

Life beyond trafficking. Lessons from the King Baudouin Foundation's Trafficking Victims' Re/integration Programme¹

What is the Trafficking Victims' Re/integration Programme (TVRP)?

In 2006, the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) in Belgium launched the Trafficking Victims Re/integration Programme (TVRP) to enhance the scope and capacity of re/integration programmes for trafficking victims in the Balkans. It aims to:

- Support sustainable re/integration programmes for trafficking victims;
- Build the capacity of NGOs to provide re/integration services and support;
- Encourage cooperation with government services and national referral mechanisms (NRMs);
- Identify effective, human rights centred re/integration models;
- Promote sustainable re/integration programmes beyond the scope of the TVRP.

Grants totalling 875,000Euros were given to NGO partners between 2007 and 2011. The TVRP supported nine NGOs in six countries in the Balkans:

- Albania – Different & Equal, D&E (Tirana) and Tjeter Vision (Elbasan and Gramsch)
- Bulgaria – Nadja Centre (Sofia) and Animus Association (Sofia)
- Kosovo – Center for Protection of Victims and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings, PVPT (Pristina)
- Macedonia – Open Gate (Skopje)
- Romania – Young Generation (Timisoara) and Adpare (Bucharest)
- Serbia – Atina (Belgrade)

What is re/integration for trafficked persons?

"Nadja" was trafficked to the EU when she tried to migrate for work. She was offered a job as a waitress in a hotel but forced to work in prostitution. She was 22 years old at the time. She eventually managed to escape and made her way back to her home country in the Balkans. But coming home was difficult. She did not feel safe in her hometown and feared her family and neighbours would find out what had happened to her. She felt ashamed of being in prostitution and was traumatised by the abuse she suffered while away. As she explained a few years after her return home, "It took me a while to perceive myself normally after what happened. At the beginning I couldn't accept what had happened". But over time she has managed to recover and re/integrate with her family and lives comfortably in her community. She has a job and is saving money to continue her studies. She has returned to her hometown and has good relations with her family. As she explained, "I have managed to go through hard times. I managed to accept myself after what happened and to forgive myself. This is the most difficult thing I could do".

¹ This summary was drafted by Rebecca Surtees, Senior Researcher, NEXUS Institute, Washington (www.nexusinstitute.net).

Re/integration is the process of recovery and economic and social inclusion following a trafficking experience. It includes living in a safe and stable environment, having access to a reasonable standard of living, enjoying mental and physical well-being, having opportunities for personal, social and economic development and having access to social and emotional support. It may involve returning to one's family and/or community of origin; it may also involve integration in a new community or new country. Key to successful re/integration is empowerment – i.e. supporting victims to develop skills toward independence and self sufficiency and to be actively involved in their re/integration.

Successful re/integration is a complex and costly undertaking, requiring a diverse set of short and long term services for trafficked persons (and sometimes their families). People are trafficked for a wide range of purposes (for sexual exploitation, labour and so on) and the impact of this exploitation is highly individual. As one woman assisted through the TVRP explained, her recovery involved the provision of a wide range of services over an extended period of time:

“I received numerous services such as food, clothes, medical care, health education sessions, psychological counselling, legal counselling, information about trafficking, empowerment sessions, educational activities and many psycho-social activities that helped me to gain communication skills, to internalise ethical social behaviours, to re-socialise in a proper manner, and so on”.

There are different factors which, cumulatively, constitute “successful re/integration”. These include:

- Safe and affordable accommodation
- Legal status (including birth registration, citizenship, access to documents, etc.)
- Professional and employment opportunities
- Education and training opportunities (including formal and informal education, professional/vocational skills and life skills training)
- Safety and security (within the family, community and vis a vis traffickers)
- Healthy social environment (including anti-discrimination and anti-marginalisation)
- Social well-being and positive interpersonal relations (vis a vis peers, family, spouses/intimate partner and the community)
- Economic security (i.e. the ability to earn money, support family members, etc.)
- Physical well-being
- Mental well-being (including mental health, self esteem and self acceptance)
- Access to services and opportunities needed to recover from trafficking and for personal, social and economic well-being generally
- Motivation and commitment to the re/integration process
- Resolution of legal issues (including criminal and civil proceedings)
- Well-being of secondary beneficiaries

How long does re/integration take?

Re/integration is different from direct assistance. It is a multi-year process with beneficiaries typically moving from a period of crisis, through a transition phase and finally the re/integration or inclusion stage. Re/integration services often require months and years to complete. For example, developing

professional skills and labour market experience cannot be done quickly, as one trafficked person explained:

“I would suggest letting trafficked persons attend a longer vocational trainings, in order to become capable and professional for a relevant selected field and truly integrate into the national labour market”.

TVRP organisations provided re/integration support over a period of up to 36 months. The initial crisis phase is generally between 0-3 months, the transition phase often runs from 4-12 months and the re/integration phase is from between 13 to 36 months. While not all services are offered in all phases, the combination of these services at these different stages cumulatively contributes to the sustainable re/integration of trafficked persons. These multi-year needs were highlighted by one trafficked person when explaining what was involved in the complex and challenging re/integration process:

“We have to start a new life. That’s why we need so much help and even for a long time”.

Why did KBF fund re/integration programmes? Why is it important?

In 2006, when the TVRP was designed, there were very few re/integration programmes available to trafficking victims in the Balkan region. This meant that many trafficked persons did not receive the long term support they needed to recover and move on from a trafficking experience. While many trafficked persons received direct assistance – e.g. short term care and support in a destination country or in the initial stages following their return home – most did not have access to the longer term, re/integration-oriented support which can help restore mental and physical well-being and develop the skills to be economically independent and live in a healthy social environment. Lack of re/integration support exposes former trafficking victims to on-going stress and difficulties as they struggle to recover and build a normal life. In some cases, it can lead to re-trafficking. Indeed almost 100 of the trafficked persons assisted under the TVRP between 2007 and 2010 had previously been victims of trafficking.

By contrast, under the TVRP many individuals were able to receive the long term, specialised care that they are entitled to as victims of the crime of human trafficking. While challenges remain, the impact of such programmes on these trafficked persons has been significant, as one woman explained of her current situation:

“I am satisfied, independent, single, employed. I have so many friends, like never before. I reunited with my older sister... and I also improved communication with my dad. I am not in a relationship; I am waiting for Mr. Right. I know what I want now. I think that my biggest success is because I look at the world differently. I am much more realistic and mature. My biggest fear is that I will somehow meet with the trafficker. It upsets me”.

For many trafficking victims, re/integration programmes were their primary and sometimes sole source of support following their exploitation. More than one trafficked persons described how they had no one they could turn to or family support they could rely on:

“I have to face a lot of challenges in my daily life, starting from the bad relationships I have with my family members, they don’t even call me”.

“As I am alone, without family support, without a place to live, at a crossroad of starting life from the beginning, it is very important for us to have long term support. In addition to training, we need a place to live... rent support is something that makes us feel well and secure, at least to give us time to save some money from salaries and be able to start and pay rent. All of that costs a lot. But there is no other way to economically re/integrate a beneficiary”.

Why is re/integration so challenging?

Re/integration is often considered a long term but relatively linear process, with trafficked persons passing through a series of stages which cumulatively result in their recovery and social inclusion. But experience reveals a different picture. It is not only time consuming and expensive but also intensely complex, impacted by a range of personal factors as well as the broader social, cultural and economic framework. It requires a diverse package of services for the individual (and often also the family) to address the root causes of trafficking as well as the physical, psychological and social impacts. There are different obstacles to re/integration – some linked to the individual’s experience and situation, some tied to broader socio-economic issues and some due to shortcomings in re/integration models and challenges in the re/integration process itself.

Individual and social conditions that may inhibit re/integration

Trafficking experiences are deeply traumatic and managing life after trafficking can be difficult, with victims feeling anger, guilt, shame, fear and a range of other negative emotions. These tensions and problems play out in the family and community setting where victims’ behaviours may be neither understood nor accepted, leading to further inter-personal problems. Also relevant is the environment to which trafficked persons return which is often the same socially and economically as when they left and which often (at least partly) triggered their initial migration. In some situations, the home environment is unsatisfactory; in more extreme cases, it is unhealthy and even dangerous. Even where the family and community are “safe”, the difficulties of trafficking add a layer of stress and strain the individual’s situation. And yet a stable family setting is often key in the process and re/integration programmes work to mediate family conflict and create conditions for a safe and affirming family environment, as one service provider explained:

“It is very important for returned victims to find in their families the most important thing – understanding. But from our experience, for many victims this doesn’t happen from the beginning. In many cases, victims receive support from their families after a period of time, after they understand the real danger their daughter (or cousin, granddaughter, wife) was in. When the victim receives support from their families, the victim regains self esteem”.

In addition, many trafficked persons face stigma and discrimination in their communities, which directly impacts their social and economic options such as having positive social relationships, finding suitable employment or setting up a small business. For example, “Elena” was trafficked into prostitution by her boyfriend, returning home to her family in a small town after her escape. But many people in the town knew what had happened to her and she was judged harshly and treated badly. She wanted to re-establish her old friendships but her friends’ parents feared that their daughters would be stigmatised through contact with this “prostitute”. Community discrimination meant that Elena was unable to get married and staff at the commune administration resisted providing her with assistance.

There are also more systemic obstacles which re/integration programmes cannot address. The social, economic and political landscape in many origin countries involves serious structural problems such as endemic un (or under)employment, high costs of living, lack of professional opportunities, inadequate state assistance and under-developed social services. For example, many trafficked persons prioritise (full and adequately paid) employment and economic opportunities but find it difficult to realise this goal. Consider the reply of one beneficiary when asked about what services and support she most needed:

“A well paid job...there are no workplaces in my village... The only thing that worries me is the fact that I don’t have a job. I would feel more assured if I could save some money to be able to support my family”²

Even when re/integration is completed or progressing “satisfactorily”, it often involves “setbacks” – e.g. conflict with an intimate partner, losing a job, conflict with friends or family, security issues, a medical problem, a chronic condition, etc. – which may derail the re/integration process. In more extreme cases, trafficked persons may feel that they have few options but to resort to activities they did while trafficked, like prostitution, as one woman explained of her return home after trafficking:

“When I was at home with my parents, we did not have enough to eat and I used to look out on the street and think at the choices that I had. And the street looked like a way to make money”³.

In addition, for many victims, vulnerability preceded and contributed to trafficking. Beneficiaries who were not socially integrated before trafficking will need to forge new, positive social relations, in the face of marginalisation, stigma and discrimination.

Shortcomings in re/integration models; challenges in the re/integration process

There are also issues with re/integration programmes themselves – for example, the often high cost of re/integration assistance, the long timeframe required to realise sustainable re/integration work, the geographic (un)availability of re/integration support, gaps in the current assistance model and challenges in cooperation with state agencies. Other issues are linked to the complicated nature of re/integration itself – for instance, whether trafficked persons are willing to accept services and the challenging task of supporting victim autonomy and minimising dependency.

A partial barometer of the profound challenges of re/integration is the rates and patterns of re-trafficking. It is worth noting that in spite of the intensive and long term care provided under the TVRP, 50 trafficked persons have since been re-trafficked.

What did the TVRP achieve? What are the results?

✓ Assisted and supported re/integration of trafficked persons and their families⁴

² Surtees, R. (2007) *Listening to victims. Experience of identification, return and assistance in SEE*. Vienna: ICMPD, p. 87.

³ Ibid.

- **Almost 1,000 trafficked persons have been assisted between 2007 and mid 2010 by the nine TVRP partner organisations (n=927)**
- **Approximately 50% of victims assisted under the TVRP having been successfully re/integrated at the time of the 2010 assessment**
- **Almost 300 secondary beneficiaries (family members and dependents of trafficked persons) have been supported in this period (n=258)**

✓ **Built capacity of NGOs to provide re/integration services to trafficked persons**

- **Improved capacity to manage re/integration programmes** including monitoring and evaluation, developing ethical principles, enhanced beneficiary participation and managing staff burnout
- **Improved capacity to provide re/integration services** including theorising the re/integration framework, economic empowerment programmes, handling “difficult cases” and addressing obstacles in the re/integration process
- **Improved capacity to advocate in the re/integration field** including lobbying for government funding, advocating against government closing of shelters, etc.

✓ **Cooperated with government services and national referral mechanisms (NRM)**

- **Partner cooperation with and involvement in the NRM in all six countries**
- **Involvement in government led policy and programme response on re/integration** – e.g. developing standard operating procedures (SOPs), establishing national action plans (NAPs), implementation of NRMs, reforming legislation, participating in national cooperation mechanisms, formal bi-lateral agreements or MOUs with various government departments
- **Cooperation with government departments in the provision of assistance** including increased reliance on state employment agencies, micro-credit programmes, vocational training, educational programmes, centres for social work, medical care, legal aid, etc.

✓ **Identified and supported effective, human rights centred re/integration models**

- **Supported different models of care in the re/integration process** – e.g. residential programmes (shelters, semi independent living) and non-residential programmes (day centres, field support teams, community based services); mixed target populations (e.g. VoTs with DV victims, irregular migrants, etc.)
- **Assistance to different types of trafficking victims and for different forms of exploitation** – e.g. male and child victims; victims of labour and sex trafficking; national and foreign victims with TRPs
- **Different types of approaches in the re/integration process** – e.g. economic empowerment approaches, working with “difficult cases”, assistance to secondary beneficiaries (VoTs’ dependents), ethical guidelines in re/integration work

⁴ These numbers will be higher still when the programme ends at the end of 2011. However, while these numbers are significant, TVRP’s objective was not to assist the maximum number of trafficking victims but to assist trafficked persons in ways that translated most effectively into their sustainable and durable re/integration.

✓ Promoted sustainable re/integration programmes beyond scope of TVRP

- **Diversified funding sources for re/integration programmes** – e.g. some positive steps toward private donations, national government funding, social enterprises
- **Increased access to government services and support** – e.g. increased ability to access services such as social services, job placement through employment centres, vocational/professional training, basic medical care, day care/crèche for children of VoTs, education, legal aid, etc.
- **Capacity building of NGO and GO counterparts in the re/integration field** – e.g. state social workers, employment centres, police, prosecutors and magistrates, students within the social science faculty, journalists, etc.
- **Access to other forms of services and support** – e.g. increasingly accessed services from non-trafficking NGOs, religious organisations, community groups
- **Advocacy on re/integration efforts at national and European level**

What has been the impact of the TVRP in the lives of trafficked persons?

Former trafficked persons described their successes due, at least in part, to re/integration assistance received through the TVRP, although they were clear that challenges also remain in their day to day lives:

“I am okay now. I am married and have two kids. I do not have a job... I have no secrets about what happened to me from my husband. Success is that I feel inner peace. I have anxiety though that someone in the place where I live will hear something about my past”.

“The programme helped me to build and create a new beautiful life. But above all it helped me rebuild my confidence and my personal values”.

“I am pretty much satisfied and I can even say that in percentage the success of my re/integration is 85%. I independently take all decisions on everything that concerns me. The 15% relates to the problem of my citizenship and legal status and fear of recidivism. I was a drug addict. I am still in treatment for drug withdrawal after four years”.

“I always wanted to be a hairdresser, this was my dream. Without [the organisation’s] help I don’t believe my dream would come true. So, having in mind that I’m working in the field I love most, I can conclude that things in my life are going fine. Furthermore, I am happy for my personal and professional positive changes during the assistance period. Now I have a job and with the amount of money that I receive, I can support my family. I have started a relationship with a man, who believes in me, supports me and does not interrupt my achievements, with whom I’m very satisfied. Today I feel capable of creating my own life”.

“My current situation is far away from my past experience. It’s something completely new. Currently, I live independently in an apartment... I work at a full time job... I have a monthly salary that helps me satisfy my needs. Currently, the thing I love most in my life actually is my job. I never thought I will work in a decent company with a huge number of staff and a very dynamic work activity. I am very excited about that. It is very challenging for me. With [the organisation’s] support, my life changed a lot and I had obvious progress in almost every dimension of life. I just have to keep that in mind and do my best. I will never forget how much I suffered. This is the first time in my life that I have started to think about my future. For the first

time I believe I can do things on my own... I suffered a lot and it was so difficult for me to achieve this stage, where as [the organisation] taught me to feel empowered. That's why I am telling you that my life changed a lot. I am so happy".

"As a single mother, with two children I face a lot of difficulties each day. Thank God, I have the support of my mother and of course of the organisation. The biggest successes in my life are my children. The biggest challenge is to secure them a better future".

What are the lessons learned? Recommendations for going forward?

We can positively impact the lives of many trafficked persons. In less than four years, the TVRP contributed substantially to the assistance and successful re/integration of almost a thousand trafficked persons in the Balkans. Re/integration is costly and complex work but, when done professionally and systematically, it can be make an important difference to large numbers of individuals, families and communities.

There is much more work to be done. Re/integration remains the least considered and least funded (and arguably also the most complicated and labour intensive) aspect of the anti-trafficking response. Far more needs to be done in the Balkans and globally to support the re/integration of trafficked persons. Programming in this arena can have a positive, direct and often immediate impact on the lives of trafficked persons. Too few donors and organisations are involved in re/integration work.

Different victims need different services and strategies. Every trafficked person is different and has their own unique and specific set of needs. Moreover, some trafficked persons have been less considered in the design of re/integration support. New challenges have emerged and future programming should consider, among other things, re/integration support to underserved populations (e.g. males, labour trafficking victims, elderly victims, foreign nationals); integration strategies in destination countries (i.e. integration of foreign nationals in the Balkans; integration of Balkan nationals in the EU) and family or community based re/integration support.

Conceptual clarity is needed for tackling re/integration. Part of the TVRP has been to clearly define, frame and conceptualise the re/integration issue – for example, by developing a framework for successful re/integration, identifying indicators for monitoring success, defining key terms and concepts, considering key constraints in the re/integration process, defining “difficult cases”, articulating ethical principles in re/integration work, etc. In going forward it is important to explore and clarify issues which arise in the context of practitioners and policy-makers day-to-day re/integration work – e.g. developing a framework for integration, evaluating different models of assistance, investigating the issue of re-trafficking, etc.

Re/integration services and policies need to be sustainable. The TVRP has contributed to the sustainability of re/integration support for trafficked persons. But more work is needed in this arena and agencies must actively promote mechanisms for sustainability in the longer term. Developing achievable models of sustainability might include support through social enterprises, fundraising by local businesses and/or individuals benefactors, outreach to Diaspora communities, advocacy with government, etc.

NGOs and GO partners need to cooperate if re/integration is to succeed. Future re/integration efforts should dovetail all future programming with government initiatives, possibly even supporting joint NGO/GO initiatives. In spite of some positive developments, TVRP partners continue to face challenges in their relations with the government and yet it is the positive relations between NGOs and GOs which will ensure sustainability of these re/integration programmes and policies.

We need to know more. More information is needed about the re/integration process including what does (and does not) work and the different issues which are linked to re/integration. Information and lessons should be drawn from direct service providers who have a wealth of knowledge of re/integration processes; independent empirical research is also needed into less considered and understudied trends and challenges. And at the centre of all of these discussions need to be the experiences and perspectives of trafficked persons themselves.

Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate. Little empirical evidence exists of what does (and does not) work in terms of re/integration programmes. An impact evaluation should be conducted of the TVRP in two to three years time to gauge the long term outcomes and impact of this re/integration effort. This would constitute one of the only (if not the only) impact evaluation in the field of re/integration and could contribute substantially to the knowledge and evidence base on re/integration responses.