents for a while, I had enough of their beatings and wanted to go back to [*the home country*], to my grandmother. I knew I needed a passport, but my parents had my passport, they were keeping it under their head. I believed the good neighbour, a nice and understanding man. He had seen how my parents were treating me and I believed he wanted to save me and take me back to my grandmother. But instead he sold me to a pimp who made money out of me [in another Western country].

Involuntary departure and abduction

Five children were abducted and soon after came under the control of the trafficker. In a vast majority of these cases, the persons who abducted these children were not strangers but acquaintances, friends of friends, or someone from the same community. Most of these abducted children came from families that were not affected by domestic violence.

One day while I was in the town, a man kidnapped me and took me to a village where he raped me and he kept me there.

One day, I was standing next to the school gate with my friend when some guys came in a van and they kidnapped us and took us to another village and in the basement of a house. They beat me up there, and then I realized that my friend was their friend too and this was all organized.

The relation between my mother and my father was not good, but I was not intending to run away from home. I was deceived and kidnapped, when I accepted a ride in the car of a friend.

When I was 17, a [female] cousin of mine came and picked me up from home, and for two hours she pretended we were going to visit our aunt who was sick. My cousin hurried me along and persuaded me to get into a taxi without waiting for my father.

Organization of the trip and travel modes

Fifteen interviewed children were trafficked across a national border. With one exception, all of these children knew where they were going. However, less than half of them informed someone in the family about their destination. Those who did inform someone usually told their mothers. Some offered only partial information, did not mention the purpose for which or the date when they were leaving, and others kept silent because the traffickers had told them not to say anything or because the family opposed their departure.

In nearly all cases, the trafficker organized and paid for the travel, including documents (sometimes forged), tickets or transportation, and made arrangements for pick up at the destination. The travel-related costs became the children's debts to the trafficker, and were used to restrain and control the children. In nearly all cases, the children were accompanied on their trip by a friend or acquaintance.

Most children crossed the border through border posts and interacted with train conductors and customers. Some children were intercepted by border guards who took the children away from the traffickers. In other cases, border controls did not end the trafficking process, even though some children had incomplete or forged documents. In some cases, the testimonies from children indicate that corruption seemed to facilitate the border crossing.

I travelled together with my friend [a 20-year-old female]. We crossed the border legally, with documents, in a car driven by a driver [hired by the traffickers] and two other boys who were going to 'work'. The traffickers had organized everything, also our passports. A customs officer noticed that I was 'a child', but the driver told him that I was going for a trip with them. I did not have my parents' written consent, but the customs officer did not insist and did not intervene either.

The trip was paid and organized by my friend. We travelled with a minibus. I did not have my parents' written consent, so when the customs officer asked the question I lied saying that I was accompanied by my aunt [a lady in the minibus] who was taking me to her mother in [an EU country]. I crossed the border without any problem.

We crossed the border legally, in a car with a driver. Although my father was wanted by the police, nobody asked anything. A customs officer asked only if we had the amount of money according to regulations, and we showed the 2000 Euro that the driver had given us.

We paid the conductor to hide us in his compartment.

The train conductor took money, he made sure to talk to all frontier guards.

The traffickers

Only eight children were trafficked by a 'stranger', someone they had not met before.

A stranger offered to help me get work abroad. He said he would give me money for the train ticket and for the identity card. I was promised work in the market. He advised me not to tell the rest of my family where I was going.

Most of the children interviewed (21), knew their traffickers. In some cases the exploiter was identified as a boyfriend or lover; in three cases it was a neighbour; in three others, a cousin.

My cousin asked my parents to let me go with her and I wanted to go on holidays with her because I trusted her. My cousin told me she could offer me a pleasant holiday.... My parents were against the idea, but later they accepted it. They went to a notary office for a paper from a lawyer, got me an identity card and a passport, and I left to [name of the country]. There [her cousin's husband] told me I was going to be a prostitute; he locked me up and took away my identity documents.

The interviews highlight that exploiters were often among the adolescents' peer group, especially in the cases of those children who, after leaving home, relied on the support of relatives, friends or other peers for accommodation, work and joint travel.

I had a friend and she lived next to me and when she would invite friends over, I would often join them.... One day she took me with her and we went in an apartment with lots of guys. They all sexually abused us, and at the end I saw that they gave some money to my friend. This lasted for three weeks, every night after midnight she would come and get me and then we would return early in the morning. This all happened with my approval, until my father caught me and he beat me up badly.... Later I got married and after a month my husband started doing the same thing as my friend, every night he would bring clients home.

Traffickers were both, women and men, mostly adults, but in some cases they were under 18 years of age or even much younger.

One day, while I was staying at the doorstep, a neighbour, called Ariana [original name changed], came up to me and said: “Come with me, you will be my little sister, you will stay some time with me; we will have a lot to eat and then we will come back again.” But she cheated me. I was 10 years old when I left with Ariana. She was older than me; she was 13 to 14 years old. We also took with us my little sister. We went to a city. I was very afraid of Ariana. She used to beat me and said very often: “I will drown you in the sea”. She introduced me to a lot of boys.... I was forced to stay with them all day long.... They gave me money and she took everything from me. She used to buy a lot of things to eat for herself and gave me nothing. We also went to the capital. There, I used to beg in the street or knock at the doors and ask for money and food.

Seven of the children were exploited by more than one trafficker.¹³ They were either sold from one trafficker to another, or had periods in which they managed to break free from the control of traffickers, work independently, or spent time in shelters. All of these children eventually came back under the control of a trafficker.

My boyfriend sent me to [an EU country] to make money as a prostitute. So one day, together with another girl, we travelled by plane with a false passport to [the EU country]. At the train station [in the capital] some guys were waiting for us. They took us to another city. There, I started working as a prostitute, I had to make money: I owed my boyfriend 3,500 of our local currency because he paid my journey. And I had to make 8,500 Euro in order to help him to buy drugs. After I made 12,000 Euro, he came to meet me and together we travelled to another country. He was a drug dealer and I helped him. One night, when I was out to have a drink by myself, a group of four guys from my country who were trafficking drugs, kidnapped me. They had beaten and threatened me. They had drugs and weapons inside the car. They said to me: “you will work for us”.

[In an EU country] At the beginning I begged and stole from shops. Afterwards, the trafficker put me out to make money in the street [commercial sexual exploitation] because I couldn't steal any longer because the entire police knew me. Because I made only small amounts of money the trafficker sold me to another trafficker. I began to know [the city]. I was repeatedly picked up by the police and learned how to get myself out of jail. I learned [the language] and I learned who the trafficker's friends were, who to beware of, and my network of steady clients expanded. After all this, I managed to escape. I found a 'sponsor' [a married man who paid for her hotel] and started on my own.... There were better periods and worse periods, arguments and fights with the girls on the street. For various periods I had to work for other traffickers because they were threatening me. I had no papers. I was countless times picked up by the police for theft or for lack of documents. I was kidnapped by a network of traffickers who drugged me, raped me and locked me up, from where I managed to escape following a police intervention in force. I gave lots of statements, lots that I don't know how many and I helped in the arrest of this network. [After about one year] Since the traffickers had their eye on me again – they had heard that I was making more than 500 Euro a night and they wanted me back – I left everything I had made in the hotel in [the city] ... and I left with my best girlfriends [both over 20 years old] to another Western country.

Coercion and control during the trafficking process

The traffickers used various methods and strategies to keep the children under their control (*see Figure 3*).

- Threats and intimidation
- Beatings, rape and other forms of violence
- Physical restraints, such as constant surveillance or keeping the child locked up
- Depriving the child of identity papers
- Keeping the child high on drugs or alcohol.

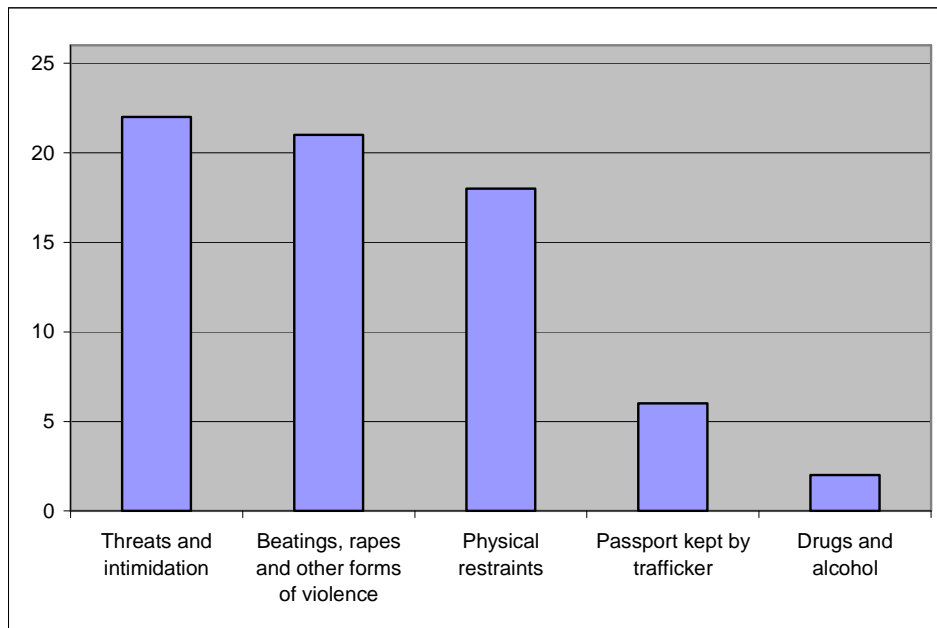
As many as 23 children reported being subjected to two or more forms of coercion and restraint. However, there were also five children (the youngest of the group) who reported that they did not feel any form of active coercion or restraint. Some of these **children felt**

they did not have any alternative but to stay, or felt dependent on their exploiters because they felt they had nowhere else to go.

I was sold by my cousin and her pimp to a network of traffickers who intended to make money in [an EU country]. They locked me up, for the period needed to prepare the trip, in a house on the outskirts of the town. I was guarded permanently by a fierce man in his forties. I was forced to do all the house work. They beat me up and raped me repeatedly.

I was kept there unconscious since I was forced to have alcoholic drinks and during that time they abused me badly. I could not even think about escaping since it was a basement and they were all around. I was in this situation for two weeks until they took me to [a town] and left me at a playground.

Figure 3: Methods used by traffickers to control the children



Note: Total of 26 children. Five children did not report any form of coercion or restraint. Twenty-three children reported two or more forms of coercion.

I lived with 20 girls in the trafficker's apartment. I was beaten many times. They told me if I ran away they would find and kill me, would come to my village and kill my mother.... Then he sold me to a woman. They took us by maxi taxi to the place where we were sold. We were sold to the clients, three to four girls per night. A woman took the money. We were always supervised. We were beaten for any little thing. We ate only pasta. Several girls ran away, the trafficker caught them and beat them hard in front of us. They told us that the same will happen to us if we run away.

During my time there, the owner of the bar and a friend of his used me and one day the owner had to leave because his son was sick, so he left me with his friend, who sexually used me and when I would refuse or I would try to get out they would keep me locked in the basement.

They threatened me saying that there was nothing I could do, that everybody had seen me with them and nobody would believe me, that they would set fire to my house, that they would kill my mother and my child, that they would rape my sisters.

They threatened me saying that if I would not work for them, they would make me the laughing stock of the village.

Some traffickers used threats, violence and other forms of coercion from the moment they recruited or abducted their victims. In other cases, the relationship between the child and the trafficker changed. The exploiter began by earning the child's trust and making the child feel

he/she was a friend. Yet once the exploiter controlled the child, the relationship quickly turned violent. In some cases, traffickers used relatively sophisticated forms of emotional manipulation, convincing the girls that they loved them.¹⁴ All adolescent girls who fell victim to this strategy had previously experienced abuse at home.

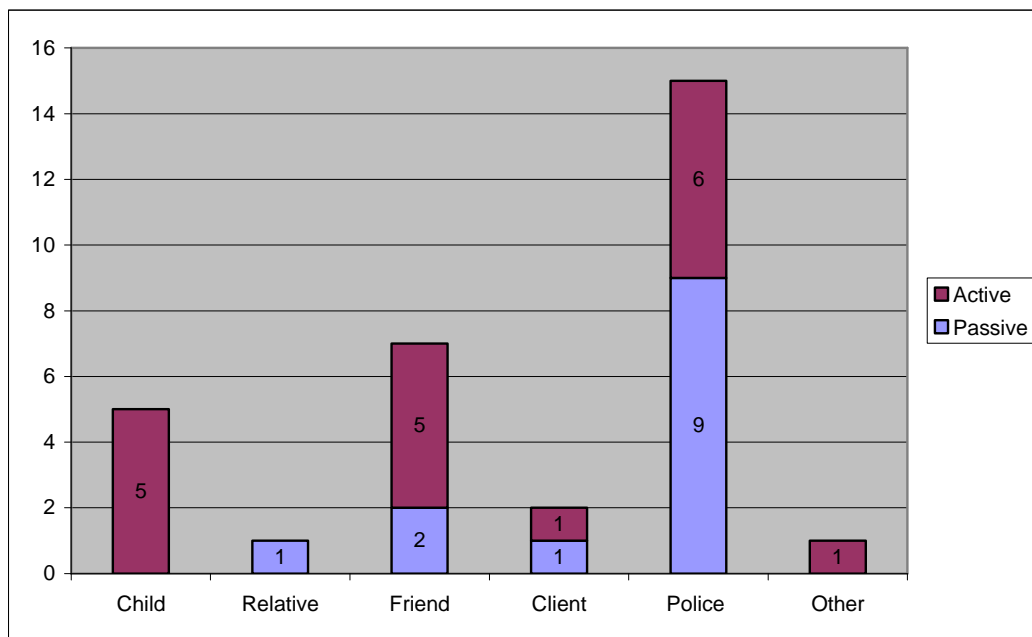
In the beginning, it was nice. He kept me for himself, he bought me clothes, cosmetics, he was treating me nicely. Then, an ex-girlfriend of his arrived and, for the time, this one stayed with him and he sent me to produce [make money]. My sister was jealous of me because she was making money together with the other girls and I was kept only for him. At that time, we patched things up as I went to make money, too. When his ex-girlfriend left, he kept me for himself again. He was rather old but nice. Only that he used to hit me, to curse me if I didn't obey him and I didn't go fetch something (for instance beer from the fridge). I had to be obedient and do the work around the house.

I fell in love with a guy from another city. I loved him so much. He said to me: "Our future is abroad . You have to go there, to work as a prostitute, just for a short period of time. With the money you will gain, you will pay my journey to that foreign country. And we will live there." He had money to pay only for my journey. At first I cried, I didn't want to, but since I loved him very much, I decided to do what he suggested me.

The way trafficking episodes came to an end

The ways in which the trafficking and exploitation process came to an end varied widely. Of the 31 children and young people interviewed, 18 actively escaped from their situation of exploitation, alone or with the help of others; one third of these children approached the police for help. The other 13 respondents were either not able or not trying to escape but were taken out of the exploitative situation by third persons, most frequently the police. The police identified these children either during the movement process or at destination. Figure 4 indicates the different actors who had a leading role in ending the trafficking experiences of the children and young people participating in this study. Often these 'main actors' had support from others: friends, relatives, and frequently, the police.

Figure 4: Main actors involved in ending the trafficking experience



Note: Total of 31 children. "Active" refers to those cases in which children themselves took the initiative to escape. "Passive" refers to those cases in which children were either not able or not trying to escape by themselves, but were taken out of the exploitative situation by third persons, most frequently the police. "Other" refers to an NGO worker.

The information provided by the children who tried to escape reveals that their escape was a process rather than a single event. In each case, it took time, knowledge, imagination, courage and luck. They needed to understand the strategies of the traffickers and identify persons they could rely on. Escaping also required overcoming fear, both the routine fear that some felt¹⁵ and the fear of additional punishment they would be subjected to if they were recaptured.

Five children managed to escape without any help.

The house was far away from the road, on the outskirts of the town. Even if I made motions from the window, the passers-by could not see me and could not hear me. The windows were nailed shut, I tried them all. The windows had roller blinds always rolled down. Whenever I tried to roll them up he would catch me and beat me up. He [the traffickers' accomplice] was staying in the house all the time and was watching me day and night.... Since I was making him coffee, I was looking in the cupboard for a cup and that is how I noticed there were some keys hidden there. I took them and, one night when he left me alone in the room, I managed to escape and I found the road to the centre of the town, to the police.

While we were walking through the woods they stopped near an old house and they forced me in there. It was four of them. I stayed there for three days without food or water, being raped by all of them and also beaten by them. One day we all left that old house and I remained with one of them, while the others went to look for something. I was freed to have some water and while he was drinking the water I got a piece of wood and I hit him on the head and ran away.

Other children's accounts revealed that the child's social network in the place of exploitation and people they had stayed in contact with back home played an important role in planning the escape. Most children who developed an escape strategy relied upon the help of a relative, a friend, another trafficked woman or girl, an NGO worker, or a 'client' paying for sex or various combinations of all four. These contacts helped to organize the escape and the initial phase after the children had gotten away from the traffickers.

I tried to escape, but they beat me cruelly. I managed to run away together with another 14-year-old girl to a family where we lived for two weeks. One day, when I went to buy some bread, I was detained by the police and sent to a temporary shelter.

I spoke with a girl who also wanted to run away. We did not speak openly about that in order not to be denounced. I ran away with that girl, who had the key to an apartment of a friend of hers who lived in the suburbs of the city. We stayed there around two weeks in order to be convinced that no one was chasing us. Then we phoned some relatives at home.

I tried to run away three times. Two times I was caught and beaten severely. I succeeded in running away only the third time. I got acquainted with a woman from my country who took me to her place and we lived together. One month later she helped me to get work as a waitress. It was she who advised me to go to the police.

When I caught on how things stood, I started coming out on the street earlier than the other girls, so they don't see me, and I made some money to call my grandmother and tell her what I was doing.... I asked my grandmother how I could get away. She talked to the police in our village and they told her that if I went to the police and said that I was a minor, they would help me come back home. There was also another girl belonging to the same pimp who had told me the same thing. But she had advised me that it would be better to wait for a police patrol car to pass by in the area so I could tell them and they could take me away from there. Otherwise, I might not be able to reach the police station, as we were being watched. So this is what I did.

I tried to escape but they locked me in and beat me. When I found out that I was pregnant, the pimps threatened me with an abortion. So once, when they took me to a client, I jumped from the second floor. I hid myself, but some girls helped me to find my friend with whom I had departed in the beginning and who worked for another pimp. She took me to an apartment, gave me money and took me to the train.

It was impossible to escape as they watched me day and night. A client who was also a lawyer put pressure on the trafficker to buy me a return ticket to my country.

I told three clients that I had been kidnapped from home and that I'm a minor. But they told the owner about it, because they didn't care. But one of the clients said that he would save me from the club.... Then, I gave him the telephone number of a schoolmate and asked him to convey the message "[name] is expecting you in [city]". Following this call, my school friend understood that something bad was happening and called my parents. My mother immediately notified the police.

The fact that men paying for commercial sex were among the people who helped children to escape suggests that such men do not simply create demand for commercial sex but can also play an important role in identifying trafficking cases. Raising awareness among men who pay for sex about the predicament of victims of trafficking and the possibility that a woman they see as a sex worker may in fact be a child and a victim of trafficking can contribute to the identification of victims, in particular those under 18 years of age. Relying on a client for help, however, can be risky for victims of trafficking since they have no way of knowing how the client will use the information or whether the client is complicit with the trafficker.

Organizing and preparing the escape also relied upon understanding the traffickers' strategies. Some of the children found out that their traffickers operated a network that helped them to control the children and prevent escapes. In a few cases, understanding the traffickers' strategies involved suspecting corruption of officials. In the cases of two children with similar experiences, police officers and traffickers came from the same town and were complicit.

I worked out which client might help me and I managed to save about 500 Euro to travel home. But I cut my hair and dyed it, to change my looks so they would not recognise me. I knew that pimps caught girls who were running away at one of the railway stations where the trains to my country left. So I did not go to that one but to a different station.

Escape did not always mean the end of trafficking for the child. As was illustrated earlier, children can return under the control of the same traffickers or be recruited or abducted by different traffickers.

The children's experience with the police

In about half of the cases (15), the police played a major role in getting the child out of the exploitative situation. In six of these cases, it was the child who took the initiative to contact the police in order to seek assistance. In the other cases, the police identified children as victims of trafficking during raids, at the border, or, in some circumstances, when checking the child's identity.

During the interviews, the children and young people expressed mixed feelings about the police. Some trusted the police and in general, felt they had been supported and assisted by them, ("The policemen had been very good with me"). Others felt extreme mistrust. Some children never tried contacting the police because they felt guilty about what the traffickers had forced them to do and were afraid of legal consequences. More often, however, fears and mistrust were grounded in warnings by traffickers and threats to children who cooperated with the police. Some children also suspected that the police were corrupt and complicit with traffickers.

I didn't try to contact the police. All policemen were bought.

I gave hundreds of statements, lists of names and amounts and dates and so on. They are still free! The police did nothing because they are hand in hand.

I was afraid that if I talked to the police, they [the traffickers] would find me and hurt me.

I was so scared. One girl in [the destination country] had told me that in our country centres for women and girls who return from abroad have been set up and that police treat them very badly and force them to make reports.

I contacted the police six months after I ran away from the traffickers. I was afraid of the foreign country's police. I did not have identity documents and did not know if they would help me. However, I went to the police but I did not tell them that I was forced to prostitute. I told them that my documents were stolen and I could not return to my country. I did not tell them that I was trafficked but they helped me to come back to my country.

I wanted to leave them [the traffickers], but I was afraid. I wanted to report them to the police, but I felt unsafe doing that in my country, so I decided to postpone it until we arrived in [the destination country].

Many times, the police caught us and kept us at the police station just for verifications, but I had never told them about my situation as I was so afraid.

The police asked me to report about persons I had met, but I didn't accept to do that because I was very afraid.

Some children who had been trafficked came repeatedly in contact with police – in their own country, at borders or abroad. These contacts happened on the streets, when the children were suspected of theft or having an identity document that was not 'in order', and in raids on apartments serving as brothels. However, this apparently did not automatically lead to the child being referred to assistance.

The police sent us to the police station. He [the trafficker] told me not to tell the truth. I was so happy that the police had caught us, but in the same time I was so afraid of him.... All the time in the police station I was with him. He told the police that I was his sister and that we had come to [the destination country] to meet our father who was working there. He showed the police the family certificate (the false one). The police handed us over to the police [of our home country] in the customs post. The police [in our home country] questioned us and he told them the same story, that "I was his sister". I couldn't talk; I couldn't tell them the truth. Afterwards, they set us free. We took a taxi, and in a city on our way home, we were stopped by some other policemen. I think they had doubts about us, that's why they stopped us. I told them the truth. At that moment the guy called his father and his father communicated with the police too. He gave to the police money and they set us 'free'.

One day, a friend of mine helped me. He gave me money in order to get away from Ariana, but I wasn't able to get away from her. I was afraid of her.... If I would return home my mother would treat me the same.... I have contacted the police several times. They sent me home. When I turned back home...the friends of my mother continued to pay visits to us every night, I remember that my uncle shouted and beat my mother because of me.... Then, after some time, I met again Ariana. I continued begging and meeting different boys and men.... One day, while Ariana was sleeping, I together with my sister went away and met a policeman in the street. We asked him for help and he returned us home again.... My mother didn't want us back, I continued to meet with the friends of my mother...but not very often, because my mother was afraid of my uncle.

Furthermore, in many cases, there were no individual case assessments to determine the best interests of the child. Instead, children were facing standard procedures that did not succeed in identifying and responding to their specific situation and needs. This lack of flexibility in the options and services offered to children may sometimes have increased their risk of exploitation and abuse.

The police told me that if I was a minor, they could not send me back home. They had to place me in a juvenile shelter. Only if I wanted to be recorded as an adult, they could send me directly to my country.

So I said I was adult and they sent me to [the capital of her home country]. I travelled in a group of adults who were also sent back to my country. Two of them helped me to find my way in the capital and get to the railway station. I got on a train. Then I called my grandmother and she told me what buses I had to take to get home.

The police informed me about the two alternatives I had: either to return to my country or to go to a centre there [in the destination country]. I wanted neither to return to my country nor to go to the centre. I just wanted to get in touch again with my boyfriend. I cried and screamed at the police station and they decided to let me free, to go anywhere I wanted.

At the police station, a colonel gave me [the equivalent of about one Euro] for a soda and a pretzel and also a note to the attention of the railway police to send me back to my hometown. He said, "You go to the police in your town and solve your problems there."

I knew I could turn to a foundation in that city that had helped us with the school. But all they could have done was to take me and send me to a shelter, not home to grandmother. And I was sorry to leave my brother alone, I always helped in with his maths homework.

PANEL:

The children's testimonies shed light on the complex factors that characterize the trafficking process. There are many different patterns of trafficking and exploitation, different factors that are interrelated in a variety of ways, and multiple phases involved in the trafficking process. Two examples provide some insight into these complex dynamics. They demonstrate how children can fall in and out of the control of multiple traffickers and highlight how institutional actors who came in contact with the children – in many cases the police – did not exercise their full responsibilities to protect them and thereby may have put children at a greater risk of abuse.

GIRL #1

I met a friend and went to her flat and I spent 10 days there. She was 33 year old and she was bringing her boyfriends in her flat, but she didn't allow them to touch me, saying that I was too young. They took my friend by force to work in a bar. She advised them to take me as well, which is what happened.

In that café, we stayed for two days, and afterwards the police came there and since we didn't possess any documents, they sent us to the police station. They sent us to a shelter. And then, we were sent to the court, where we testified against the owner of the bar.

In the shelter, I met one of my friends who told me that she had a boutique of clothes and she could employ me there. But in the meantime, she left the shelter. I disliked everything in that shelter and I made the request to the custodians to leave that place. They told me if I want to leave, the only thing I had to do is to sign a paper. I did so and left the shelter. I was 16 at that time.

After leaving the shelter, I paid a visit to a café and met the girl whom I knew from the shelter. She was accompanied by two men. They took us with them saying that they got me a job in a shop, but when we arrived there I saw that it was a bar. One week after, the owner of the bar started to beat me and bring the clients to me. He was selling me for money.

This lasted for one month and a half, until my brother in law visited that place and saw me. He informed the police. The police came and got me out and sent me to a shelter. This time I did not make a statement against the bar owner because I was afraid of him.

GIRL #2

(In an EU country.) At the beginning I begged and stole from shops. Afterwards, the trafficker put me out to make money in the street (prostitution) because I couldn't steal any longer because the entire police knew me. Because I made only small amounts of money the trafficker sold me to another trafficker.

They made me work as a prostitute. I began to know [the city]. I was repeatedly picked up by the police and learned how to get myself out of jail. I learned [the language] and I

learned who the trafficker's friends were, who to beware of, and my network of steady clients expanded. After all this, I managed to escape.

I found a 'sponsor' [a married man who paid for her hotel] and started on my own, with a girl that I taught to forget about riding the high horses. I told her, shut up and get to work yourself, so we can live. There were better periods and worse periods, arguments and fights with the girls on the street.

For various periods I had to work for other traffickers because they were threatening me. I had no papers. I was countless times picked up by the police for theft or for lack of documents.

I was kidnapped by a network of traffickers who drugged me, raped me and locked me up, from where I managed to escape following a police intervention in force. I gave lots of statements, lots that I don't know how many and I helped in the arrest of this network.

(After about one year) Since the traffickers had their eye on me again - they had heard that I was making more than 500 Euro a night and they wanted me back - I left everything I had made in the hotel in [the city] ... and I left with my best girlfriends [both over 20 years old] to another Western country.

Policy recommendations

What can be done to protect and assist children in situations of trafficking and exploitation

These recommendations are based on the broad body of UNICEF IRC studies on child trafficking¹⁶ and reconfirmed through the voices of the children and young people quoted in this study.

There are many different patterns of trafficking and exploitation, different factors that are interrelated in a variety of ways, and multiple phases involved in the trafficking process. Most children interviewed (21), knew their traffickers. In some cases the exploiter was identified as a boyfriend or lover; in three cases it was a neighbour; in three others a cousin. Traffickers were both women and men, mostly adults, but in some cases they were under 18 years of age or even much younger.

- Responses should recognize and take into consideration that the trafficker is often a relative, a peer, or someone with whom the child is already acquainted, and he/she may therefore be reluctant to report due to attachment, shame or fear, or both. Special measures should be taken when the trafficker is a child. Actions should be taken to avoid the risk of re-trafficking.
- The protection of the rights of trafficked children and a victim-oriented approach should be central in any anti-trafficking law enforcement and identification process. Special measures (e.g. diversion) should be taken when the trafficker is a juvenile to avoid the child's entry into the criminal justice system.

Some children were intercepted by border guards who took the children away from the traffickers. In other cases, border controls did not end the trafficking process, even though some children had incomplete or forged documents. In some cases, corruption seemed to

facilitate the border crossing. Some children also suspected that the police were corrupt and complicit with the traffickers.

- Governments should assess what measures are in place at the borders to identify and protect children being trafficked. Existing measures may be either inadequate or not fully enforced or simply ignored. All actors who may interact with children who are being trafficked should be trained regarding the special risks, vulnerabilities and rights of trafficked children. The establishment of a Europe-wide referral system, with clear procedures and communication protocols, could facilitate this. Child migrants need better access to information on their rights and how to get access to assistance once they leave home, both in their own country and abroad.

Most children who developed an escape strategy relied upon the help of a relative, a friend, another trafficked woman or girl, an NGO worker, a 'client' paying for sexual services, or various combinations of all of these.

- Governments should provide outreach services, hotlines, free telephone advice including on legal issues, drop-in centres and child-friendly information/material. These services should be developed in a consultative process with children and young people, including those belonging to marginalised groups, migrants and victims of exploitation and trafficking.
- Identification procedures should be developed aimed at detecting indicators of trafficking and referral to services. Further research on identification processes may be necessary.
- Partnership should be developed with agencies with a labour protection mandate to monitor and provide support to exploited children. In the specific context of the sex industry, imaginative schemes should be designed to encourage men who pay for sex to identify victims of trafficking, particularly those under 18 years of age. They should also know who to contact in order to ensure that a victim of trafficking receives appropriate assistance. Support should be given to encourage initiatives of boys and men who work with peers on gender and sexuality to prevent and combat sexual exploitation.

The experience of the 31 children who participated in this study illustrate that reality does not always fit neatly into the definition of child trafficking provided by the Palermo Protocol. The real situation of these children is much more complex. Their subjective perception of exploitation and abuse often varies, making it a particular challenge to fully understand the dynamics of exploitation and abuse when children are moving from one place to another.

- Children migrating to seek work within their own country or abroad need more effective protection. This involves protection measures at home, to give them opportunities to find out about employment opportunities and to find out if those they hear about are genuine and safe; and measures abroad, to prevent forced labour in the informal economy as well as exploitation in formal employment. This also means discarding the assumption that adolescents (especially 15- to 17-year-olds) do not or should not migrate to work away from home. Children should be given the opportunity to acquire skills (e.g. language and technical skills) that will help them gain access to the labour market in accordance with international standards and national labour regulations.

- Further research is needed concerning children's motives for migrating and their experiences once they do, including on the forms of abuse they experience, the degree to which they are informed of the risks involved and their suggested actions in terms of policy and programme response. Children and young people could also be involved in designing the research and be associated with its development, when safe and appropriate.

2.3. Repatriation and recovery

The repatriation process

Among the 16 children who were trafficked abroad, 12 were repatriated by the police of the destination country; the other four children made their way home alone or with the help of their social network (*see Figure 5*). In some of these cases, once the child had escaped, it took several months, and in one instance, a full year, before the child was referred for assistance. The children spent this period either in the destination country, travelling to other countries, or in their home country.

Repatriations organized by the children alone or with the help of their social network, sometimes exposed the children to additional risks or continued abuse and exploitation.

I ran out of money before getting home and had to bribe myself across the last border by having sex with a train controller.

Once back in their home country, it was the police who eventually referred these children to a shelter. Only one girl called a telephone hotline to contact service providers.

Figure 5: Repatriation processes

Form of escape	From destination country	Form of repatriation	To home country	Number of cases
Escaped alone or with help of social network	→ Escaped alone → →	Repatriation alone or with social network	→ Police → Shelter	4
	→ Police →	Repatriation by the police	→ Police → Shelter	3
	→ Police → Shelter →	Repatriation by the police	→ Police → Shelter	3
Escaped with help of police	→ Police → Detention →	Repatriation by the police	→ Police → Shelter	4
	→ Police → Shelter →	Repatriation by the police	→ Police → Shelter	1
	→ Police →	Repatriation by police	→ Family → Shelter	1

Note: Total of 16 children who had been trafficked across borders and who returned to their home countries or were repatriated.

Of the 12 children who made contact with the police in the destination country, only four were referred to a shelter in the destination country. Four children were repatriated immediately and another four children were detained by the police: two were kept in a police station for a few days and two in a detention centre where one stayed for six weeks, the other for about three months. Only a few of these children reported having received assistance, in particular medical treatment.

The children's responses suggest that once they were under the responsibility of authorities in the destination country, they were given little information about their legal status and rights, what types of services they could access, or any other relevant information about their situation (*see Table 6*). Most children interviewed said that their views, wishes and concerns with regard to repatriation were hardly taken into account and many of the children had no idea what was going to happen to them.

Table 6: Views of the children and young people on their repatriation process

Children and young people describe the repatriation process organized by the authorities of a destination country	No	Yes	Number of valid cases*
Were you able to contact your parents or family (while in police custody or in a shelter)?	5	8	13
Were your parents or family contacted by anyone else (including to make inquiries about your home)?	11	1	12
Was an adult appointed to look after you on a temporary basis?*	9	2	11
Did you meet a lawyer at any time while you were still abroad?	9	3	12
Were you ever asked about what you wanted to happen to you next – whether you should stay in that country or return to your own country?	8	6	14
Did you want to come back to your country?	4	8	12
Before you left the country to which you had been trafficked, did you know what was going to happen and where you were going to go once you arrived back here?	8	4	12
On your return journey to your own country, were you always accompanied by a police officer or some other official?***	8	4	12

Note: Total of 16 children who had been trafficked across borders and who returned to their home countries or were repatriated. Twelve children were repatriated by the police.

* Some respondents went through a similar process more than once, e.g., with police forces in different destination countries.

** Applicable only to the cases of children under 18 at time of identification.

*** Two respondents were accompanied by the police to the departure airport and were received by the police upon their arrival. One 14-year-old reported that she “really enjoyed that trip” (the flight home).

Conducting a risk assessment prior to repatriation and identifying a family member or other guardian to take responsibility for the child upon return are basic safeguards to protect the rights of repatriated children. They should be conducted routinely. However, in the majority of cases when the repatriation process was organized by the authorities of a destination country, the child’s parents or family were not officially contacted by the authorities of either the destination country or home country in preparation for repatriation, according to information provided by the child. This suggests that in these specific cases, no risk assessment was conducted to find out if it was safe for the child to return home, and to identify, for those who at the time of repatriation were still under 18, a family member or other guardian to take responsibility for the child.

Many of the children were not able to contact their families prior to repatriation.

As soon as we reached the first city in [the destination country] we were captured by the police and arrested. I was in the police station for five days. They didn’t permit us to contact anyone. So I did not contact my family. I had no chance to do it.

While still abroad, few of the children had a temporary guardian appointed (2) or had the opportunity to talk to a lawyer (3).

Several children were asked whether they wanted to return to their own country. Two girls reported that they were offered only two alternatives, which depended upon whether or not they self-declared to be under or above 18 years of age. As under-18s, they could remain in the country and be referred to a shelter; as adults they could be returned to their home country.

The police told me that if I was a minor, they could not send me back home. They had to place me in a juvenile shelter. Only if I wanted to be recorded as an adult, they could send me directly to my country. So I said I was adult and they sent me to [the capital of her home country]. I travelled in a group of adults who were also sent back to my country. Two of them helped me to find my way in the capital and get to the railway station. I got on a train. Then I called my grandmother and she told me what buses I had to take to get home.

The boy who was convicted of theft in an EU country reported that, while being held in juvenile detention in that country, he was told he had three choices: he could serve his sentence in detention and stay in the country where he was being held until he reached 18 years of age; he could be adopted by a local family and remain permanently in that country; or he could return to his home country.

That was a very good life [in the juvenile detention centre], I had everything I wanted: excellent food, computers, but missing home was the worst. To have no one to talk to except in that English of theirs, to have no father, no brother, to have no friends... it was agony.

His choice was to return to his home country, where his passport was stamped with an instruction that he should not be allowed abroad again before reaching age 18.

Two thirds of the children who had been trafficked across borders wanted to return to their home country.

I was so happy when I got back to my country. I got in my knees and thanked God for bringing me back.

I did not want to stay there [the destination country]. I was not afraid to come back home. I have parents.

The others were fearful of what would happen once they returned home; many of them still feared the traffickers. These very different experiences highlight once again the critical importance of conducting an individual case and risk assessment for each child, taking into account the views of the child, in order to determine if repatriation is in the best interests of the child or not.

I was afraid of going back home because of the traffickers. They got interested in me. They had looked for me at home. The police was also there.

I'd like to go abroad again because here [in her home country] I have problems of security. My life is in danger as I have reported a lot of persons to the police. My family would not accept me back. I was terrified by the idea that I was going to come back. I am in the witness protection programme. I cried a lot, I had no place where to go and I did not know what was going to happen to me.

Residential care in home country

All the respondents had spent some time in a shelter in their own country, so all had experiences with residential assistance for victims of trafficking. In most cases, it was the police who referred the children to the shelters, independent of whether they had been trafficked abroad or within their own countries.¹⁷

While most children had stayed in only one shelter, some had transited through multiple facilities. The maximum number of shelters one girl had been to was four. Periods spent in care varied from a number of days to many months. One respondent spent two and a half years in a residential care centre, after being repatriated as an adult. She was still looking for a long-term solution at the time she was interviewed.

Most of the children and young people considered the assistance they received while in residential care to be “very helpful”.

I liked the way they treat a child. I have learned a lot of things and I have started to see the world in a different light.

I had the opportunity to meet other people who suffered. We became friends.

I liked it very much. It was a great help with accommodation, food and especially advice. I've learned a lot of things about abuse, about diseases, about how to protect myself. The ladies took care of me, helped me find employment and a low rent apartment. It has been very helpful for the life I'm leading now.

I've learned a lot of things. Had I only known all of these things before.... My mother came too [to the shelter] to see the film [*Lilia For Ever*] and she read with me the booklet *Myths and Realities about Trafficking*. And my mother said that she could not have even imagined. Now I know how to protect myself. I have agreed with my family on certain passwords in case of emergency. I have realized that the trafficker can be nice too, not necessarily fierce, he can be kind. Both my mother and me understand things better.

They have helped me a lot to recover morally and psychologically. Also, me and my little boy were offered healthcare assistance and humanitarian aid. I get 60 dollars monthly to raise my child. I managed to solve my gynaecological and kidney problems, I consulted the psychologist and the psychiatrist many times.

In their home country, nearly all the young people were provided with health care. Their physical and psychological health was assessed soon after their arrival and the treatment prescribed was made available. Most mentioned that they consulted with a psychologist and felt this had helped them reduce their anxiety, although a majority also stated when they were interviewed that they were still disturbed by their experiences.

I'm not at all scared anymore. The psychologist helped me to see the positive side and to be able to move on.

I talked and, especially with the lady psychologist, I've learned solutions to my problems.

I am still worried, only that now I know how to protect myself better.

I'm still worried. When I see a group of boys or a tipsy man they scare me to death. I can't even go to the shop by myself. I'm afraid of men when I'm alone.

The most common negative comment about living in a residential facility was that the children felt isolated and homesick.

They offered me everything but I missed my family more than anything else.

The only boy who participated in this study and who had been in juvenile detention in an EU country felt that conditions in detention had been preferable to the residential facility.

This period [in a shelter] did not help me at all. They kept me there, far from my parents, in their shabby homeless guy clothes. Had they not released me sooner I had a plan to run away through a window, but I thought the police would catch me again and I could hardly wait to go back home and show off my clothes to everybody and give my father and my brother the clothes I had bought [in an EU country] for them.

Most of the respondents reported that they had participated in the preparation of a 'reintegration plan' drawn up by a care professional. The plans focused on completing or restarting education for the child or young person, helping them finding a job, solving accommodation problems and identifying additional assistance that could help them once they left the residential facility. These were important steps to help the young people plan their future in both the short- and the medium-term.

Access to education, training and jobs

Many of the respondents said their reintegration plans put a special emphasis on education and training in order to increase their potential to get a job. The majority either returned to school (to complete their period of compulsory schooling) or attended a vocational training course. The latter group included courses in fields that are conventionally considered to be women’s work (hairdressing, manicuring, house-keeping, dress-making and cooking) and courses for less conventional jobs, such as construction industry training. Some respondents opted to also learn technical skills (drawing or computer courses) or a language, most often English.

Some children decided not to attend courses or dropped out after a while. There were individual reasons for this. In some instances, it was evident that the child did not think the course was suitable. In others, children encountered difficulties that forced them to stop the course.

While I was taking the hairdressers course, a guy told to the girls what had happened to me. The girls started to say things to me and I quit going there again.

I attended a course to be a hair stylist but I missed a few days because I got sick and the owner expelled me, so I would like to continue with the course and also to continue my schooling.

I wanted to attend a vocational training course for waiters/waitresses, but I had no money. The course was free but I would not have been able to work during that time and I would not have had money to pay my rent.

A minority of the respondents got a job immediately, even though the job openings did not always meet their expectations. Given general challenges that young people often face in finding employment in the countries covered by this study, the assistance given by social workers was often considered crucial.

Seeking a durable solution

After they got away from the traffickers, the children and young people who participated in this study resorted to different living situations with family, friends, independent of the family, or in shelters (*see Table 7*). For some, this period was characterized by constant change. Moving from place to place, they lived with different family members, friends and partners. None of the respondents reported being pushed out of a shelter before they wanted to leave. Nonetheless, one “regretted” having left a shelter and said she wished she had stayed longer to take full advantage of the facilities.

Table 7: Respondents’ living situation at time of interview

Living situation	Number of cases
With the family (including at least one parent)	11
With relatives others than parents*	2
Independent of the family (with or without a friend/boyfriend)	5
In a residential facility (short- or long-term shelter or protected apartment)	13

Note: Total of 31 children. Situation recorded at the time of the interview. In one country, all respondents were still living in a residential facility, whereas in other countries some respondents had already left residential care.

*Children’s responses included grandmother and aunt.

Thirteen children and young people were still living in a shelter at the time they were interviewed; the other 18 children had left the shelter to live with their parents, other relatives, friends or a partner.

After leaving the shelter, I lived for 1-2 months at my aunt's [who took her away from her abusive parents] and another two months in a rented apartment. Afterwards I moved in with the family of my boyfriend. He has gone to work in [another country] to make some money for us. I do not pay rent but I contribute to the expenses of the household. My current family loves me, respects me. They have even proved that they care for me and about me.

While some children successfully returned to their family or community, others faced major difficulties, including stigmatization and rejection, and even danger. Aware of these risks, many children were careful about how they talked to family, friends and peers and what kind of information they shared.

Talking to family and friends

Irrespective of where the children and young people lived, most of them (26) were in contact with their families at the time they were interviewed.

The children were very strategic with regard to choosing the persons they spoke to about their experiences, the type of information they shared and what information they preferred to keep to themselves. Most of the interviewed children (17) had told other family members something about their experiences. Given the fact that nearly all cases were associated with sexual exploitation and rape, the informed family member was usually the mother or another female family member. Some children felt their father or brother blamed them for the exploitation or did not understand them. In most cases, siblings, particularly younger ones, were not informed in order to be protected from information that was considered dangerous or potentially harmful. Very few children spoke about their experiences with friends or other persons beyond the direct family.

My mother only knows some of it, because I cannot tell her. I know she would suffer. The pain would be too much for her.

I cannot tell my grandmother everything because I'd cause her too much pain and she has a heart condition. She suspects, but I cannot tell her everything I've been through. But my aunt knows everything, everything.

My father and older brother know only what I declared to the police. My older sister knows a bit less. I keep everything in me. I don't want to talk.

I work in the city and rent a room. I go home more seldom; I stay more often with my aunt. My sister knows, maybe she told to my brother as well. But I told neither him nor my father.

My mother knows everything that happened. My sisters know just part of it. The family has always helped me, and they are helping me now, too.

I told my parents about what happened to me. I went to the police to denounce the trafficker. They were very helpful during the investigation. I was accompanied by my parents to the court, especially by my mother. She supported me morally. Sometimes my father is upset and reproaches me that I went to [another country]. This happens when he gets drunk.

My father and brother know everything that happened to me. My mother and grandparents know only part of it. Both my father and my brother have been helpful, they have not scolded me, instead they have tried to understand why I left, what went wrong, what we could do differently now.

Stigmatization and rejection

According to the children's statements, some families were very supportive, while in other families only individual relatives showed sympathy. In other cases, no family member offered

support. Many children encountered parents or other family members or both who had difficulty accepting what had happened to the children.

I had difficulties with my uncle and his wife who are our neighbours. They keep mentioning that I am a bar girl.

In the village where my parents and my siblings live, everybody talks and treats me very badly, including my mother.

They know what happened to me. My mother, my brother and my sister understand me, but my father blames me.

I have good relations with everybody in the village, except for a girl who tells everybody that she's heard I am a prostitute.

The girls also reported experiencing varying degrees of difficulty in rebuilding their relationships with peers and with boys and men.

When I came back home I had two marriage offers but after they found out [about] my past they never came again.

Out of fear of rejection and stigmatization, some children thought it was better not to talk about their experiences or even to return home.

I don't want to tell, they would only laugh at me. I went to the priest and I confessed all my sins. For the others I am smart, I tell them I have money, I don't want them to know anything. I told them just that I've been abroad and girls come to borrow my clothes because they are cool. But I don't want to give them, let them go make their own clothes.

I declared everything, both at the police and at home. I cannot say I have problems, but I can feel they have grown colder to me. It would have been better to keep my mouth shut and everything would be fine now. My mother, when she's drunk, she flaps her mouth and spreads the rumour in the entire village that they kidnapped me and they raped me and ever since, both the old ones and the young ones behave like I was eating people. At the disco, they all shun me, our neighbours don't even drink water in our house because they say it turns their stomach. The boys laugh at me.

Some respondents felt there was no way they could create a normal life back home and were eager to leave for another city or country.

When I came back home, of course I had difficulties, especially with my father, who many times reminded me what had happened, e.g., when I served him a drink he used to tell me "Take it easy, you're not in the café anymore", and there were occasions when he mentioned the same things in front of our guests...I can clearly see that there is no future for me here. I don't see any future here, because when I went out with a guy, as soon as he understood the things from my past he left me.... I would like somebody to help me to go somewhere in Western countries because I don't see any future for me here. The café owner [who had exploited her and against whom she had given evidence] threatened me and I'm also afraid that people will continue to talk about my past. They will not understand me, and I will not have the chance to create my own family here or to have a normal life.

Follow-up contacts with shelter staff and social workers

After leaving the shelter, nearly all the respondents were told that a social worker or member of the staff at the facility where they had received treatment would be available to them for follow-up advice and support. The frequency of follow-up contacts varied. Where children still faced domestic violence after returning home, social workers faced a particular challenge in maintaining contact with the children. The majority of the respondents, however, reported being satisfied with the help they received.

It is fine that I can call the shelter anytime I need support and they do not refuse me. The staff of the shelter inquired about me all the time, and we talk on the phone several times a month. When my fiancé beat me up, the police here [in her home city] again didn't do anything. I talked to the shelter coordinator who called [the regional administration] and with a simple telephone call, the police came to help me. Without the ladies from the shelter it would be much more difficult.

During my period at home, I had support from social services and [an organization]. They helped us with two beds and the generator necessary for my father's work. I had regular visits from the social worker and from one psychiatrist.

In just a few isolated cases, children felt they did not need any further follow-up by service providers and social workers.

I don't want to feel as if I'm being followed by the police. I have had enough advice, I need money, not advice.

Access to justice

Only 11 children reported that they had been able to consult a lawyer/attorney while they were in an assistance programme. Most of those respondents who provided evidence to the police, however, were not represented by a lawyer/attorney (15 children).¹⁸ Some of these children had been told by the police that they could contact a lawyer/attorney, but had no financial means to do so. Many therefore perceived justice to be a matter of money.

Justice is not served and you need a lot of money.

There is no money to contact a lawyer/attorney or to seek justice.

In another case, the parents, wanting to put their child's perpetrator behind bars, had contacted a lawyer/attorney, but the respondent said she did not want to go through the whole procedure of testifying and reliving her experiences.

I don't want to hear anything more about statements, police, lawyers and trials. I want to forget.

One girl felt the police were more interested in prosecuting the traffickers than in protecting the victims and was still worried that the traffickers would come after her.

I was questioned twice by the police while I was abroad. They were not concerned about me; they were more concerned about how to catch others...who were behind me.... I am still afraid of those guys that I reported in the police station in [the capital of an EU country]... maybe when they are freed they will come and look for me.

In only 4 of the 31 cases the children reported that their trafficker had been sentenced and imprisoned. Because only a few of the cases had gone to trial, the children had little information to offer about the way police investigation, prosecution procedures and the trial had impacted them. In the case where traffickers had been convicted, the respondents had not benefited materially: none was paid compensation of any sort. The interviews therefore suggest that for the majority of these 31 children, the criminal justice system was not effective, either abroad or in their own countries.

In the four cases in which traffickers were convicted, sentences ranged from six months to 10 years' imprisonment. In one of these cases, a pimp who had been arrested and convicted had already been freed by the time of the interview. The risks and difficulties of returning home, therefore, go beyond stigmatization and include concrete threats by traffickers and the danger of being re-trafficked.

I don't feel well and I don't have any plans for the future since the guys that kidnapped me were in prison for two and a half years after I testified against them and now they are out of prison. I heard from others that they said that if they ever get me they will kill me. I used to go out with a guy for a while and I told him the whole story and we wanted to get engaged, but those guys that got out of the prison beat him up badly and he left me. So this is the reason why I don't have a future here.

The risk of reprisals appears particularly serious in cases where traffickers come from the same community or region as their victims. One of the two girls who had been trafficked by her female cousin testified against the relative. In consequence, her cousin was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment. This led to divisions in the family, which continued to cause problems for the girl who testified. She observed that others in her village had grown cold towards her and concluded that, "It would have been better to keep my mouth shut and everything would be fine now."

In another case, a child reported, "The trafficker's mother says she wants revenge on my family because her daughter was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment because of me." In this case the respondent was not represented by a lawyer in court: "The police told me that justice was on my side," she said.

One girl, based on her experience with giving testimony against her first trafficker, drew the conclusion that it would be too dangerous for her to provide evidence against her second trafficker:

The first café owner [who was sentenced to six months' imprisonment] told people that if he meets me he will kill me, because I caused his imprisonment, and therefore I'm very much afraid.

Another 17-year-old reported that she was living back in her home village, where she had seen the traffickers, still unpunished.

They glare at me, but they are afraid of the police in [the local provincial capital, i.e. police from the Organized Crime Unit].

Yet another girl had been under the control of traffickers for six years but none of the traffickers had been prosecuted for any of the offences committed against her, despite the fact that she had given evidence to the police in her own country. At the time of the interview, she still hoped they might make an arrest. After having spent more than two years in a secure shelter, with her own movements restricted, she remarked, "Sometimes I feel sorry for reporting them to the police."

Beyond abuse

Despite the fact that most of these children and young people had endured violence and abuse, the majority¹⁹ were optimistic about their future and anticipated it as "a success", "very happy", and "very beautiful". Their dreams included: having a good job, their own family (to be married and have children), their own house or apartment, and a particular level of education or qualification. Several of the girls wanted to become policewomen, and one wanted a husband who was a police officer as well. One of these girls said, "I want to help everyone in need." The two young people with children of their own both emphasized the importance of protecting and creating a safe environment for their children.

The girls were also optimistic about marriage. One girl who had returned home to a community with a tradition of arranged marriage hoped that her aunts would find her a good husband. She still didn't trust herself to make such an important decision. "I am afraid of finding my future husband by myself, I might make mistakes."

Many wanted to stay in their home country. Only six of them mentioned plans to work abroad. The two who reported that they were not currently entitled to use their passports to travel abroad²⁰ obviously resented this. They were planning to leave for another country as soon as they turned 18 and travel restrictions that had been imposed on them as child victims of trafficking would be lifted.

Policy Recommendations

What can be done to better support children after they have been trafficked

These recommendations are based on the broad body of UNICEF IRC studies on child trafficking²¹ and reconfirmed through the voices of the children and young people quoted in this study.

Of the 12 children who made contact with the police in the destination country, only four were referred to a shelter in the destination country. Four children were repatriated immediately and another four children were detained by the police; two children were kept in a police station for a few days and two in a detention centre where one stayed for six weeks and the other for about three months.

The children's responses suggest that once they were under the responsibility of authorities in the destination country, they were given little information about their legal status and fundamental rights, what types of services they could access, their options or any other relevant information about their situation. In most of the cases, the child's parents or family were not officially contacted by the authorities of the destination country or their home country in preparation for repatriation.

- Individual case management for each child identified as a victim of trafficking must be ensured. This includes an individual needs and risk assessment, the determination of the best interests of each individual child in all actions concerning the child and taking into account the child's views. Governments need to ensure that child victims of trafficking are never placed in law enforcement detention facilities or otherwise deprived of liberty and that they are provided with temporary humanitarian visas.
- Conducting a risk assessment prior to repatriation is of critical importance in order to determine if repatriation is in the best interests of the child or not is key. Identifying a family member or other guardian to take responsibility for the child upon return is a basic safeguard to protect the rights of repatriated children and should be conducted routinely.
- Children need to be informed and consulted when determining the types and forms of assistance they will receive. These consultations need to take place before the child is referred to assistance and when the child is received in a shelter or other forms of assistance. Regularly revisiting the child's views and opinions during the assistance

process is particularly important in order to evaluate its effectiveness to support the child and its ability to meet the child's best interests and needs.

Only 11 children reported that they had been able to consult a lawyer while they were in an assistance programme. Most of those respondents who provided evidence to the police, however, were not represented by a lawyer.

- Governments need to ensure that every child has access to legal counselling and representation regardless of whether he or she is willing to testify. A legal guardian should be immediately appointed to represent the best interests of the child and the child should be provided with free legal assistance and counselling.
- Law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities should take particular care to protect the rights of the child victim and avoid unnecessary questioning, repetition of testimony and visual contact with the defendant.
- Governments need to develop child- and age-specific material on relevant judicial procedures, including on children's rights in such situations

Once back in their home country, nearly all the young people were provided with health care. Their physical and psychological health was assessed soon after their arrival and the treatment prescribed was made available.

According to the children's statements, some families were very supportive, while in other families only individual relatives showed sympathy. In other cases, no family member offered support. Many children encountered parents and/or other family members who had difficulty accepting what had happened to their children. Some children felt there was no way they could create a normal life back home and were eager to leave for another city or country.

- Governments should put in place appropriate measures to ensure the physical and psychosocial recovery of the child after the trafficking experience (with a focus on resilience building), including appropriate accommodation, counselling, legal assistance, health care, psychological and material assistance, interpretation services, education, vocational training, employment opportunities and other relevant protective measures, where necessary also for the family members at risk in countries of origin.
- Long-term support services should be made available at the local and community levels through counselling and other mechanisms to support programmes.
- Educational opportunities offered to children who have been trafficked need to consider the fact that the child may come from a family that does not or cannot, for financial reasons, support the child staying in school. Seeking and taking into account the views of the child with regard to education and vocational training is critical. Further measures are needed to ensure that young people who have been trafficked are prepared to meet the challenges of an independent and self-determined life and find productive employment so they can break the cycle of poverty and dependence.
- Parents and other members of households to which children who have been trafficked return should be given advice (prior to family reunification) on how to prevent

secondary victimization and stigmatization, both within the family and by other members of the community. The level of detail of information that the parents or others are given about the child's experiences must be guided by the child's best interests and determined primarily by the child, in consultation with the social worker or caregivers overseeing the reunification process. Family members should also be given information on symptoms of post-traumatic stress and on how to respond to these appropriately.

- Awareness-raising and mobilization of community members is necessary to counteract stigmatization of girls and boys who have been sexually exploited. Efforts should be taken to mobilize boys and men to take action against gender discrimination and sexual exploitation. The promotion of a child-friendly environment is particularly important.
- There is a need to evaluate which of the services, information and skills provided in shelters the children consider most useful. This information can inform the development of the general school curriculum and support the strengthening of the overall child protection system. Additional research with children who have been trafficked is needed to get a better understanding of their long-term needs.

3. A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CHILD TRAFFICKING – KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS TO INFORM POLICYMAKING

3.1. Key Findings

Much of the information from the interviews with the 31 children confirms findings from previous research on child trafficking. It also gives new dimensions and insights into the lives of children who have been trafficked. The findings from these interviews indicate:

- Trafficking is not a single event but a highly complex and dynamic process, involving multiple actors. The experiences of the 31 children illustrate that reality does not always fit neatly into the definition of child trafficking provided by the Palermo Protocol. The complexity of child trafficking often makes it difficult, in practice, to distinguish between trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse of children.
- The experience of young people in this study indicates the linkages between various forms of neglect, violence, abuse and exploitation. The study acknowledges that children who have experienced violence in the home are at risk of being recruited by traffickers, or they may choose to migrate and risk ending up in exploitative situations.
- The children's testimonies provide some indication of how institutional actors who came in contact with the children, in countries of origin and destination, before, during and after the period of exploitation, often failed to provide the necessary protection of children concerned. In some cases they may have put these children at a greater risk of abuse.
- The study also reveals that these children and young people were seldom given the opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Decisions were often taken without their involvement or full understanding of what was at stake, and they were not always consulted in the development of their rehabilitation programmes nor in evaluating services established to support them.
- Finally, this report shows that when children who have been trafficked are given the opportunity to describe their experiences and express their views, this information sheds light onto those factors that make children vulnerable, their reasons for leaving home, and their special needs regarding prevention, assistance and protection. Children's participation plays an important role in helping to identify areas for additional research and to inform effective policy responses.

Any interventions to prevent and combat trafficking must be grounded by an understanding of these factors and based on a child rights based approach (*see Annex for the components of a child rights-based approach*). The children and young people interviewed for this study have helped to deepen this understanding

LESSONS TO INFORM POLICYMAKING

Prevention

A lesson to be learned from the experience of these children is that they could have been prevented from being trafficked in the first place.

The fact that 12 of the 31 respondents said they left home to avoid some form of domestic abuse suggests that social services and other institutions in the children's home countries were not providing adequate protection for these children while they were still living at home. Other actors in the community (neighbours, teachers, law enforcement agencies, social workers and others) might have been aware of the hardships and problems experienced by the families concerned. Nonetheless, the interviews do not indicate any direct contact between these actors and the children. At the same time, the children's accounts also confirm that the responsibility for preventing child trafficking rests not only with the children's home countries, but also with countries to which they migrate with or without their families.

It is important that national child protection systems not only support children who have been abused, but also invest in prevention strategies by addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as gender discrimination and other social economic and structural factors, as well as the demand side of trafficking, meaning the demand for children from clients, brothel owners and factory owners. Families and community members, including children themselves, play an important role in preventing child abuse and exploitation and in monitoring risk factors at the community level.

Vulnerable families and other community members need support through the provision of livelihood options, family counselling, parenting education (for fathers and mothers), drug and alcohol prevention and rehabilitation, and overall information about child protection issues and children's rights.

Protection

The testimonies provided by the 31 young people who participated in this study indicate that a full range of child protection initiatives is needed to protect children from abuse and exploitation. These initiatives must be implemented in the places where traffickers recruit children and in the destinations to which children are trafficked. For interventions to be effective, they must address the multiple factors that contribute to trafficking.

Multidisciplinary teams need to be organized at the community level and should consist of all professionals who have a role to play in detecting and responding to cases of child abuse and exploitation, including health professionals (e.g. doctors, nurses and paramedics); educational professionals: (e.g. teachers, school directors, personnel responsible for responding to school dropouts): law enforcement officials (e.g. police, prosecutors and judges) and others. These professionals must be properly trained in the detection of incidents of child abuse and neglect and in identifying cases of child trafficking and of the exploitation associated with trafficking. Furthermore, in countries of origin and destination, standard procedures need to be developed to ensure that the best interests of the child and the child's right to have his or her views heard and taken into account are respected.

Information, skills and safe places

Nearly all the children and young people who participated in this study indicated that they lacked access to quality information and skills that could have helped prevent them from being trafficked, protect themselves from harmful and abusive relationships, know where to turn to for advice and assistance, and learn about the risks they might face when leaving home. These testimonies highlight the urgent need to ensure that all children have access to child rights education and benefit from child-friendly information about different forms of abuse and opportunities to develop skills to better protect themselves from such abuse. From the children's stories it also became clear that information by itself is not enough. Beyond this, those children who felt that staying at home was no longer an option, had no concrete alternatives; no safe place to go. A framework needs to be in place to respond to children's concerns, offering a hotline or other contacts to call upon for advice and information, and safe places that provide shelter for children who suffer abuse and violence in the home. Child-friendly, age-appropriate and diversity sensitive information needs to be developed in close partnership with children and young people themselves.

The active participation of children

When children are trafficked, they suffer physical and psychological trauma and they are often limited, fully or in part, to make decisions for themselves. During the period that they were under the control of a trafficker, all 31 young people interviewed for this study were denied the right to make decisions about their lives. There is also some evidence that the children who remained under a trafficker's control for many years had lost a great deal of their 'agency', i.e. their capacity to make decisions and act on them.

It is safe to conclude that part of the recovery process after being trafficked must ensure that victims are given an opportunity to regain confidence and life skills to take charge of their lives.

Across the board, all children who were interviewed reported that once they were out of the control of the trafficker, they felt that their views were not sufficiently taken into account. Those who found themselves in foreign countries, in particular, continued to feel treated as objects, passive 'victims' whose fate was decided by others. This does not mean that the institutions did not provide useful assistance, but rather that they did not always consider it necessary to consult the children about the solutions being envisaged or decided upon. As one girl put it, "Nobody talked to me, they do not care." It is critical to ensure respect for, and effective implementation of, the provisions of article 12 of the CRC,²² in particular, children's rights to have their opinions heard and taken into account.

A key moment for determining the 'best interests' of children who have been trafficked occurs when decisions are taken that affect them in the long-term. The accounts of the 11 children who were repatriated by foreign governments when still under 18 years of age provide no indication that any procedures were followed to ensure that their best interests were a primary consideration. In particular, the appointment of a temporary guardian was not followed in any of these cases.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Although the group of children and young people interviewed was small, some observations can be made about the ways in which information is obtained from trafficked children, as well as conclusions made about how to better protect them from abuse.

The interviews indicate that there is a risk of re-traumatization for the trafficked children. The experience of the young persons interviewed, however, suggests that re-traumatization can be avoided to some extent if appropriate methods are used, while valuable, in fact vital, information can be obtained for the development of evidenced-informed anti-trafficking and prevention efforts.

Was there evidence that this research caused any further harm to the respondents?

The respondents were all asked at the end of their interview whether the questions had been too intrusive (see Table 8). A relatively high number of respondents felt fine about the interview, although some found it intrusive. In one of the countries, the psychologist supervising the interviews reported that the individual interviewers had all noted that, “the girls were extremely affected by the questions raised in the interview” and that “this always happens when somebody reminds them of their past.”

Table 8 Respondents’ comments on their interview

Country	Albania	Kosovo	Republic of Moldova	Romania	Total
Number of interviewed children	8	6	8	9	31
Suffered interview fatigue*	1	1	4	2	8
Response to the question “How did you perceive the questions in the interview?”					
- I liked them**	0	0	0	3	3
- Alright (OK)	7	4	4	5	20
- Not intrusive	1	0	0	0	1
- Some were intrusive	0	0	2	0	2
- Interview was intrusive ***	0	2	2	1	5

Note. Total of 31 children.

* Respondents felt that during various interviews they had repeatedly been asked similar questions.

** “I liked talking with somebody. It’s nice to see that other people understand you.” ;

*** “I would like to forget the nightmare that I experienced, but I have to answer to your questions.” ; “I have had enough of it: I underwent a police investigation, a court suit, and living at a shelter.” ; “They remind me of my past and I feel a little sad but it’s OK.” “I have been asked before some time to give an interview for somebody else but I refused.” .

Many children commented that they appreciated the fact that the interview did not focus on details related to the trafficking process.

It’s fine that you didn’t pester me with names and amounts and other stuff like this.
I was worried that you would want details again, like at the police.

Some children stated very clearly that they were selective about the types of information that they shared and with whom they shared it.

I cannot tell everything because I’d cause too much pain [to others].

I’m ashamed to talk about it.

I know how to talk, both to you [the interviewer] and others. I know what I should say and what not.

Table 9 Children still worried by their experiences at time of interview

Country	Albania	Kosovo	Republic of Moldova	Romania	Total
Number of interviewed children	8	6	8	9	31
Children still worried or afraid	5	6	3	5	19

Note: Total of 31 children.

More than a half of the children were still worried about their experiences when they were interviewed or said they were still frightened (*see Table 9*). Nevertheless, some presented their experiences in quite an objective way, highlighting how they took initiatives to improve their situation during or in between different trafficking experiences. They gave the impression that they had managed to cope with the trauma. Some recited their story placing themselves at the centre as a hero who endured hardships but eventually succeeded in triumphing over adversity, rather than portraying themselves as a victim. This may have been due in part to an increase in their confidence and self-esteem on account of therapy they received while in residential care.

Many respondents wanted to explain what they had learned from their experiences and ended the interview with comments such as: “I would like to send a message to all girls who have experienced what I did, that they should accept help” , and “I would like to pass a message to young girls to be very careful. I don’t know how this message will influence them because when I heard about this kind of risk myself, I didn’t pay attention.”

Interview fatigue was an issue, even with those children who did not perceive the interview as intrusive (*see Table 8*). Attaining the right balance between protecting these children from undergoing too many interviews, from the risks of re-traumatization or violation of their privacy on one side, and obtaining valuable information about their experiences to inform better prevention strategies in future on the other side, is bound to remain difficult. The balance needs to be determined by the best interests of the children involved, providing them with anticipated and full information about the process and scope of the interview, letting them take an informed decision on whether they want to participate or not and respecting their decisions. They should also be informed that they can always take a break or fully withdraw from the interview whenever they would like to do so.

Further research needs revealed by the findings of this study

The feasibility of interviewing young people between three and six months after they have left residential care raises the possibility of tracking some children for much longer periods in order to assess the long-term impact, both of the abuse they experienced and the assistance they received. While it is important not to endlessly remind victims of their abuse, or to intrude on their privacy, the information obtained from these respondents suggests that a great deal remains to be learned. It suggests that interviewing young people at periods of one, two or more years after they have left residential care would produce further valuable lessons. These interviews revealed relatively little about the relationships the children re-established with members of their home communities. It would be extremely useful to better understand whether stigmatization is a short- or long-term experience and whether some trafficking victims develop successful strategies for dealing with it.

Since this study was limited to the participation of children who had been identified and assisted in their home countries, it will be important to better understand the situation of other child victims of trafficking: children who have not been identified as victims of trafficking by official authorities, children who have not received any assistance, and those who have not returned to their home country but received assistance abroad or otherwise sustained an independent life abroad. This will offer additional important information to better understand the complexity of child trafficking and to give children an effective opportunity to enjoy their fundamental human rights.

ANNEX: Children First: A child rights-based approach to trafficking²³

Approaches to trafficking in human beings are informed by a variety of perspectives and concepts. Each concentrates on certain aspects of human trafficking and the protection of affected persons. It is therefore important to consider the potential of each approach in order to address the complexity and dynamics of trafficking in a comprehensive manner. Addressing trafficking in human beings generally will not, however, automatically protect children.

The tendency of existing anti-trafficking approaches to focus on specific elements or types of trafficking fails to address child trafficking in the broader context of children's rights, thus leaving many children unprotected. Children's increased vulnerability to exploitation and the particular harm suffered by trafficked children require that child trafficking and trafficking in adult persons be dealt with as separate issues. In order to safeguard the rights of children, there is a need for targeted laws, policies and programmes, and integration of child-specific provisions into existing anti-trafficking initiatives. This requires that all actors engaged in anti-trafficking initiatives are made aware of the special vulnerabilities and human rights of children.

The child rights-based approach to trafficking means placing the children at the centre of all trafficking related interventions. The child's best interests need to be given primary consideration in all actions. These should be determined for each child, giving due consideration to his or her views.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges children as actors and asserts children's agency by reaffirming their right to be consulted on matters that affect them, to express their opinions freely and to seek, receive and impart information.

Listening to children and learning from children's experiences are a key reference that can inform this approach, as are children's views when preventive and protective measures are being considered. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) organizations such as UNICEF play an important role in this process, not only by providing or supplementing assistance to trafficked and exploited children, but also by promoting initiatives aimed at the prevention of child trafficking and, more broadly, the fulfilment of children's rights in all countries, including origin and destination countries.

This also implies addressing discrimination as one of the root causes of trafficking and ensuring that approaches to address trafficking are sensitive to children of various age groups and backgrounds. Responses should take into consideration the evolving capacities of the child and ensure the child's survival and development to the maximum extent possible.

Responses to child trafficking need to go beyond viewing it simply as a sub-issue of trafficking in human beings. A comprehensive approach that places the human rights of children at its core is needed to effectively address all forms of abuse and exploitation of children, including trafficking. Such a framework is designed to safeguard children's rights at all times, prevent child exploitation and abuse and empower the child to make informed choices, recognize risky propositions and face the future with confidence – even after an exploitative experience has occurred.

Beyond specific international standards and regulations targeting trafficking in human beings and child trafficking, it is critical to ensure that governments, as the key duty bearers,

implement the provisions that already exist in international law to protect the human rights of children and child crime victims.

The principle actors in preventing child trafficking do not fit a precise profile. They include children themselves and their parents and relatives, community members, social workers, law enforcement officers, persons working with and for children, such as teachers and health professionals, and members of youth organizations. Peer groups are also important in identifying, discussing and reporting on risky situations.

Strengthening peer awareness and interaction on the rights of children and young people is a significant strategy in preventing child trafficking. The main responsibility for safeguarding children from any form of exploitation and abuse should be borne by national child protection systems or the equivalent authorities where such systems are not in place. Their capacity to identify at-risk children and to offer them relevant information and effective and child-friendly services needs to be strengthened.

This includes the possibility of reporting risky situations or actual cases of exploitation and abuse; identifying places where advice can be sought (e.g., counselling services, hotlines or drop-in centres), and alternatives to situations that place children at risk of exploitation and abuse, at home or in institutions.

Governments should monitor and assure the quality of their interventions. Independent monitoring mechanisms, such as Ombuds for Children, are also essential in this regard. Prevention, protection and empowerment are the basic dimensions of successful anti-exploitation initiatives. They are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Programmes and initiatives that employ these three dimensions have proven successful in preventing child trafficking and assisting children who have been trafficked.

Prevention

Prevention programmes seek to address the root causes of trafficking and the factors that put children at risk, including social and economic marginalization, discrimination, violence and abuse in the home, lack of access to quality education and livelihood opportunities, and armed conflict and organized criminal networks. This entails examining the overall socio-economic conditions in countries of origin, legal and structural challenges in the process of migration, as well as the particular environment, potential and risks for children. Vulnerable groups should be identified and given priority assistance. Awareness-raising campaigns and access to accurate information are other important elements of a successful prevention strategy that can empower children and young adults and engage the support of society as a whole.

Since there is no specific set of criteria that all at-risk children share, the identification of children who are vulnerable to trafficking is difficult and complex. The implementation of uniform systems to identify children who are socially excluded or have been subjected to any form of abuse and exploitation, and to monitor their situation, is therefore a priority. Mechanisms for systematic data collection, analysis and dissemination on a wide range of child rights indicators are essential for this process.

Education plays an important role in preventing child trafficking. Measures should be taken to ensure quality education and prevent children from dropping out of school, and to provide access to professional and vocational training for children and young people. Subsequent to

schooling and vocational training, adequate financial and technical resources should be allocated to promote adolescents' access to employment.

Programmes that focus on life skills education conducted both in and out of school can also strengthen children's self-protection strategies. Life skills education should address issues such as gender, risky behaviours, dealing with abusive relationships, negotiating in exploitative situations, building self-esteem and creating awareness of support networks.

A particularly vulnerable group to trafficking are children who migrate with or without their families, to seek employment or asylum, or who migrate for other reasons. Governments should be aware of their legal obligation to protect all children under their jurisdiction, independent of their immigration status. Prevention strategies should therefore cover all children, taking into account their specific situations, needs and risks.

Successful prevention programmes will seek children's input to ensure that information about trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and the risks associated with illegal migration, is provided in a way that enables children to understand the issues at stake, make informed choices and protect themselves as fully as possible.

Protection

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a comprehensive framework for the protection of the rights of all children and calls for a multidisciplinary approach to child protection issues. With its widespread ratification and the experience gained from its process of implementation, the Convention provides a strong foundation for safeguarding the rights of children.

For children who have been trafficked, governments have a responsibility to determine a durable solution that is in the child's best interests, looking at both the child's immediate and long-term needs. Family tracing is essential, and the views of a child should be heard at all stages. A thorough investigation should be made in order to identify the best solution in each individual case.

Protection measures are designed to address the needs of children, taking into account their particular experiences and ages, and acknowledging the evolving capacities and distinct challenges faced by young children and adolescents. Such measures ensure the presence of a stable support network and the provision of relevant education, training and other skills that prevent children from being exploited and re-entering the cycle of exploitation, abuse and violence. Protection initiatives help child victims deal with the physical and psychological consequences of abuse. These initiatives also support the integration of child victims into society.

Such programmes provide children with skills and education, focus on their resilience and foster in them a sense of responsibility for their lives and futures. They can help lessen the risk of exploitation and limit its impact if it does occur. The paramount concern must be to help children achieve physical and psychological well-being and recover from abuse. Children's legal safeguards need to be upheld when they are involved with official proceedings and authorities, including to avoid any risk of children's deprivation of liberty. Where children find themselves far from home or abroad, they must be given the necessary information and support that will allow them to make informed decisions that are guided by their own best interests. It is essential to have in place child-friendly and accessible services, including legal advice, as well as reporting mechanisms.

Working with trafficked children is a long-term process that requires well-trained and committed staff. While the legal obligation to protect the rights of all children primarily lies with governments, NGOs also play a vital role in this process. Governments have to ensure that professionals working with children who have been trafficked are qualified. They must also make a long-term commitment of sufficient resources to enable NGOs to offer sustainable support to trafficked children.

Empowerment

The empowerment of child victims of trafficking and at-risk children is a crucial element of anti-trafficking work. Yet, it is an element that often remains absent from anti-trafficking initiatives. Children are traditionally viewed as passive subjects who are unable to effectively assess reality, make decisions and act with initiative, self-reliance and responsibility. Government laws and practices consistently place a child's fate in the hands of an adult: a family member, state official or appointed guardian. Services provided to children often fail to address a child's individual experiences and challenges, and children rarely participate in decisions that affect them or benefit from child-friendly information.

If initiatives are to effectively protect children from exploitation and abuse, and assist and protect child victims, they need to respect a child's agency. This means recognizing that children have opinions, make decisions and play an active role in the development of their own skills, the negotiation of their daily lives and the levels of responsibility they shoulder.

Only by promoting an understanding of children's rights, raising awareness of the risks they may face, and providing opportunities for them to gain skills and confidence to make informed decisions and assume a responsible role in society, can child trafficking be more effectively prevented.

Children also have to be given the opportunity to influence social policies and measures that address trafficking. Child-friendly structures, including decision-making structures, also are needed to enable action based on what children are saying.. Listening to children and learning from their experiences and recommendations are key to designing and implementing effective preventive and protective mechanism. Adults also need to be sensitized on child participation and on how to consult with children. Notably, acknowledging the agency and expertise of young people is not a substitute for, but a compliment to, adults and state action

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ENDNOTES

¹ For the purpose of this study, the terms “home country” or “the child’s own country” refer to the place of habitual residence of the child or young person before he or she was trafficked.

² The results of this assessment were published in August 2006 in a joint UNICEF/Terre des Hommes report written by Mike Dottridge, *Action to prevent Child Trafficking in South Eastern Europe: A preliminary assessment*, United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for CEE/CIS and Terre des Hommes, Geneva, August 2006. The report is based on a review of research and agency reports as well as interviews with organizations implementing prevention initiatives. It can be downloaded at: www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_4857.html.

³ See *Action to Prevent Child Trafficking in South Eastern Europe: A preliminary assessment*, prepared by Mike Dottridge in collaboration with United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for CEE/CIS and Terre des Hommes, Geneva, June 2006; and United Nations Children’s Fund Innocenti Research Centre: *Child Trafficking in Europe: A broad perspective to put children first*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, March 2008.

⁴ See Mitchels, Barbara, *Let’s Talk: Developing effective communication with child victims of abuse and human trafficking. Practical handbook for social workers, police and other professionals*, UNICEF and UNMIK/Government of Kosovo Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, September 2004.

⁵ Notably the World Health Organization’s guidelines concerning interviews with adult women who have been trafficked. See Zimmerman, Cathy, and Charlotte Watts, *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2003.

⁶ In theory, having information supplied by two different sources makes it possible to cross-check the information supplied, yet it raises a number of ethical issues when the answers to the same question differ. Decisions need to be made as to whether it is appropriate for researchers to have direct access to information about a child that the child might prefer not to reveal. These ethical concerns were noted but not resolved within the context of the study.

⁷ For example, according to national official statistics of Romania, in 2005, only 4.2 per cent of the total number of identified trafficked persons (internal or cross-border) received assistance in shelters (ONPTP - Oficiul National pentru prevenirea Traficului de Persoane - data, *National Anti-Trafficking Strategy Romania*, 2006).

⁸ Five children had received information from school, four through the media, and five through informal networks (e.g. mothers, neighbours, other people in the village).

⁹ See <http://www.unicef-irc.org/>

¹⁰ Also see section on limitations of the data, page 7.

¹¹ Some children reported multiple forms of exploitation, e.g. commercial sexual exploitation and begging.

¹² Child trafficking, as defined by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (‘Palermo Protocol’), includes three key elements. First, there is the process of trafficking, i.e. the element of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child. Second, there is the element of exploitation of the child. Third, there is the conduct behind the exploitation, which includes, among other elements, forced prostitution, forced labour and services and slavery.

¹³ In one case, the child managed to escape before being trafficked by a second trafficker (to whom she had apparently been sold).

¹⁴ The use of this method has been documented in the Netherlands, for example, where the traffickers and pimps involved are known as ‘lover boys’. See Van den Borne, Anke and Karin Kloosterboer: *Investigating Exploitation: Research into trafficking in children in the Netherlands*, Stichting Defence for Children International for ECPAT Netherlands, Defence for Children International Netherlands, UNICEF Netherlands and PLAN Nederland, Amsterdam, 2005. .

¹⁵ One respondent reported that the trafficker “made me tremble with fear” .

¹⁶ See <http://www.unicef-irc.org/>

¹⁷ One girl was referred to assistance by her aunt.

¹⁸ There were major differences in the practices reported from the different countries covered by this study. However, it is not clear whether this is a result of national practices or the initiatives of the organizations providing assistance to children. Further investigation is therefore needed.

¹⁹ Twenty-three respondents were optimistic about their future. Three children did not answer. Three children responded in neutral terms, while two children described their future in negative terms. Most of the negative responses came from children living in Kosovo, who commented “I have no future here” (in their own village or country) because they felt stigmatized

²⁰ Both respondents were in Romania. There was some debate in neighbouring Bulgaria during 2005 about whether children who had been convicted of offences abroad should have their passports confiscated upon their return to Bulgaria. Romania is not known to have a specific legal provision stipulating either that trafficked children should have their passports taken away (most do not) or that children repatriated after being convicted of a crime in another country should lose their passports.

²¹ See <http://www.unicef-irc.org/>

²² Article 12, para 1 of the CRC states “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

²³ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, *Child Trafficking in Europe: A broad vision to put children first*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, March 2008.