Evaluation of support services provided to victims of trafficking in human beings

Introduction and methodology

The present study was carried out under the *Program of specialized protection and assistance for victims of trafficking ACASĂ* and is the result of a research that had as main objective the evaluation of specialized protection and assistance services provided to victims of trafficking in human beings by the Association for the Development of Alternative Reintegration and Education Practices (ADPARE).

The aim of this research is to better understand the impact these services had on beneficiaries, the changes they produced and how to improve the quality of these services in the future.
The study uses a qualitative methodology. The research method was the in-depth face to face interview, based on a previously compiled, semi-structured interview guide, that oriented the conversation flow without being a strict methodological element. We considered that the interview, „the story of life", as a research tool with a strong biographical significance, would allow the respondent to express some deeply personal insights, some very intense aspects and feelings otherwise almost impossible to be caught by a quantitative research. As Robert Atkinson puts it, "By telling one's life story, one can get to know oneself, others, the mystery of life, and the universe in which one lives better than before. The story of life can give the researcher a better understanding of how the narrator sees himself in relation to these elements. (…) When different elements of a life are consciously put together as a whole, we get a meaningful document." [1]
The interview guide focused on three central themes:
1. Exit strategies from the trafficking situation and the relationship with the first contact institutions and organizations.
2. Involvement of victims in protection and assistance activities and the evaluation of the services provided.

[1] Robert Atkinson, *Povestea vieții. Interviul*, traducere de Sebastian Năstuță, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2006., pp.. 9-10.

3. Assessment of the current situation and future plans in relation to the trafficking history.
The respondent group consisted of 25 persons (23 females and 2 males), Romanian citizens aged over 18 at the time of the interview, victims of trafficking in human beings, mostly for sexual exploitation, but also through forced labor, domestic servitude and forced begging, both in Romania (domestic trafficking) and abroad (international trafficking).The exploitation period ranged from a few days to over five years, especially in those cases when trafficking started in Romania (the victims being minor at the time) and continued into their adulthood in the country of origin, as well as in the destination countries.

One important element taken into account in the selection of respondents was the length of assistance period they benefited prior to the moment of interview, given that the impact and results of specialized assistance services depend directly on the time victims spent in the program provided by ADPARE. In this respect, we sought to cover as wide a range of cases as possible, from victims who have completed the program, to victims in the monitoring phase and victims in the reintegration phase (who spent at least six months in the protection and assistance program).

On the other hand, it should be emphasized that each of these respondents represents a specific moment in the evolution and development of the specialized protection and assistance services offered by ADPARE, their „journey" so far being an illustration of the „history" of the organization.

The 25 interviews were conducted between October 2019 and January 2020 at the ADPARE Counseling and Assistance Center, a very familiar place to the respondents, where they felt comfortable. The duration of the interviews was between 30 and 70 minutes each, and each interview was subsequently transcribed in its own transcript.
All participants were informed of their rights regarding confidentiality. In addition, they were asked for permission to record the discussions and were provided with both audio recordings and transcripts.

Needs for protection and assistance of victims of trafficking in persons/minors

Victims' assistance and protection is an area where roles and responsibilities are shared by both public authorities and civil society. These are joined by other structures and/or specialists that can ensure the identification of victims, their referral to a support organization, the area of assistance and protection of victims being the one where the activities of all social actors involved in anti-trafficking policies meet and complement, as follows: the Ministry of Education and Research ensures the school insertion of young people, victims of trafficking in persons, through the School Inspectorates; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides, upon request, assistance to Romanian citizens victims of trafficking and has an important role in the repatriation of victims of international trafficking, through the diplomatic missions and consular offices of Romania; the

Ministry of Justice manages the funds concerning the financial compensations for the victims and provides them with psychological assistance through the territorial probation services; the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection ensures the professional qualification and reintegration of victims on the labor market, through the National Agency for Employment and through its territorial structures; the Ministry of Health provides free medical assistance through the Public Health Directorates; the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection - DGASPC, subordinated to the local Councils, ensure the social assistance of the victims.

An important role in victims' assistance is played by the non-governmental organizations that, in cooperation with the aforementioned state institutions or, most often using their own funds, continue to work in the field.

Although the Romanian legislation generously provides access to assistance and protection services, in practice the number of beneficiaries is low compared to the number of victims identified every year. The reasons for this are generally the lack of proper collaboration between institutions, the small number of specialists in the field, limited funds, poor information of victims on their rights and the procedures to follow according to the law. Although these flaws were permanently reported by both national actors and international bodies and observers involved, the Romanian government did not take the necessary steps. The US State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2019) points out that „lack of sufficient government funding for assistance and protection services remained problematic, leaving most victims without services, susceptible to re-traumatization, and vulnerable to re-trafficking".[2]

The Association for the Development of Alternative Reintegration and Education Practices – ADPARE has as main field of activity the implementation of complex assistance programs aiming to reintegrate the beneficiaries, victims of trafficking in persons/minors. The protection and assistance services are permanent, the activities being carried out in cooperation with relevant institutions, non-governmental and international organizations active in the field. Projects devoted to the protection and assistance of victims are integral parts of the ACASA program - Alternative Community Assistance and Support Activities for victims of trafficking in human beings.

The protection and assistance interventions are addressed in a flexible way, customized to the needs of victims. Specifically, this way of working is advocating deinstitutionalization, actively involving the victim in decision making on her/his own path of social reintegration. There is a particular emphasis on the inner resources of beneficiaries, on the motivation for change, on their initiatives and future projects through a professional, collaborative relationship, aiming to increase a person's level of adaptation to the requirements of an independent life; the working method is that of case management.

Individualized long-term intervention services involve four distinct phases that also generate the setting of specific progress indicators for each victim:

[2] Available at https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf

- The crisis intervention phase - between 0 and 6 months - involves the assessment of individual and family immediate risks and needs, as well as the implementation of immediate protection and assistance measures to cover basic needs and alleviate the consequences of physical and mental trauma.

- The intervention phase through integrated services - between 7 and 12 months - involves the implementation of protection and assistance services in accordance with the individualized intervention plan, steps taken by victims/tutors together with the case manager and the multidisciplinary team.
- The re/integration phase - between 13 and 24 months - involves intervention services focused on the development of self-protection skills and independent living, which allow the victim to be physically, emotionally and economically secure.

- Monitoring phase - lasts at least six months after the end of the assistance program and involves monitoring the victim's adaptation to the requirements of independent living and providing support to resolve any difficulties.

Specialized protection and assistance services are provided at the counseling center, in the protected apartment and/or in the community, and could be systematized as follows:

- *Residential assistance in ADPARE protected apartment*: accommodation for women victims of trafficking in transit in Bucharest (for 1-2 nights) or in crisis (for 1-2 weeks), and long-term assistance (several months, depending on individual protection and assistance needs)

- *Residential assistance in the family (nuclear, of origin, extended) or in community:* consists in ensuring a safe home by improving the housing conditions: repairing, equipping with household appliances and furniture, payment of utilities, payment of rent in community or in school/university dormitories etc.

- *Material assistance*: consists in providing individualized funds to cover basic needs (food, hygiene and cleaning products, clothing and footwear) during the crisis intervention period and/ or in the first six months of assistance in case of long-term interventions. This activity is carried out by the counselling service for development of individual budget management skills. In addition to the funds intended for victims and/or tutors, donations of material goods are distributed according to needs.

- *Psychological assistance*: consists in providing permanent emotional support (directly or by telephone) for the implementation of re/integration; individual and family psychological counseling; and individual, couple/family psychotherapy. Within the psychological assistance could be identified two separate specialized components: emotional support and

psychological counseling to victims participating as injured parties or witnesses in criminal proceedings, and psychological counseling concerning the medical investigations (before and after screening for sexually transmitted diseases).

- *Medical assistance:* consists of covering costs for medical insurance, medical investigations and consultations, as well as for purchasing prescribed medical treatments and/or usual medication.

- *Social assistance:* consists of counseling on the rights to social benefits, mediation of the relationship with the representatives of public social services, support for the restoration of identity documents, covering the costs of: safe transport, communication and postage.

- *Educational assistance*: consists of emotional and financial support for formal education: mediating relationship with school inspectorates and second chance-type schools, payment of school fees and necessary schooling equipment, and informal education: educational toys for preschoolers, tutoring classes for students, skills development (PC operation, language learning, etc.), leisure educational activities.

- *Professional assistance:* consists of vocational counseling, support for professional qualification courses, education on labor rights, mediation of relations with professional coaching service providers, emotional support in finding and maintaining a job, education on developing independent professional businesses: registered agricultural producers, self-employed person, individual or family enterprises, etc.

- *Legal assistance*: consists of legal advice on rights and proceedings for both criminal and civil cases related to the cases of trafficking; legal representation in all phases of the criminal trial, legal support for obtaining financial compensation from the state, as well as conducting psychological assessments at the request of criminal prosecution bodies or judges.

The purpose of protection and assistance interventions is to ensure that victims are physically, emotionally and economically secure. The final results are not defined by formula such as "successful re/integration / success story - failed re/integration", because are taken into account the success "standards" of the victims in relation to their personal and professional life.
The evaluation of integration services cannot and must not take into consideration only the reality of the results obtained. This would be a dangerous position that would value some services and devalue others. In fact, „the evaluation should consist in being determined to understand to what extent the programs allow or support access to a better life and reduce the risks of relapse. The

objective is to understand what do these programs bring to the women they support so they can build or rebuild their lives after experiencing human trafficking?" [3]

1. The exit from the trafficking situation and the relationship with the first contact institutions and organizations

Very often the work of non-governmental organizations involved in assistance and protection of victims of trafficking is compared to that of teams of highly specialized mechanics, in other words people whose job is to repair, restore, make it work again as good as possible, a mechanism, a gear, which due to incidents or accidents got stuck, broken. Their belief is that although the process is a very laborious one, with care, patience, skill and scrupulosity the system can be put back into operation.

The comparison is by no means risky or inappropriate - those who work in these organizations, be they social workers, psychologists, lawyers, that's exactly what they do: they do everything they can to repair not gears or machines, but human beings who, at one point, have passed from a world which, with its good and bad, we consider normal in one in which they get nearly exclusively evil. Entering into the world of the trafficker represents a real trauma for the victims: violence, misery, physical degradation, permanent devaluation. Trafficking in human beings involves a relationship of dependence on traffickers that can often go as far as reducing the victims to slavery.
The world of trafficking, especially for sexual exploitation, is an experience during which victims often lose their quality of a subject. From discussions, it appears that traffickers use the same mechanisms to break victims' self-confidence: seizure, blows, beatings, humiliation are common features. Dispossession of documents and very personal items, threats of retaliation against families or children back in the country of origin are elements that allow traffickers to reduce the victims to objects, property of their exploiters, who dispose of them as they want and according to service needs.

„I had a very hard life, those guys who took me abroad made a mockery of my body and my health."
„I was followed, everybody threatened me about the child."

Permanent control, strict supervision, almost total lack of freedom of movement become the norm that defines the condition and status of the exploited persons. Moreover, violence is quasi-present,

[3] Paul Philippe, Luciano Romano, *Feed-back: The Perception of Assistance and Protection Models by the Victims of Human Trafficking who Benefit from them,* ALC, 2008, p. 316

no matter if it manifests itself as symbolic, emotional, or physical violence and goes to extreme brutality. Fear becomes the watchword; it is the dominant feeling.

„I did it, because I had no choice, either he would have killed me or I would kill myself. Or I would have live, which is what happened. Perhaps if I stayed there I wouldn't live, he would have kill me."

„I left out of fear, there were decisions made out of fear."

„I stayed four years mostly because of fear... I preferred to shut my mouth, I suffered in silence."

Victims are sold, sometimes sold again, moved from one place to another, beaten up for not earning enough or just becoming scapegoats, objects of revenge of a fleeting rage of traffickers or clients.

„I was sold, and more than once..."

„I was about to end my life, that hard was for me. I was beaten, I was scared, in a deprived and disheveled state, really messed up."

„God, I got so beat up by the trafficker... I got beat up by clients too, one broke my arch, he hit me with that part of the gun, you name it... the handle, I still have a scar.

It must be emphasized that, despite all risks they exposed themselves and their families, the victims found the courage and strength to run away. The exit from the trafficking situation (for sexual exploitation, labor, begging, domestic slavery) took place in very different circumstances and depended largely on the setting of exploitation, the environment they found themselves, but also on the extreme psychological conditions, when the decision to escape from traffickers actually meant to choose between life and death.

„I was being held prisoner and to escape I jumped from the 3rd floor. There were some dumpsters near the building wall and when I jumped, I thought that if I would fall on them I would just break a leg and then run away. Unfortunately, I landed on the sidewalk on my feet, then I crashed on my face, all my teeth blew out of my mouth. I have rods in my hands, my legs, I have rods everywhere. They operated me, they put me together a little, and after three months in the hospital I preferred to come home, to Romania, because it was easier."

„I was on the verge: suicide or running away. I had to do something with myself. Fortunately, I am among the few girls who managed to escape soon; I would have escaped even sooner if I had been more careful for a split second."

In certain cases, the victims took advantage of the weakened surveillance, the carelessness of traffickers or the contexts that facilitated the escape and managed to get away .

„I managed to escape in a moment of inattention, I took advantage of the fact that they were busy with other things and I found my loophole."

„I practically ran away from there, because there were a lot of girls telling him everything I did. I waited for everyone to fall asleep, I went to the airport, I waited for the counter to open to get my ticket and I came to the country."

„I ran away with 100 euros in my pocket, the bus money, I ran to Romania."

In others, the young women forced into prostitution managed to get out of the trafficking situation with the help of clients:

„I ran away once before, but they found me, and the second time it was a client who helped me. He took me to the center against domestic abuse."

„I was lucky with a client who had a very beautiful car, you could see he is a very clean and very nice man. And I asked him to help me get out of there."

or were released as a result of police raids:

„I was there ... and the police came ... they took me, brought me to the station."

„The police came to the bar and took us, we were a bunch of girls, not only Romanian."

It should be noted that in most cases the police intervention was reactive, a result of the victim's efforts to get out of the situation of exploitation, and less proactive. In most instances, the first step taken by the victims exploited abroad and managed to escape the hands of traffickers was to try to get in contact with the police.

„I made a plan for escape, and one night I kicked up a fuss, their gang was drunk, and I ran away. I stayed in a public toilet, the next day I continued to stay there, the third day I went to the police. They helped me get to a center."

„I decided to go to the police alone. I relied heavily on the police to help me."

Although resorting to the aid of authorities, especially of the police, is the best solution, even if not always the most convenient, some of the victims do not consider it as completely safe and is

regarded with distrust and fear. The fact that they speak very little or at all the language of the destination country, that they don't know and cannot navigate the area where they are, and especially the idea instilled by traffickers that getting in touch with authorities poses a risk to them and therefore should be avoided, render victims' first contacts with these authorities more difficult. However, as the interviewees confess, faced with the possibility to meet again the traffickers – *„behind me were them, I thought they woke up and were looking for me"* – suspicion and fears have been overcome and they understood that the police were in that particular context the only institution that could guarantee their safety.

„After a night of loitering, hungry, unwashed and sleepless... I wondered whether going to the police or no ... I was afraid that the police are hand in hand with those who... I thought I must call the police because I had no other acquaintances and possibilities for the moment. The police helped me indeed, and with their support I managed to get to the hosting center."

But in some cases the police behavior, the lack of empathy towards victims' situation and/or the excessive zeal of some police officers can generate or accentuate a sense of disbelief in the state institutions. Subsequently, they can even hamper the relations between the victims, still marked by this contact with the authorities, and non-governmental organizations providing specialized assistance services.

„When I got into the police station I didn't have any documents with me, only a bag, and they kept me there for 1-2 hours. A translator came, I laid out my case and, at 4:00 in the morning they told me, OK, you gave the statement, free to go, we will contact you later. And I simply stayed on the street for a few hours. I don't know if the police could have helped me in any way, but now if I think about it, it's still an emergency you can't actually leave people in my situation in the street, they are vulnerable. Such a person practically ran away from someone and there was a chance to meet him."

„After the experience in A., especially with the institutions themselves, I was like this ... I didn't know what an NGO is, why it would be different from state institutions, and I was quite distrustful. It was already in my mind that I was entering a new prison, something like that, an institution that offers services, you are constrained, I will go the same way."

Victims' frustration is even bigger when the attitude of authorities, especially of the police, is compared to the attitude of the locals who, most often unaware of the details, showed more empathy towards those asking for their help, or compared to the interaction with service providers. Looking back and reflecting on interacting with the police, some interviewees say:

„At that time, I got more help from simple people than from the police. Even now I'm very disappointed with this system of theirs."

„The S. authorities were not very cooperative, the guys from the association were very OK."

Sometimes victims find the authorities' decisions in the destination countries hard to understand because they seem to defy any logic. Simultaneously, they strengthen the distrust in the authorities, deepen victims' confusion who even consider themselves guilty of what happened to them.

„I had to leave A. I had to go to a police station where I was fingerprinted, photographed and banned - I can't go back to A. for two years. And I took it as something bad. I mean, I'm a victim, I was trafficked, you said I was trafficked, you gave me the decision, and at the same time you fingerprint me, you forbid me to enter for two more years! The reason - for my protection. That's what they told me! But it was quite interesting - and that made me want even more to leave as soon as possible."

When trafficking took place in Romania, victims' reluctance to seek police assistance was often fueled by stories about alleged links between traffickers and police, about corruption and complicity of the authorities, about their delayed reactions.

„I don't really trust them anymore, because even in the police there are people who can influence the trafficking."

„The Romanian police do nothing. I think if I were in other country things would have been different."

Justified or not, this initial mistrust can sometimes turn into a negative representation of this institution, especially when victims are confronted with the police indifference and their complaints are disregarded.

„When I arrived in B., I was confused, I didn't know anybody at all, I didn't know where to go. I went to a police station. The police do nothing; the police don't know about the centers for... A policeman looked at me with such distaste and told me, Well, it's your traditions. Go to C., you should report there. Well, I came to you, I ran away from there, I took the first car, gave to the driver all my money to get here, to escape, and you send me back?"

„The police from C. behaved very badly. At the community police they didn't want to believe me, they said that I'm like any other girl out there who comes to file a complaint and then withdraw it. I said that I'm not like that and they should do in such a way to get me to B. And that if they don't want to take me to B., at least get in touch with my family, let someone come after me. (...) I gave a statement, a policewoman told me that I am like the other girls and I could come up with a faked story, that nobody believes me with such a thing, especially if I have no evidence and I do not have

anyone with me. Instead of trying to talk calmly to me, to calm me down, they were very rude; I felt very ashamed, as if it was all my fault."

In line with the protocols and mechanisms for victims' identification and referral, the persons trafficked abroad have been mostly referred by the police to non-governmental organizations providing specialized assistance services. The range of services offered by these organizations is very wide, from residential assistance and leisure activities in centers, material assistance, medical care in clinics to counseling activities and professional integration. In addition, according to victims' wishes, the NGOs organize their repatriation to Romania, with all that this entails (identifying and contacting partner organizations in Romania for further assistance, providing safe transportation etc.).

Regardless of how long they spent in the accommodation centers and the type of assistance they received (short or medium term), all respondents speak positively about these services.

„The girls were very OK, really loving. We talked, played games, went out to town. It was a nice house with a garden, not at the edge of the town, about 20 minutes from the center by metro. They gave me pocket money, I cooked with the girls, it was very nice."

„The program was similar to ADPARE, we were several girls in a house and had financial support. We were shopping and eating together. Was very good; even now I keep in touch with the women there, they are happy that I am fine."

„They took me to the hospital, I did some tests, they accompanied me to the police. Re-enactments. Then we had daily activities - fitness, makeup, various activities."

„They were fine, they treated me well, they didn't make any difference."

Speaking about the psychological support services offered by these organizations, some respondents (with the benefit of hindsight and after experiencing similar services provided by ADPARE) pointed out certain aspects that, in the context, they considered less satisfactory and, consequently, did not access, for instance that the meetings took place in groups and not individually.

„There were psychological counseling activities, but very few; some resident doctors came and talked to us in general way. It was not private; it was in a group. In I. there was group counseling, here I have individualized assistance and psychotherapy."

„There was the possibility of counseling too, but I refused it because I didn't feel comfortable. At the session it was always me, the psychologist and another guy, he was from the organization, and I couldn't actually open myself up. Besides, the shock was even greater at the time."

However, at the victims' request, some service providers were able to offer psychological assistance outside the center and incurred their costs.

„I asked to see a psychologist and I did it for about three months. I went to an individual practice and, indeed, for a while this helped me to get over. (...) Actually, it helped me a lot."

Also, the organizations have made arrangements for victims' repatriation upon their request.

„They looked for an NGO and asked me which city in Romania I want to return to. They never made you leave, but I didn't want to stay there alone, I already had a... I rejected the idea, I didn't want to stay in that country anymore."

„It was an NGO from G. that bought my plane ticket."

The analysis of the interviews clearly showed that, beyond the quality of support services, what the victims appreciated most were the attitude and behavior of social workers, the attention paid to their immediate needs, the sense of security and protection created by these people, regardless they are permanent employees or volunteers. With no exception, the respondents emphasized the constant efforts of social workers to provide them the necessary comfort, to create the immediate and absolutely necessary feeling of peace and security.

„They speak to your heart, if you know what I mean. They put themselves in your shoes. A lady used to say, we are people who help, not who step aside. We put ourselves in the someone's shoes, in what he went through. And the case manager at ADPARE said the same, I put myself in the shoes of the one who suffered, I can't blame her for what she did or did not."

„Very close, I saw that they were doing everything possible to get me out of that state."

„They were very concerned, meaning they took into account that you were in danger."

There was communication - I didn't speak English, but they were trying to understand my needs."

„The center fought a lot for me, it helped me a lot. (...) I really liked the time there. What I liked most was that they insisted a lot."

The perceived effects of assistance provided abroad by the service providers depended on both contextual (i.e., the time spent in centers in the destination country) and personal factors related to victims' life and family environment before trafficking.

In some cases, the special attention to victims, the careful way they were encouraged to do things previously overlooked, the affection, the mutual respect and harmonious relations cultivated between the social workers and beneficiaries led to a radical transformation of the latter ones. For them, the period of stay in the centre was not only one that allow the discovery of their own identity, the opportunity to become aware of their needs and express them freely, but also it filled a gap, a lack painfully felt, but impossible to solve in the context of their previous lives.

„It was a fairy tale world for me. It was the first time in my life when someone supported me in all respects, from the financial to the psychological and emotional. And I enjoyed it as much as I would have liked. Because I didn't know how to be happy, I was never given anything for free, I was never appreciated for anything in my entire life, and then there was my fairy tale world."

One of the extremely interesting aspects noticed here concerns the radical change of the initial relations between the victim and the service providers. Patience, perseverance, and rational approach of all assistance steps taken despite the initial resistance and disagreement of the victims, turned the care centre and its team into the home and family that some of the victims didn't have before.

„They were like mothers, this episode I missed a lot in my life, and they were there with hugs too. Despite the fact that I rejected them, because I didn't understand why they wanted to hug me, because I didn't experience these things. And it was weird to think that for some strangers it is OK to hug me without giving them God knows what, because in my family, as a kid, I caused some feelings of nausea and disgust. Instead, here I was loved, caressed, understood, they gave me hugs, understanding. I liked that we always had dinner together, that they helped us to learn. (...) It was magical, they helped me a lot get out of all this; you can't compare my state of mind when I arrived there with the one when I left..."

Alongside the changes induced at emotional level, the new center-home and the new team-family generate a context that produces deep changes at the behavioral level and a revaluation of some aspects hitherto almost ignored or considered unimportant by victims, such as formal education.

„At the Centre, I was very open, with a thirst for knowledge I couldn't believe. I've never been interested in school, I couldn't wait to get rid of it, to mind my own business. However, in the project there were nuns who had a vast culture, they could talk about anything and I was so amazed and intrigued by what a mind can store. But I could not find topics of conversation with them in

any field. So I started to ask constantly for courses, more courses... I wanted that and that. I felt the need to talk myself too, to be able to communicate with them, to display my knowledge."

Once freedom is acquired, the difficult task of reconstructing one's personal identity occurs. This reconstruction requires that victims should face the consequences of trafficking and take responsibility, thus qualifying for the future decisions. Bruno Bettelheim stated that „before starting a new integration, it is necessary to accept that the trauma took place, and to accept its degree of gravity and its own nature".[4] For some victims, however, acceptance means an implicit recognition of the failure of a life project with a huge emotional investment. By refusing to integrate an experience, they remain connected to it and can hardly regain their autonomy. Denial seems to be the momentary solution and to this effect they resort to all mechanisms of emotional self-protection, considering the trafficking episode just an event from a series of events, a fact among others, minimizing its impact and consequences and believing they are capable to overcome it by themselves.

„I had a long period of instability, I don't know if it was because of my problems, I couldn't keep my job for more than a few months. And there, at the Centre, I was trying to find out, to bring to the surface whatever could help me go further and get over certain things. But neither then, nor now, things didn't change and I don't think they would change for a long time to come."

„I didn't want to admit that this thing happened to me. Dude, I thought it was just an experience and that's it. Besides, I saw what kind of people came here, people who really have big problems. I mean, I didn't want to be aware of my severity. And always when I came here, I didn't want to, why does the prosecutor ask me to come here, I can treat myself, I don't need to."

Examination of interviews shows that the victims who gradually succeed to integrate this experience and find support points in it, who are able to put it in parentheses, but are aware of all its implications, relate differently to care systems and can recover faster.

„I don't think I'll ever be able to get over completely. But the important thing is that it strengthened me, it opened up new things for me... It was like a motivation; although it was something negative, it turned me into a good person."

„Mentally, I don't know if I will ever be able to forget this incident, but I can overcome it with the help of ADPARE guys who are always on my head, not to end up in such situations again. I was able to control myself, I sat and thought, it's okay, isn't it okay?"

The trafficking episode is often seen as a milestone in their lives, defining the boundary between a before and an after.

[4] Cf. Philippe, Romano, *Feed-back*, p. 329

„We cannot live in the past, we live in the future and in the present. What you did in the past, it belongs to the past. That was then and this is now. I said that making a mistake is like banging your head against the lintel to see the threshold. I have accepted that and would accept it further."
„I was very strong and I managed to overcome the moment and I didn't crack. (...) I said that this is how it was to be, it happened like that and we have to move forward. We don't have to crack, there are others who are in a worse situation than us or than me."

Assuming and accepting the experience is a very hard struggle, a long and difficult process that involves reviewing, recalling what happened. The memories are embarrassing and the evocation painful. Victims bear the traces of violence suffered during the trafficking. And if the visible marks have disappeared, although not forever, the flashbacks still haunt them.

„There are certain things that seared into my brain - beatings, I was beaten and then taken to the hospital and the doctor was told that I had a nervous breakdown and I was sedated ... you can't get those things out of your mind."

„But it was stuck in my heart anyway."

„When they go deeper in there, there are some wounds that bleed and when touch them they bleed worse."

Self-depreciation and guilt are often present; the victims blame themselves, they feel guilty for what happened to them. More than that, as if mistrust and suspicion should be regarded as normal attributes of the relationships between people, some interviewees question the very idea of trust.

„I thought maybe I don't deserve it. That's what I thought. (...) I thought that maybe there are other girls with more serious cases, maybe I am a minor case."

„At first I felt very guilty. That was because of me... It's not the same guilt anymore, now it is rather critical thinking. I never stop to think about it, I say, why did I have such confidence, because we were not so close? Back then I really wanted to do something with my life and it was that impulse, and I haven't really thought why the heck is this guy asking my IDs? And why should I give them to him? I trusted him blindly. Now I think I shouldn't have done that."

Trust is certainly one of the psychological dimensions most affected by the trafficking episode - for social workers, *gaining the trust* is a laborious but essential process in order to be able to work towards *restoring victims' confidence* in their own strength. From the victims' perspective distrust, in themselves and those around them, doubled by the fear of facing an unknown, potentially hostile environment, is most often prevalent. As one of them says, „*you know, once bitten, twice shy,*

because I'm afraid". *As one side offers more and more security, the other gradually reduces its defense*, often justified, and eventually comes to accept that nothing can work without mutual trust.

„Because everyone behaved nicely and gently, I understood that I could open myself up and talk about what I went through. And that, with their help, I can overcome the situation and ask for justice."

„Later I got used to the people here and I wasn't so afraid to tell everything, although I was still ashamed to say some things."

„The first time was hard for me because I didn't know how they would take my story. And I was afraid they would judge me one way or another. Gradually I realized that I am here for help and no one will judge the story."

Shame and fear are two elements that cannot be avoided or erased for a long time. Overwhelming at first, especially when victims choose to talk or have to talk about the degrading, humiliating situations they have gone through, shame seems easier to overcome in time. Fear instead is their daily companion and continues to accompany them for a long time throughout their lives. The object of fear is sometimes a possible encounter with the trafficker.

„I was very scared to go out, I thought the ones I ran away from were looking for me."

„I was really scared for a while; I must confess, at first my mother came with me everywhere, she was also afraid that I would meet him. But then I went to the police and made statements and I did whatever had to be done. I talked to the prosecutor and she told me that all I have to do is to believe in myself, that it will all work out."

„I'm so afraid of him, I'm afraid I might meet him on street. Last time he beat me up pretty bad. He was violent all the time, I have five forensic certificates. In November he beat me up very badly."

„A few years ago, at the subway in Victoria Square, I passed him. There are some feelings that... Even if I want to seem tough, at that moment my legs started to shake, I panicked, I didn't know what to do..."

But most often, usually in case of trafficking for sexual exploitation, the fear of victims is generated not so much by the fact that they have been forced to provide sexual services, but by the reactions of the community members when they might find out about it - labeling, marginalization, exclusion. Therefore, to avoid all this, the trafficking episode is hidden from the eyes of the people around, it becomes secret. Hiding this part of their past to their family or to friends is like walking on a tight rope every day since it requires not only effort or vigilance every moment, but also mean

living with the fear of being revealed. It is not the secret itself that is an obstacle in this process; it is rather what the secret is associated to: stigma. In the broader sense, a stigma sense is an attribute which discredits its bearer and causes social sanctions, symbolic feeling of inferiority and various forms of exclusion. Prostitution is a stigma in the sense that it disqualifies and prevents a person from being fully accepted by society. The characteristics attributes of prostitution are signs whose specific consequence is to draw attention on a shameful aspect of the identity of those who hold those signs. The stigma provokes social reactions that the stigmatized will have to make permanent efforts to avoid, to get rid of them.

„We don't talk about these things, we don't debate them because I know that there is always labeling and I don't want them to feel sorry for me if they would understand me, but I wouldn't want to be offended or whatever if they don't understand me either."

„They did not know exactly all the problems we encountered. (...) They were just judging me without knowing what happened."

„That made me say nothing about what happened to me with the trafficking because you never know how someone reacts or what he thinks."

Bearing a visible or nonvisible stigma has consequences on daily life, it changes deeply social relations and the interactions with the other, in general. A person who bears a stigma bearer must know how to manage information regarding his or her stigma, to hide it or reveal it, and must accept the tension between the social norm and personal reality.

„I was afraid that I might be tagged in some way or I would be labeled. I was afraid that after telling what happened to me… Well, I didn't know that there are other people who went through a similar or identical situation to mine, and I was afraid not to be thrown aside. I mean, I didn't want to be that child, not necessarily here, at ADPARE, but in society in general. That's why I didn't want to talk to anyone about what happened to me, because I didn't want to be left out. I wanted to be accepted like all other children. And understood."

„I'm scared ... In addition, they point finger at me, look what happened to her."

Living with such a secret seems to be a difficult burden and in order to get rid of it, some of the interviewees decided from the beginning or at some point to tell their family or relatives the situation they went through. The feed-back they received depended to a large extent on the family relationships prior to the trafficking episode. Most often, when victims have chosen to share this experience, their families or partners were with them, gave them the support they needed.

„They were at my side, they understood that we all make mistakes. I made a mistake, I have accepted it, they never blamed me for it. That's it, that's what happened, there is nothing to do. There is no room for reproaches. The relationship with my parents is OK."

„I have a very good relationship with my family. They supported me and understood the situation I went through."

„I told to my boyfriend when we started our relationship; I told him about prostitution too, I told him everything. So he knows everything about me. I told him from the beginning - you want to accept that, fine, if not, leave me alone. And now he respects me a lot, he helps me a lot, he supports me, if I am sick he goes with me to the emergency room, he is very careful."

But other times the confession met family's indifference or even resulted in ending the relationships with their life partners.

„I tried to explain it to my mother, but she wasn't interested..."

„My folks didn't care. My sister asked me from time to time what it was like, what was going on there, but very little. (...) Nobody got involved."

„I told [to my partner] from the beginning, since I came back, this, this and this. I don't want you to blame me later on that you did this and that... And he said yes, but after a while he started to touch where it hurts the most. Even if it doesn't seem to hurt, it does. And I decided to end it."

„When I returned to Romania I went to my friend, we were supposed to marry. I lived with him for a while, then he started reproaching me and I had nothing to do, I broke up with him..."

Out of the desire to protect their family or some of its members, the victims sometimes chose to share with them only the most general aspects of the trafficking episode. They continue to try to avoid or hide as many of the painful details as possible, knowing that in this way they would not deepen the wounds and sufferings of other family members.

„My only mistake was that I thought I'd protect them a little. I didn't tell them. They didn't know what had happened, they didn't know anything at all until I came home and have seen me at the airport. When I arrived I told them it was a car crash, I didn't tell them exactly what happened. Gradually, I had to tell them the truth."

„There were some things that perhaps I didn't want to tell him at the moment (...) but along the way I started to talk about them, to let him know some stuff. Because I didn't want to tell them all at once."

„I feel that talking about such situations is affecting deeper the people close to me. And as long as I am physically OK, I've done my best to put this whole story aside and get over it, I don't want to talk about it anymore. And I am sure that those people close to me would not like to hear this, that it would make them sad, it would make them suffer."

Revealing the past means not only passing from the information control to mastering it, but also overcoming fears of stigmatization and assuming a new position.

„I don't take to the heart what happened, what people say, how they tag me. Whoever accepts me, accepts me as I am. I understand certain people because if I didn't go through that, I would behave the same way. But that's it."

„It may seem weird or crazy, but I'm laughing about what happened. If I'm asked what happened to me, I'll tell it without a hitch. (...) We generally accuse unknowingly, but if you pay attention a bit and know how to grasp the situation, you understand that a mistake made by someone, somewhere..."

In other cases, however, fear of stigmatization and public disgrace, shame, low self-image and self-esteem prevail, and some victims will continue to keep it a secret.

„No one in my family knows, nor my friends, no one knows to this day and maybe they never will."

„I have no confidence. They don't have to know my problems, what happened to me."

„I prefer not to take risks. People judge you, even if they are your parents."

„Mom loves you, but friends gossip ... I would never tell them."

„I have friends, I can't say I don't have friends, but I can't tell them about my past. I admit, I'm ashamed of what I did, but I don't want anyone to know this."

„I refused to look for my family because I didn't want to appear in front of them... I considered myself a wreck. At that time, I would not have accepted that my family, my brothers, to know this side of me."

In this context, any social relation becomes a problem and since it is impossible to hide a stigma constantly, its bearer will have to act permanently through strategies, to decide whom she/he can give some bits of information and whom she/he cannot and will gradually narrow down her or his circle of relations.

„I'm talking about the event here [at ADPARE], but I wouldn't have liked to be asked for details elsewhere. Or no others than those I wanted to reveal."

„I don't allow my family to get closer, I don't want them to rummage, I don't want them to come into my life."

„I would better refrain and talk to people who are close to me and who do not spread the word."

On the other hand, dealing with trauma and confronting everyday reality require psychological, symbolic and cultural support, i.e. the use of all previous supports that have ceased to function and that are offered by non-governmental organizations active in the field of victims' assistance.

„After the trafficking episode, I was looking for ways to stop feeling sorry for myself, to relive those moments... I had to do something all the time, to keep myself busy. Not to think about what happened, not to think about my panic attacks, to overcome my fears. And I could do that only through communication, through friendship, outings, daily activities, courses (...) To get out of those states of mind, because it isn't a state of well-being for anyone or anything."

„Unfortunately, you do not understand your situation. It's like some kind of mud you can't get out of by your own. Only with people who know what is all about and know it... Unfortunately, I had no friends."

Under these circumstances, for most respondents, meeting ADPARE was the harbor they needed and the beginning of a life-changing relationship.

„ADPARE played the most important role in my current life. When I came to ADPARE I was nobody's and at the moment I can't complain about anything. For a long time ADPARE meant everything to me."

„For what I am now, I owe 90% to ADPARE."
„They were the mastermind so to speak, without them I don't know if I would have succeeded."
It was, as one victim puts it, that „*something that helped me face reality*".

To many interviewees, the ADPARE professionals became the friends they needed, trustworthy people whom they could and can count and rely, people who can listen to sufferings which remained silent for too long:

„Here I feel like with friends, they gave me a hand and brought me to light."

„If I were alone I wouldn't have been able to do this. ADPARE made up for the lack of other elements of support – they made up for everything. The most important it was the emotional part."

„They remained the same, we can discuss anything, especially since they know the case and I don't have to repeat the story once again."

„The ADPARE guys", as the victims use to call them, when they do not simply mention their first names, are probably the only ones to offer a peaceful environment to these women. With them it is not necessary to pretend or disguise, there is no need for strategies and distance. They can show what they are, with their past that they don't have to justify:

„Could you talk to someone else about what happened to you? You couldn't. Maybe just with the girls here at ADPARE, not with someone else. I wasn't keen to tell anyone. Even my aunt who knows, she knows only very little, that I was gone, that I didn't get well and I came back. She is the only one who knows that I was helped and I am helped to this day, and this because she came to ADPARE. No one knows but her. And my man, the father of my children. I wanted to talk to my mother about assistance, about ADPARE, but she isn't warm, she doesn't care about that at all. Maybe she didn't love me very much."

„It makes me feel good coming here and being other people just like me, because I can integrate myself, I feel at home, we understand each other and we speak the same language."

„When I'm in trouble, I come here, when I want to rebel, I come here."

„When I come here I am very well understood."

*

The National Identification and Referral Mechanism of victims of trafficking in human beings clearly specifies the actors involved, their responsibilities and the procedures to be followed until victims get in touch with service providers, including the non-governmental organizations that provide various types of specialized assistance.
Thus, some of the victims trafficked abroad were referred to ADPARE by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which also ensured their repatriation – „*It was IOM, they brought me back*", „*at the airport came ADPARE and IOM*". The victims encounter with the IOM representatives in Romania is generally brief and rather formal, and limited to meeting victims at the airport, providing information on further procedures and, when needed, transportation to their home or to ADPARE protected apartment.

Other victims were referred by the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP) or by the prosecution and criminal investigation bodies, specialized institutions in the field that have taken fully their responsibilities:

„A policeman who works at BCCO ... That boy, a very nice guy, told me about a case manager and about this place.

„The police (...) they brought me to ADPARE, they guided me, they brought me here and on that occasion I talked to the lawyer too."

„I filed a complaint with DIICOT and the prosecutor helped me. And she told me I would need some (psychological) counselling sessions to recover myself. (...) Initially I did not want to accept, I said yes because I was ashamed of Mrs. prosecutor. And I didn't want to come."

Some respondents got to at ADPARE as a result of actions taken by other non-governmental organizations in the destination countries (in case of international trafficking) – „*They looked for and found ADPARE (....) work very well these organizations, the state not so***"** - or in Romania that were aware of ADPARE support and thought the services offered here much more effective than what could offer themselves.

„It was another NGO that sent me, they said I could be better helped here. I took some counselling sessions with a lady there, but that was all; she was the one who sent me here."

In certain cases, the family itself contacted ADPARE, they „mediated" between the association and the victim and insisted that she should follow the assistance program. When the family relations are harmonious, the trafficking episode is a traumatic event that is changing not only the life of the victim, but the lives of all other family members. The sufferings of the victims are the sufferings of the parents and of the loved ones. First of all, the victims need to feel that they are not alone in confronting the demons and in this respect the support of the family is crucial.

„My mother approached them. We have a family friend who is a lawyer and deals with human trafficking cases, like the ADPARE lawyer. And he explained to my mom, Look, your daughter was such and such... So my mother talked to the lawyer, who talked to a friend of his who said, look, I know this association."

„My family encouraged me to come to ADPARE, it was my mother who approached the case manager at a conference, a workshop, and said, Look, I have a case in the family, my daughter. And the case manager said, OK, come with us to her, we'll be talking there. (...) I, being skeptical at first, told her, no, you call, schedule a meeting. And she told me, No, the psychologist said that the moment you feel ready to go, then you will call yourself. And at one point, about a month away

from the event, I gathered up the nerve, I called and made an appointment, which my mother participated in, and I saw her happy that I agreed to come to talk."

Last but not least, ADPARE itself has made efforts to identify victims and bring them to the Centre. As one of the victims says: „*It happened. I didn't look for them, they found me*."

„Someone sent an e-mail, but in that e-mail he wrote down my phone number wrongly, a reversed digit. And the case manager played a small game of digits and that's how she came upon my real phone number. Then she called, my father answered, the case manager asked him if she could talk to me. She explained to me how did she manage to find me and suggested a meeting. I talked to them and they've been taking care of everything ever since. Things I wouldn't have been able to do on my own."

2. Involvement of victims in protection and assistance and evaluation of the services provided

For most victims, no matter they came to ADPARE alone or accompanied by family members or government officials, the first meeting or meetings with the social workers were usually marked by suspicion and skepticism.

„I didn't come here with expectations. I didn't know what to expect. I came alone, a little skeptical, I didn't know what was gonna happen, what they wanted from me. I mean, I didn't trust the world so much. I felt not really uncomfortable, but I wasn't in the mood either."

„I was hopeless, I thought in a negative way, I used to keep in the background, I didn't trust the people here very much."

„At first, when I came I was skeptical, I admit that, I told it to the psychologist who helped me here, I told him that I was skeptical, that I didn't think he would help me talk about these things; and it seemed to me, not so much pointless, but something that wouldn't bring any value, that my life would not change afterwards."

„On the first day, I felt like a stranger who doesn't find her a place, where do I have to stay, am I okay here or am I bothering someone?"

„I felt bad, ashamed. I felt embarrassed, because I had to talk and I didn't know people."

Moreover, the fear of experiencing again the exploitation situation makes any new meeting, including the one with ADPARE, to be considered a confrontation with a potentially hostile environment.

„I went through so many awful experiences, I was so tormented, I was afraid of the Association too. Because I was thinking, heaven knows, if anything happens".

„I was very scared, God, it's gonna happen once again what happened to me before?!"

„I was expecting something different, I was thinking, who knows where do they take me to..."

„I felt a great deal of emotional tension."

Embarrassed and ashamed, the victims have a hard time communicating with social workers.

„I was very confused, I didn't find my words, I wasn't able to utter a sentence properly, I was very silent.".
„ I was very unstable emotionally, I didn't want to communicate."

„ Because I was ashamed, the first time I came to the Centre, I was afraid to talk, I was semi-dumb! I didn't want to talk to anyone."

One of the things that weighed heavily in changing the attitude of victims and marked the first step in an often very long process of assistance was the relaxed atmosphere they found at ADPARE, the warmth and honesty they've met.

„I could see everyone's desire to help me and get me out of that mood."

„When I got here, everyone was friendly, which I liked, that I could talk to anyone."

„When I first came here everyone was smiling at me, I was very serious. I was nervous too, especially because I lived what I lived, and no one had extended a helping hand to me. I've never seen such people before and it was a bit strange..."

„I am a person who gets attached to people very quickly and I felt them close to me from day one. At least the case manager, I felt very close to her from the very first moment we got in contact, she was dear to me, she got into my soul. They were dear to me, they are all dear to me, they are warm people."

In addition, as many victims point out, an extremely important role was played by understanding that in this reintegration process, ADPARE team will always be with them, that they will be alone only when want they want to.

„During the discussions we had here, they explained to me that I will not be alone, not even in the apartment, and so I decided to come over. This mattered a great deal."

„I didn't miss anything at ADPARE since I came here. I didn't feel alone for a second, I had counseling, I had beautiful people by my side."

„I received support and so on, self-confidence, and I saw that I am not alone in my struggle against what is happening around me."

„For me ADPARE is the second house, is the family I can rely on every any moment of the day and night. I mean, if something happens to me tomorrow and I find myself in a deserted place and I don't have anyone next to me, I can go to ADPARE and tell the case manager, I'm in danger or something. Because they are the family that's always there to help me. That's what they made me understand."

„Whenever I come here to ADPARE I get away from it all."

The analysis of the interviews shows that most respondents were almost completely deprived of information about the assistance programs that can be provided by public service providers and non-governmental organizations active in the field.

„Honestly I didn't really know what I would benefit from and I was pleasantly surprised to find out how much support they can offer me."

„I didn't know; I had never heard of such associations before. I didn't know what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised by their warmth, by the way I was received. From the airport!"

„I did not know that there is such a foundation that helps trafficked girls, I knew that there are foundations that help with different things."

„The first time when I heard about the association and came here, I can't say I was skeptical, but I didn't know exactly what it was about."

Involvement of the victim in the decision-making process

Any assistance program, regardless of the type of services offered, is based on an analysis carried out jointly by the case manager and the victim. The latter is without exception the one who has the last word on the steps to be taken. Although the decision-making process is one involving negotiations between the parties concerned, evaluating alternatives, weighing the pros and cons, the final decision ultimately rests with the victims. It must be emphasized that their participation in decision-making also has an additional meaning - it is a way of restoring their self-confidence, a form of empowerment and control over the progress, even on short term, of their life after trafficking. In addition, the decisions taken together with or suggested by ADPARE social workers are an evidence of the level of confidence victims have in them.

„These decisions, come to think of it, I made myself. When I came to ADPARE - What do you want, M.? I said, I want to learn. Should we enroll you in school? Yes. Look, on that day we have to go sign up. Then, when it came to school equipment, it was me to say - I need this and that. After all, I came up with the ideas. And if it weren't some good ideas, they would certainly have said to me, hey, stop, let's think and see what to do."

„ADPARE told me, you do what you want. I chose this, this is what I wanted to do, this is what I did. ADPARE helps you, don't leave things unfinished, that's what I can say for sure. It is not a foundation to be used or taken advantage of. As much as it can help, it does."

„We always made the decisions together, I proposed, they listened, we consulted, they guided me and I chose the things I thought could help me to overcome certain aspects, those on which I thought I should work harder. Totally involved just like them."

„They offered me opportunities and support, they didn't press me, they didn't force me to do anything. And that's why I felt comfortable doing what I think is good and it was all natural; I mean I didn't felt compelled to do anything, neither denied to do anything else. However, I was presented with ideas, opportunities."

In some situations, discussions aiming to find the best solution have been lengthy, required patience, perseverance, effort; however, the service providers never pushed for certain point of view or position.

„They were the ones who convinced me to come to B. And seeing my parents that I had support, help and understanding, they also advised me that it would be good to follow their advice and come. Anyway, the decision was mine."

„I was already determined to go to college. Initially I wanted to go to the Police Academy, but later I realized that I am not a very obedient person and I gave up this idea. The people from ADPARE always said to me: are you sure? Think it over. Then I wanted to go to Psychology and they told me the same thing. I wanted to study psychology for a passion of mine for it, not necessarily because I wanted to work in this field. And I gave up that idea too. A colleague of mine form the high-school persuaded me to choose the School of Journalism. And I applied there, I don't regret that I came to this faculty. I really like it. Initially they - ADPARE – did not fully agree, but later they supported me. And still do it."

Aware of their own vulnerability, of the emotional instability that characterized them at one point and of the guiding role that ADPARE played in channeling them towards a safety zone, some victims give the association a decisive position in this endeavor. Moreover, they insist not only on the possibility to choose, to make a relevant decision, but also on the fact trafficking situation could have been avoided if they had some reliable people around to analyze options and alternatives.

„These were partially suggested to me by ADPARE. At that time, I was totally disoriented, what to do, where to head to. I always went more towards the evil than to the good. And ADPARE was that arrow that had to shake me up a little, no, that's the way you have to go."

„My choice is very much influenced by ADPARE. I personally rely more on ADPARE because their role is to provide options."

„It would have been nice if I had consulted with someone. It would have been very good and I were not in a trafficking situation."

Some respondents appreciate the non-intrusive manner in which ADPARE obtained information on their current or future options and interests, and in particular the freedom they had to make their own decisions.

„Their diplomacy, the way they get involved, but meanwhile leave you the possibility to decide how far you let them go; and the manner they manage everything, from the financial aspects to meetings."

„A person has his own direction, maybe he needs just a little support."

„I think they have a very good strategy. When they were talking to me there was no point-to-point discussion, let's see what you want to do today. No, we talked casually about anything and I think they processed the information and got exactly what I was thinking or wanting, they knew my

needs. But in such a way that they didn't even ask me or force me to say. And I think it's a better way to see what someone wants, to be on the same line."

A very important aspect highlighted by a number of respondents is that any successful reintegration activity is directly dependent on the involvement of beneficiaries. No matter how great the assistance team's efforts may be, they will not produce the desired results without the victims' involvement in the proposed activities.

„You can't do anyone better than that. It's just that ADPARE has to deal with different people, each one with his own strength of character, some do overcome, some don't. But from what I've seen, there are people who don't want to go over, they get stuck there. They want help, but they don't have that thing, that impulse, I mean, look, this guy helps me, but let's help him to help me too. And they stay there. I've talked to girls I've seen here before... If you stay there, it's hard for both ADPARE and the girl. They can't help you if you don't want to. I tell you this and you say no... There are people in ADPARE who try to explain to them that this is better and that there are people who would not understand."

„Man, these people offer me, but I can't do anything for myself. Then, since the counseling, little by little, I started to move forward and accomplish things."

The protection and assistance program

Since a victim's assistance program is customized and based on the need analysis carried out together with the case manager, the assistance services she receives are different. Depending on context and duration, victims may benefit from all or some of the services offered by ADPARE (see Introduction). Also, depending on priorities, some services initially considered less important than others can be accessed later on, and they may contribute to resolving some critical issues. Obviously, the number of situations is equal to the number of respondents.
However, the analysis of the recorded interviews shows that valuing a certain type of assistance can be generated by the fact that it meets some urgent and immediate needs of the victim – for instance, medical assistance; equally, other types of assistance have a lot longer range, their results being visible in the future - such as psychological, educational or legal assistance.
Without exception, all the interviewees have a positive view of the assistance services provided by ADPARE, from material assistance in emergency situations to the „spiritual support", „the push to move on", as some of the victims put it.

„I didn't expect to get as much help as I got so far, and I think I could not have done a better job than they did."

„The fact that I had someone to talk to constantly about these things actually made me confident, gave me the strength to move on. And the money spent are very useful, especially for someone who can't afford so much. But for me the greatest impact was that they were actually there for me, every time I needed it."

„I received a lot of help, both financially and morally, as well as spiritual support, advice, psychological counseling."

„ADPARE gave me a push to move on, that spur I needed."

Material/social assistance

In most cases, respondents mention a „package" of support services which almost always includes material assistance (ensuring personal needs by providing food, personal care and hygiene products; clothing and footwear).

„Whenever I needed it, I received money for food, for the transportation pass. When I needed to see a doctor, a gynecologist, treatment and so on, they supported me with everything."

„I received assistance, then it was the money given to me weekly for food and hygiene, the psychological support - which I really needed, they helped me finding a job. They helped me in every way."

„At ADPARE they helped me from the first day when I came together with the nun, they gave me some money to buy clothes because I had left home with what I had on me. When I came to the apartment, they gave me money for food and hygiene. I had a lot of help from ADPARE, I was offered a lot of help."

„At the beginning, indeed, I benefited mainly from material services, I lived in a private dorm, offered by ADPARE. I was unemployed at that time and they helped me with food and supplies".
„I really wanted to emphasize that for me this material help was something incredible, I did not expect. It was a plus, a plus, a plus - a plus in every way."

It must be said that material assistance is often extended over a long period of time and, in some cases, it is provided not only to the victims but also to their children.

„ADPARE has supported me since my baby was born, I didn't have anyone, they helped me with everything, clothes, toys, everything. Still today they help me, anything, whenever I need. I come to the girls and get toys, clothes... it's a material support. It matters a lot, it's huge."

„They helped me in this respect. When I was pregnant, after I gave birth, I needed medication and the social worker came to the hospital and brought me medication. They were always there when I needed them, even the case manager came to me at the hospital and brought me diapers and a bag of medicine for the little one. I had their constant help, they were always by my side."

Social assistance, which comprises various types of services, including reimbursement of transportation and communication costs, is considered vital by most interviewees since before getting a job they confront themselves with a poor financial.

„Getting reimbursed for the transportation pass was so helpful, it's very expensive and I can't afford it."

Some respondents talk about the help they received from ADPARE for restoring or sometimes even issuing identity documents and the role they played in mediating the relationship with the issuing authority, especially with the police.

„I have their support; they help me with everything I need. They also helped me with school, I don't miss on anything, now it's OK. (...) I received more than that because when I came here I didn't have an ID, they helped me to get it, they helped me solve other problems with the police."

„I didn't have my IDs at all, I didn't have an ID until I was 17. My mother never wanted to get me an ID. I had a birth certificate. If it weren't for these guys I think I would have my docs only now, at the age of 18."

Residential assistance

Residential assistance is one of the first types of assistance provided to victims of trafficking, especially in case of external trafficking, and before anything else aims to protect victims and ensure a safe environment. This is also true for victims of trafficking in the country of origin, especially when their return to the family poses a major risk, the family does not accept them or when the victims do not have a family to accommodate and offer them a minimal support.
Over the years, ADPARE has provided short- or long-term residential assistance to a very large number of victims exploited abroad and in the country.
Many of the interviewees have benefited or still benefit from this type of assistance and the way they perceived accommodation in the protected homes depended to a large extent on their social background, on their family relations prior to the trafficking episode. First of all, the reception center or the protected apartment are perceived as an oasis of hospitality, places that allow the privacy, retrieval and peace that victims need. The comfort and safety they offer are elements that

in some cases have been almost completely absent and generate very intense reactions and emotional responses.

„When we return to Romania and they took us there to the center, to our little rooms, I was so happy! I liked that room because it was small, it was so warm, we were all there, we didn't lack anything in the kitchen. It was the most beautiful moment. There were other beautiful moments, but there I felt I had something that is mine..."

„I enjoyed when they took us there to the dormitory, we had our space, we had our rooms, we had everything. At one point I didn't even want to go back to my mother, I would have stayed there, in the shelter."

„I felt myself protected, I felt that I lacked nothing, it was a very beautiful period. A very beautiful period because I did not have beautiful periods in my life."

In case of victims coming from dysfunctional families, affected by material deprivation, abuse, and physical and verbal violence, to live in such an environment is a real breakthrough, a major change in their existence.

„I had a difficult life and when I arrived at ADPARE I couldn't believe that everything is so beautiful, that I don't miss anything. And when I went to my mother, in the countryside, I didn't stay longer because my father was a drunkard, and he always chased us and it didn't really appeal to me."

The protected apartment means not only protection, safety and comfort; it is also an environment in which victims invest emotionally, and gradually build on the family relationships they never had. They remember with nostalgia and joy the time they lived there and consider leaving the apartment one of the most difficult moments in the entire assistance period.

„Later on they rented us an apartment, we were a few girls living there. We took jobs... In the morning we would head to work, then came back home, we had our differences sometime. It was beautiful, I have nice memories, I would like to live there again, with the girls. It was wonderful."

„The hardest moment was when I left the apartment, when I moved in with my boyfriend."

All service providers make accommodation in centers conditional on compliance with detailed internal regulations, and ADPARE is no exception. The rules are strict in terms of cohabitation rules, going out and going in times, confidentiality regarding the location of the center and so on. Accepting them involves giving up a number of habits, changing some behaviors or adapting them to the needs of other beneficiaries. It is a compliance exercise that some of the respondents, aware

of their own weaknesses, have chosen from the very beginning not to do it; others gave up at a certain time when the limitations imposed by the regulation became increasingly difficult to follow.

„Then I got into the house and saw that regulation - which is not strict, but I'm more... <No shouting, no swearing, no drowning in this house.> There are some things I didn't overcome, I still shout a lot, I slam a lot, I am very often nervous. I can't control myself in front of other people. There are already some rules I can't follow. And there was another rule: to be at home at a certain hour. The rules seem very OK to me, but I couldn't follow them. I didn't have the strength to try either, but I said I wouldn't take residential assistance. I thought that rather than create trouble there, better not. Because I thought that there are other people living there and instead causing troubles to them, I'd better stay apart."

„I moved [from the apartment] with my boyfriend and now it is slightly better from this point of view. Because when I lived in this apartment I was somehow stressed because of the schedule, of the rules we had there. I wasn't allowed to bring in anyone, I had a fixed hour to return home that I wasn't very used to, and it was quite difficult with my friend, with my friends..."
Sometimes, because they knowingly violated the rules initially accepted and ignored the warnings, beneficiaries had to leave the apartment. But even in such cases, they understand the fairness of such a measure and that the purpose of the regulations is to protect them.

„The most difficult moment was when I ignored the three warnings. At ADPARE if you break the rules, you get three warnings. I violated the verbal one, I violated the written one and the third time I had to leave the apartment. I can say that it was the hardest moment for me, but I didn't blame ADPARE. I blamed myself a lot because I found myself again alone and it was my fault. Because I didn't know how to value what I had. And this got very well in my head: if you have something beautiful, keep it!"

Living in a community involves primarily interactions with the people around; for some respondents, this means a form of emotional support, it represents a very necessary balancing factor which comes as an extension of the psychological counseling provided at the center. The mere physical presence of others becomes an element that contributes to overcoming the trauma.

„At the apartment, it matters to be surrounded by other people, because if I were alone, my thoughts, memories would catch on and it wouldn't be OK. Living with someone else is good for me. If I were alone maybe I would start thinking, remembering, so living with someone else you have someone to talk to, to joke with, you have things to do together."

The leisure activities organized by ADPARE outside the center were considered by the beneficiaries an opportunity to get to know each other better in a different environment than the protected apartment.

„There were many pleasant moments in the apartment. ADPARE not only helped us with the budget for what we needed, but also with leisure activities - for instance, going to the park together for a picnic, going to a movie. To get together once a week, to organize ourselves, and I can say that's a very good idea. (...) It helps you communicate with the people you live in the house. To figure out how to get along with that person in a different setting. Because outside they can behave differently than at home. That's how I behave, I'm more comfortable in the house and my hair is more ruffled and so on, and outside I'm dressed more nicely, I try to speak more beautifully, because I'm surrounded by people and I don't want people to look at me badly."

Moreover, some of these activities, including the walks in the park, had a tremendous impact. Aside from the ludic side, they meant a real discovery and filled an emotional void, victims became aware of an acutely felt „missing link".

„At first I felt a bit weird because I felt a little older for someone to take us to the park, but that lady carried out activities with us, we played too, in the center and outside. In the park we played, we did different activities, even if we were older. It meant a lot to me, I had never gone for a walk, my mother didn't take me to the park and it seemed very beautiful to me. In my place in the country, I did not have such a thing, outings, as it was at ADPARE. In my parts they sent me to work in the field, I didn't have any dolls, and when I arrived at ADPARE it seemed to me that life is beautiful".

Medical assistance

All research participants benefited from medical assistance, from routine medical investigations, ophthalmological consultations and blood tests, to specialized interventions and complex dental treatment, performed in private clinics. Most of them point out that without the financial support of ADPARE, which covered the very high costs, many of these would have been beyond their means.

„There were periods when I settled bills from medical tests, consultations, investigations. And if I hadn't had the support of ADPARE, I wouldn't have gone to those consultations, because I wouldn't afford."

„The medical tests were paid for by ADPARE, my first serious gynecological consultation was paid by ADPARE, in addition a social worker accompanied me."

As a result of violence suffered during trafficking, some victims' health has been severely affected. For them, the medical assistance, especially in the context of family's poor material condition, represented the most important element of the whole package of specialized assistance services offered by ADPARE.

„You helped me a lot – financially too, you gave me everything I needed. The girls came with me to the doctor, I have a hearing aid, I did all the tests, they did the paperwork for my hearing aid. (...) The medical part was the most important for me. Hearing recovery. And going to the doctor. It was the most important thing for my soul."

„All I wanted was to get well, to be able to walk, my only wish was to walk, not to stay in bed, to depend on someone else. I didn't think ADPARE would help me get over all this stuff (...). But my only wish, at that moment, was they would help me get on my feet again, to walk. That was the first thing. And they helped me."

Before they reach ADPARE, some respondents received support from other support providers. As such, they are able to compare the quality of services and especially the short time the same medical problems were solved with ADPARE help.

Psychological assistance

Apart from the physical ailments, from the more or less visible traumas and scars, the trafficking episode left deep marks on the minds of all victims. These mental traces are inscribed in the memory of these young women and prove hard to erase without the intervention of a psychologist. And that is why, aware of this difficulty, victims give psychological assistance a special place, role and significance among the support services provided by ADPARE.

„First of all, the psychotherapy offered by ADPARE helped me a lot."

„First of all, I want to emphasize that I received psychological counseling, this was a very important element for me because if I hadn't come here, I'm absolutely sure I wouldn't have gone anywhere else. First of all, I wouldn't afford it, financially speaking, and secondly, I think that I wouldn't have had the guts to go and ask for such advice."

For many respondents, psychological counseling, coupled with material support, was the beginning of the road to independence and recovery of their own identity by facing the past that continues to haunt them.

„ADPARE provided me psychological support, first of all, and financial support. That's what a parent should offer."

„Psychotherapy ... this mental, emotional support has weighed and weighs much more than material things. Because without it practically I would have remained dependent on the material services provided. And I think that's a good thing, that's the purpose, to help you as a person to go through it alone, to learn to handle it yourself."

„I had financial help from ADPARE, but for me the psychological support was the most beneficial of all. Each service was very welcome, but this one was actually the most important."

„ADPARE helped me more from another point of view - related to my career and what follows, more mentally than materially".

Although some victims initially felt that they did not need psychological assistance or were reluctant to seek it, in interviews they emphasize the crucial role that this type of service has played for their development.

„They told me from the beginning that if I wanted I could access it, but I didn't want to. But at one point I was very stressed and the case manager told me, let us know and we can arrange for you to talk to our psychologists. And I said yes, why not? And now It's much better."
„I was solitary; I didn't really want to receive any help or I didn't see what opportunities I had. About a year later, I took the first step, so to speak. Well, I knew about psychotherapy, but I didn't feel ready to talk to anyone, no. But gradually I took this step. And thanks to them, I also enrolled in college, I had their support."

„I came here only at the insistence of the prosecutor. Initially I didn't feel the need, I didn't want to think that I had this problem, that I needed to come to a psychologist, I didn't want to accept. But I really needed it the most. And probably if I didn't come here and contact the psychologist and the people here, I would continue to be in the same situation at the moment. I mean, even now I might have been somewhere in Holland or God knows where."

For most interviewees, psychological counseling was a real touchstone. Almost without exception, everyone remembers that the first sessions were emotionally charged. The fear to tell their story, to talk about their traumas, to „open up" in front of someone you barely know, the distrust and the reluctance were the dominant feelings.

„It was painful when I had to tell the whole story from end to end, what happened to me, how it happened. It was very difficult, I didn't know how to speak, how to explain. Because I didn't know. And being scared and frightened, I didn't talk."

„The first time was hard for me because I didn't know how they would react to my story. And I was afraid they would judge me one way or another. I no longer trusted the people around me."

„At first I didn't open up myself so much because I was afraid to tell certain things, because I didn't know if the psychologist would tell it to the prosecutor. I felt like a permanent test and I was scared."

„The moment I stepped into the building and there were so many people I didn't know… and that I had to tell the psychologist, who was a stranger, about what happened to me, what I have on my mind ... this was certainly the hardest moment."

The psychologist's ability to gain the trust of victims, to explain to them the purpose of psychological counseling, and the victims' gradual awareness of changes occurred as a result of it, took the relationship between the two parties to higher level.

„After the first 2-3 sessions it was OK for me. (...) Then I gained confidence and understood much better what the procedure really is - the psychologist explained to me - and now I am OK."

„Gradually I realized that I am here for help and no one will judge the story."
„But, little by little, after the first meetings, which at first were bimonthly, I realized that my emotional state is not as fragile as before, that I can no longer cry only if I see news related to the subject, the event I passed through."

The awareness of the beneficial effects of psychological assistance removed any initial reticence.

„I noticed that in order to overcome a traumatic moment or to come to terms with it, you have to go through it, that is, it is not enough to bypass it or leave it there. And the association helped me a lot in this respect, the case manager who suggested that it is beneficial for me to go to see a psychologist. The point is that it opened my eyes, that it would be beneficial for me to get over by talking and not shutting up myself."

„The relationship between me and the psychologist is now improved because I feel safe and I realize that what I am doing is not good, that I have to open up myself to overcome my fear, my anxiety. And that's the reason psychologists are here, to help us get over problems. And this made me go over a lot of things, I was pushed from behind without realizing it, despite that I wasn't open and I didn't tell the whole truth."

„I'm much better now, before I didn't socialize, I didn't talk to anyone, not even to my child at home."

Equally important is that beneficiaries understand and accept that psychotherapy is a long-term process and its positive results are based primarily on their desire to communicate and open up.

„In addition, it mattered a lot that I had someone to communicate with. I'm still doing psychotherapy, so it lasts."

„Going to the psychologist it takes time, it can take years, it can take months. It also depends on you, as a person, to open up, to talk, to communicate."

Some victims even talk about the regret of not having started the therapy earlier and about their wish to receive these services in the future.

„I think I should have started therapy with the psychologist earlier."

„Psychological counseling means a lot for the psyche of each beneficiary and I will ask to continue because I saw that it helps me, I saw myself the progress I made because as a result of therapy".

If in some cases, the reluctance was due to subjective factors, it depended on the particularities and characteristics of each victim, in others it was influenced, if not even generated, by external factors. In Romania, in certain milieus, counseling and psychological assistance continue to have negative connotations, quite often being associated with mental illness, while people seeking the services of a psychologist are sometimes labeled as deviant. The fear of being stigmatized - fear again, stigma again - was one of the reasons why some victims preferred not to reveal to friends or relatives that they attend the therapy sessions offered by ADPARE.

„My friends were asking me, where are you going? And I was telling them, bro, look, I'm going to a psychologist, I wasn't telling them where, just going to a psychologist and that's it. They were laughing at me, oooh, you go to a psychologist ... In their opinion, as it was in my opinion before, it means that someone who visits a psychologist has mental problems. And they asked me why do I go to a psychologist, I would better go to psychiatry, they made fun of me. They speak on this completely unaware, as I did myself for a long time, because we don't know, only what we've seen on TV, only what we heard. And I had a wrong opinion. When I heard that I had to go to a psychologist, I thought that whoever went to a psychologist should have a problem."

„I told what happened to my cousin and to a friend of mine, but they didn't know about the counseling and what followed next."

„My mother doesn't know much; she only knows a bit about the material aspect... She doesn't know much and she's not very involved either."

As it appears from the interviews, the relation between psychologist and victim was instrumental for the proper functioning of the psychological assistance program. Due to some preconceptions or lacking pertinent information, some victims assimilated the psychologist to a physician which makes a diagnosis and provides the patient the needed medicine to cure the disease – „*She wanted me to talk more and I thought she was the one to explain to me certain things to me, to tell me what's going on with me";* others looked at him with caution and fear, *„I thought he was going to get in with his boots on ...".* However, these considerations change radically when the victims understand that the decision to address certain topics belongs to them, that they are the ones who choose what to talk about and to what extent, that they are in „control" of the whole process.

„*I had no expectations, I had fears, yes. Because he was a stranger in from of whom I was going to open my soul. I didn't know how far I would go. But after the first meeting, I realized that the psychologist is a person who will not force me to do so, that she will let me guide the discussion in a rather indirect way. And she let me decide how deep I wanted to go."*

„We didn't necessarily focus on the event, but on what I felt related to what happened to me. The psychologist always told me: we focus on how you feel. You know better what happened to you and how the situation evolved."
„The psychologist told me that I don't have to say the things I can't say, that we could talk about other issues that bothered me; that if I want I can say nothing, it was a very OK discussion. I felt at ease."

In the discussions between the victim and the psychologist, the trafficking episode and the traumas it produced gradually give way to other topics; this can be regarded as both a measure of confidence and a positive development of the assistance program.

„There were a lot of meetings in which I didn't touch even tangentially this issue because when I came here I already had other topics to discuss. I had somehow overcome the moment, I no longer felt the need to talk about it. We addressed other topics."

„At the time I left the Centre, I left in an optimistic mood.".

The respondents point out that the attitude and behavior of ADPARE psychologists often made the „professional" relationship between them go beyond that framework and become a friendly one. Although the psychologist continues to be the specialist who through his or her intervention helps the victims to re-evaluate their potential and regain their self-confidence, she or he is increasingly perceived as a trustful friend. What really mattered in this repositioning were the psychologist's skills, his/her availability, the respect and attention victims perceived from them.

„I am the most satisfied, I wanted neither more, nor less. I am very happy that, as a result of the sessions with the psychologist, I succeeded… The psychologist doesn't give me advice, she makes a suggestion sometimes, she asks questions, we do some role playing, she helps me to be less nervous. (...) Besides my mother, she somehow shows me the right way, she is listening to me, I can pour my heart out, and, well, I am happy. And I'm really OK with the idea that she's there, I even told her, perhaps if it was someone else ... I really felt this thing, that she's a good person and I can trust her. And it helps me a lot. Now I love coming here."

„For example, the psychologist – it was not a single moment when she told she wouldn't be available when I wanted to come to the Centre. Sometimes I couldn't even believe to my eyes. I think she was making some trade-offs, because she was telling me, Look, at that time I will be in place X, but I can come over if you get there at Y hour."

The decision to start or interrupt the psychological counseling always belongs to the victims. Its suitability, the circumstances and especially the evaluation of results are their exclusive prerogative. Some of the interviewes still continue the therapy sessions, others decided to stop. But whatever the case, their assessments are always positive and depend very much on their own approach to psychological assistance, on the elements they emphasized along the way and the traumatic events or characters that marked their trafficking episode.
„They helped me, I recovered, I am not as I used to be. I decided that I'm fine, I don't need therapy anymore and I told them that if I would need it again I would look for them. I told them I would like to take a break and if necessary I would come back. The decision was mine."

„I left here so pleased! I became aware of my evolution, there were times when I told the psychologist that I was thinking about how easy it was to make the transition from one state of mind to another. And I told her I didn't feel that in a long time. The moment I left, I left happy because I went through those stages talking about the problem, not closing myself in. And I was happy because my life has evolved so much from the moment I first came here to the moment I decided to take my flight."

„Accidentally, a few weeks ago I saw that person [the trafficker] in the street, but I didn't feel what I was feeling when such random encounters took place. Before I was shaking, crying, I didn't know where to go, but now I see that I am in control of myself. Counseling helped me a lot".

For many of the victims, ADPARE ceased to be just a support service provider. Thanks to the very close relationships between beneficiaries and the association staff, to the fact that these ones always find time to listen and advise, sometimes psychological assistance is no longer seen as just a type of specialized services, with a clear and well-defined beginning and end.

„I never interrupted it [the psychological counselling[, I came to the girls whenever I needed to. There wasn't a time to say I don't need anything. I never felt the need to interrupt."

Sometimes, not only the victims, but also other family members (usually mother) attended the psychological counseling sessions. This type of counseling played a major role in creating a context aimed to overcome sensitive points in the relationship between mothers and daughters.
Out of a desire to protect their families, some respondents didn't tell them certain painful details related to the trafficking situation. However, participating in the discussions between psychologist and victim, when the girl finds the strength to speak openly and extensively about the traumas she suffered, the mother comes to learn things that would otherwise have remained unknown to her.

„She learned certain things I wouldn't have tell at home for fear of hurting her."

„Basically, my mother knows everything. Basically, I told her because I had to, perhaps she shouldn't have known some stuff; they hurt her, but that's it, she must know them. My mother came with me to counseling."

„While I was in relation with that man, I started to get distant my family, I didn't want to hurt them telling about the threats. And I tried to get away from them, to avoid involving them in, making them suffer."
In turn her, the victim-daughter learns about her mother's state of mind, the drama she has experienced as a result of her sufferings

„I may not have find out some of Mommy's feelings or fears, but coming here together I understood them properly. Maybe because we were going through this counseling together, and I felt better because I was talking exactly about what happened to me."

„That way we could sit and listen to each other, and I could understand how she felt while I was there. On the other hand, she could understand what I went through, because I know it was a shock to her. And along the way she found out some things that, at home, I couldn't tell straight to her or to anyone else."

Psychotherapy is instrumental in reconnecting victims and their families; for its part, family counseling creates an extremely conducive framework for rapprochement between them.

„Thanks to the psychologist, I was able to reconnect with my father and get along well with him before he died. He died in June, I had started talking to him and having again a very good relationship in May. And this thanks to the psychologist."

„That's how we were able to take back the connection we had, as friends who were telling each other everything, with no secrets, to rebuild that trust we had in each other."

„If I got along with my mother, not exactly 100%, if I got along with her, let's say at 50%, with the help of ADPARE I managed to get along with her somewhere around 55-60%. Actually, the percentage is much higher. The difference is relatively small but very important. I perceived it."

In this process, the position and role of the psychologist is undergoing a major transformation - confidently invested by both parties and holder of very sensitive information, he is no longer seen as a facilitator of discussions, a link between participants in the counseling session, but is assimilated to a family member to whom nothing is hidden, he becomes „one of ours".

„She helped us get closer. If this would have taken place at home, maybe we tried to reconnect, maybe we would have succeeded, but is very likely I wouldn't tell her the whole story. I might have avoided some issues or skip something. And maybe if it wasn't for the psychologist, she wouldn't have found out, but this way we were among ourselves."

Educational assistance

For many victims, the desire to start or resume their studies and find a job is very strong. Their motivation is different, but most of the time working or studying and finding then a job in line with their qualification are seen as attributes of normalcy, of social integration or reintegration.
The educational assistance provided by ADPARE took various forms, depending on the needs of victims, from enrollment/re-enrollment in the formal education system, purchasing school supplies, tutoring and homework support to payment of university fees and professional qualification or retraining courses.

„I really wanted to go back to school. But I heard that's not possible of resuming school and I didn't know either that there are part-time or evening schools. And looking around and talking to ADPARE we found a solution to my desire. And for a moment I got wow... it's possible!"

„They helped me in many respects, they helped me when I was in school, they even did tutoring classes with me."

„I also got help with my homework. Before I started to attend school at Gara de Nord, a volunteer helped me with my homework, he helped me with the multiplication table".

To finish well another school year is an extremely important personal success for many of the victims. It is an indicator of self-confidence, a proof that they are about to strike a balance with themselves and rebel against the family environment and its values. Passing from one grade to the

next, the completion of studies is a hard-fought victory, the result of a struggle crowned with an increase in self-esteem and a big step toward independence.

„I managed to finish these four grades, it is not much, but I did it! And next year I'll finish the fifth! There is nothing better than that, to be not stupid, because being an uneducated man is the most horrible thing. People look at you ... I feel, I felt this since I was a little kid. When I was begging, people looked at me with a kind of ... <Look at her, this scum, why doesn't she go to school? Look how stupid she is, coming to beg!> I felt like shit and the world didn't understand that. The world being my mother. That world was revolving around traditions, pride, virginity. I had a different mentality, maybe I was born wrong, in a family I didn't belong."

„School… I decided to finish it. There is nothing more pleasant than accomplishing a step and knowing that is coming another one. Gosh, I feel like crying. It's the most beautiful thing my mother will never understand. Never. You can't change a culture, a whole mentality."

„Look at me, I succeeded and I finished the 12th and 13th grade. I was among the first in my evening class. I was praised by all teachers, by the principal! No one ever imagined that I could do this after 13 years of… But I liked doing it. Everyone, at school and at work, sees me as a role model. They told me, you, girl, how can you do all these, house, job and so on? And look, I did what others haven't done in a lifetime. I could do it."

In their answers, the people who benefited from the educational assistance to continue their post-secondary or university studies insist on some different but complementary aspects. On one hand, they mention that without the financial assistance provided by ADPARE, which actually paid for the tuition fees and various necessary materials and equipment, such an endeavour would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible at the time.

„They paid tuition fees for the post-secondary school that I couldn't afford even if I worked at that time."

„I was accepted in college, but had to pay the fees and was a little disappointed. I was thinking how to get so much money, how to make it, and they supported me with that as well. They cover my first year of college as well as the rent in a private dormitory. I mean, for a year I was secured in terms of accommodation and schooling. It is not small at all, on the contrary."

„Materially speaking, it was a help in that I bought a lot of things I need in college, a surgical suit, a stethoscope, drugs, stuff ... It was a big help."

On the other hand, besides the financial aspect, for these beneficiaries it mattered a lot the encouraging from ADPARE team, the trust invested in them; they appreciated the insistence, if not pressure, these social workers put on them not to give up.

„When I heard I could go to college, I thought, why not? They encouraged me and offered me this option to go to college, told me they could actually help me throughout the college... And I took the exam, I passes it with flying colors, I was very motivated. I felt that it wasn't that bad, that I could go on, that it wasn't over. But if it weren't for these people, I wouldn't do it alone. And I think that was the first impulse that ADPARE gave me".

„What I liked most was that they were on my head and pushed me to go to school, it was their ambition to see me going on, to overcome that moment, to succeed and do something with my life. If they were people who didn't care about the victims, they would leave me alone, well, I told her once, twice… But ADPARE pestered me for almost a year, come on, come on."

Qualification courses are a substantial part of the package of support services that ADPARE provided to victims, and some of the research subjects have benefited from them. No matter what courses they attended, these persons insist that, although they have always consulted with the ADPARE team, they had the last word in choosing the courses matching their desires and interests.
„Thanks to the courses I took with the help of ADPARE, I managed to improve my skills as a manicurist. I chose it, I have done this many years ago and I thought to continue. It was my hobby since I was a kid and I improved a lot."

„I chose this course, there were several on the list. I chose to do what I always liked - a trade worker, I did it, I have a diploma that helped me to get hired more easily a saleswoman, that's I've done for years. The course was financially covered by ADPARE, they paid, they took care of everything."

„At some point a social worker told me that there are some qualification courses, that the association sends girls to do some courses, to reintegrate into society. And she asked me, are you interested? And I said yes. And she asked me - what do you want? She put a whole list of courses in front of me. And I saw „cook". I found it interesting because I have been cooking since I was 10. And I learned to cook, I specialized myself in cooking."

„The people from ADPARE offered me a pizza-maker course, I went there, I graduated, I got my diploma and I liked it very much. I told them that if there are more courses in the future, I would be willing to participate."

„I did a manicure/pedicure course. I find it useful because I did something that caught my attention and because I was able to get faster over my problem. And I got a diploma. I could get employed right after that course."

„I am currently enrolled in a course for flight attendants and if it is OK I will probably have one more year to focus on my job. I will start attending the aviation school in March. The case manager helped me get to this school."

In addition to paying for various qualification courses, ADPARE helped some respondents to find jobs or provided the necessary equipment needed to start a small personal business according to their training. For these people, to have a job, apart from the financial stability it brings, was a goal in itself, a step towards normalcy, a landmark of reintegration.

„I told them that most of all I wanted to work and I pestered the life out of them. And their response was positive."

„I felt I was walking on the right path. (...) I got a job and now I'm on my feet. I'm very happy with the job, I've been waiting for a long time to start working, I like what I do, the team is OK, it's really OK."

There were even people who indicated without any hesitation the educational assistance and finding a job as the most rewarding moments in the entire assistance program.

„The most rewarding was when I moved to the apartment and started to work."

„Undoubtedly, when I could get a job and go to school."

Getting in contact with public authorities was often intimidating and some of the victims felt the need for emotional support. They emphasize that without ADPARE mediating the relations with various institutions, training providers or employers, and especially without the physical presence of social workers throughout the reintegration efforts, the chances of success would have been greatly reduced.

„I really appreciated that I wasn't alone, that I was supported by the people who sent me."

„It mattered a lot that they went with me everywhere, I don't know, maybe I could handle it somehow, but that way I felt better with them next to me".

„As far as the work is concerned - I didn't know I could actually start from scratch. I couldn't see any opportunity. The first time I went for a job, I was supposed to have a job interview, and

someone from ADPARE joined me and told the employer what he needed to know, and as a result I was hired. At the next interview I went alone, but yes, this is the kind of support that always some of us need."

„They helped me very much in this respect too, not necessarily giving me money, food, medicine; but they came with me everywhere and helped me to get through."

Legal assistance

Although they are informed since the first meetings on their rights, including the right to file a complaint against traffickers and the possibility of receiving legal assistance and advice from ADPARE lawyers, victims do not always decide to resort to it. Or not in the first stages of the assistance process, when other types of specialized services provided by the association are more important to them. It should be noted that sometimes this initial denial is caused by some previous disappointing experiences with certain law enforcement institutions in the destination countries, although not necessarily with the justice system, and/or by distrust of the Romanian judicial system.

„Initially I refused, I had that kind of hatred of the English system and of the Romanian system. Why should I get into this since it doesn't work out?"

To file a complaint against traffickers and implicitly to follow then all criminal proceedings, including confrontation with them or their representatives at some point, is first and foremost a courageous act; however, it involves financial and emotional costs. Those victims who have chosen to take this step highly appreciate the legal assistance provided by ADPARE lawyers. As the interviews clearly show, in addition to the technical aspects of representation by a lawyer, for them the moral support they received from her/him and ADPARE members played an extremely important role.

„I was provided a lawyer. And when I needed a lawyer at DIICOT, they volunteered for me. He went with me to DIICOT, together with a policeman, both of them helped me. And the lawyer helped me with statements, when I couldn't handle it, she was next to me. And at DIICOT that mattere; it mattered quite a lot, in many respects, that she got involved, she stepped in. I liked that."

„The ADPARE lawyer took over the case, she went with me to the police, she advised me, I did all the steps ... that means a lot."

„I felt kind of happy last time when I went to C. with the lawyer and Mrs. prosecutor told me that the case is moving on. I was pleased to see the effort to move the case forward. And I was able to talk to someone and learn some things I didn't know or didn't understand how to carry out."

„I feel like I have someone to support me, to protect my rights, it just takes time."

„The fact that we were offered lawyers, that someone took care of us, that someone expressed an interest for our case, the fact that from time to time I called the case manager and talked about this or told her what bothered me, or what was going on at home, it was very, very useful for me. (...) And when the association ensured me that something can be done in this regard, the simple the fact that we had someone behind us, whom we knew is on our side, is helping us, is with us, gave me the force to move on and keep fighting."

The memory of sufferings they went through during exploitation, understanding that what happened to them is not an isolated case, that the traffickers will continue to do the same harm and other people will be subjected to the same humiliations, is most often the reason why victims are determined to go all the way in their fight against the traffickers.

„I said that the main reason is not revenge, all I want is to stop other girls, other people, since there are also boys, going through what I had to."

„I hope that the case will be reopened, as has happened in many other cases. I hope that they will be jailed, because it does not seem fair to me to leave traffickers at large. Because they can ruin the lives of many people."

„I said so: I want him to pay for what he did to me. Lord gave me days and I survived, but maybe someone else didn't."

„All we are waiting for is justice. This is what we have been waiting for 6 years. And in the meantime, other girls may have suffered."

Very often, the long, difficult trial and the slowness of procedures generate frustrations and deepen the feeling of distrust in justice.

„In our country, justice takes a step back, it deals with much more... minor things."

„Our law is a little slow. There is always something missing, a piece of evidence or a witness."

„I was disappointed anyway, a year had already passed, I was disappointed by the justice system in Romania."

Also, the countless hearings and statements they have to give to the authorities involve reliving extremely painful aspects from the trafficking situation, and the risk of re-victimization becomes increasingly obvious.

„We've been sent from one prosecutor to another, because the prosecutors have changed in our country, in Romania, we've been siting for hours at DIICOT. And you simply relive all that and it's not easy."

3. Assessment of the current situation and future plans in relation to the trafficking history

All participants in the research have a positive perception of the effects of assistance services. The trafficking episode represented a decisive moment in their existence, in relation to which their life is defined in terms of „before" and „after". That is why they often talk about a new beginning or an „entry into normalcy". It is a process in which the recovery of self-confidence and the reconstruction of self-image are the elements on which all interviewees insist.

„I started from scratch. I work, have a new life, I started it all over again, another boyfriend, another job, there are just small things missing but I will sort them out."

„I feel completely different, I would say I started my life from scratch; an accomplished person, with a normal job, with a normal schedule, I have time for all the things I have in mind."

„I could say another person, really."

„I am more confident in myself because it was the people who supported me, they all helped me get over it and regain my confidence."

„It's a normal life, as an employed person, with ups and downs regarding the job, like everyone else in nowadays Romania."

Between the first visit and the construction of a life project, a progressive transformation of these victims takes place. All respondents emphasize the key role ADPARE has played and, in most cases, continues to play in shaping their future plans and projects.

„Now it feels like I've come full circle, emotionally speaking. Lately I started to be successful both professionally, I have a steady job, college goes OK, actually is better and better, and

romantically, it is all good... Somehow I have a pleasant view of my current life and I feel more confident."

„Coming to ADPARE was like the rising sun, they helped me, I tried to leave everything behind, to stop thinking about what happened and to see things differently."

„The most important thing is that I've met them, that I stayed with them. And this helps me. And the fact that I take care of my life; without ADPARE I wouldn't have done a half of what I did."

Resuming the high school or university studies, interrupted due to the traffic episode, is a central element of the future plans of some victims. Although this proves to be sometimes difficult, due to their personal background or to administrative procedures, it is worth noting the emphasis that some respondents put on further education.

„It was my last year in college and I dropped out. The last semester. All I had to do was to take a few exams and submit my thesis. And I dropped out. Now I'm going to do my third year again. I mean, this would be the plan. But I'm going to finish college anyway. As a part-time student probably, I won't have enough time for more."

„I didn't feel ready to resume college studies this fall, I think I will do it next year. I had one more year and I would have graduate. The girls told me about going back to studies, but I didn't feel ready."
„I wanted to do it this year, but it was a little late. I wanted to find a high school, to study and pass my baccalaureate, but the registrations were over, I practically woke up late. I won't give up anyway."

Rebuilding self-identity and projecting into the future it is a process that involves first of all accepting the past, especially the status of victim, and reviewing the whole traumatic experience of trafficking. When they manage to do this, the result is for many of the victims an increase of self-confidence and the beginning of a process of empowerment, of regaining their independence.

„My great struggle has been with myself, for stability. I didn't want to break away from ADPARE, here I felt I was a new me, I regained some of my strength."

„Even if a bit late, I discovered in my life this independence side, as a responsible grownup."

„I try to accept my mistakes; however, I didn't give up on being a perfectionist. Every day I struggle with this, in everything I do. I like to get the best out of myself, because that's the only way I think I can go on."

„That was my biggest problem then, now I managed to overcome some fears and put more of my pain and frustration behind me. And I am glad that in a little while I will turn a year since I have my job."

„I don't think I'll ever be able to get through entirely. But the important thing is that it strengthened me, opened up new opportunities for me, push me to do more. It was like a motivation, although it was something negative, it turned me into a good person."

„I feel much more comfortable with myself because I accept my situation and I try to cope with it and I know what to avoid."

„The only thing that hurts me is that I'm not as I used to be. That I have changed myself 90%, physically and mentally and emotionally and spiritually. The only good thing in all that happened is that I became stronger and I'm not so naive anymore. I used to be a child and I thought that all the waves are upwards travelling. I'm more mature now, first I consider things from every angle and only then put them into practice. First I „read" a man and only afterwards..."

The victim-family relationship

Alongside the counseling and assistance provided by ADPARE, in the construction of these future projects a very important role is played by the family support and back up. When the family relationships prior to the trafficking episode were close, the trauma was very strongly felt not only by the victim, but also by those closest to her. Overcoming that event is a project of the entire family, supporting the victim is a measure of cohesion and participation of all members to her reintegration.

„I always had good relationships with my family, I've always been close to them. Our family relations didn't change at all. (....) They encouraged me to go to ADPARE."

„The relations really improved, we'll keep them tight and nothing will go wrong, that's sure. The episode is set aside and it will certainly not affect our future relations"

„The relationship with my mother, father, brother is all the same; we have a good relationship, I don't know if anything has changed. And if it has changed, it has changed for the better."

„My family is very pleased with the support of ADPARE and they are very satisfied with my progress so far. I talk to them every day, tell them what I do, when I do come here. Every time I return from the therapy sessions they ask me how it was, if I'm fine, if I feel good."

The already tense relations between the victim and the family were sometimes deepened by the trafficking episode and even resulting in a total break between them, especially when victims were sexually exploited. The fear that the family's reputation will be „stained" by the mere association with these young women, who already bear the stigma of prostitution, makes the family to ostracize them. In this context, for some of the young women interviewed, the various types of assistance provided by ADPARE, combined with their efforts to reintegrate, their perseverance and determination to overcome the critical situation they went through, brought not only really substantive results on professional level, but also had symbolic significance in the sense of regaining a different status, especially in relation to the family. The fractured relationships are restored; they are improving constantly.

„The relationships with my family were torn apart before I was trafficked, during trafficking they worsened, they no longer wanted to see me at all. Now that they've seen I had ADPARE support and I graduated high school and I began doing something, we are very tight and I have their support too. (...) ADPARE advised me to do something thing, to finish my high school and move on, and the family came next to me, they were the ones looking for me, to help me."

„My relations with the family have already started to improve, they are already proud I am attending this school. They are proud that I have a normal job, they are proud I can go out with them. Before, they didn't even want to hear about me, they didn't want to go out with me, now they are really looking for me: listen, I'm coming to B., do you want to meet for a chat? My cousins, who are younger than me but they are in college, started to help me; they told me, if you need books or so, just let us know and we will help you. So, much better than before. It improves over time."

„The relationship with my family has changed a lot. I had a very happy childhood with my family and now we have a very good relationship, I mean, a very open one. At some point we stopped talking, the communication between us broke down. However, gradually I started to tell them what I went through - this after a while, I needed some time, it was a transition; since then we have a much more open relationship, better and more harmonious. Things have improved tremendously."

Most often, respondents mostly talk about improved relationships with their mothers.

„Now I'm closer to my mother than before."

„With each passing day it improves. Because I'm more open with her, I don't hide things anymore, maybe for a moment I say, let it go, but after an hour I tell her, look that's how the situation really is. It's like having such a... rather than tell a friend and get a wrong advice, I better ask mom and she gives me the right advice. Now she trusts me. (...) Before this, I was hiding some things, I used

to lie to her a lot. Now I am telling her everything, absolutely everything, sometimes I consider her my best friend."

„The relationship with my mother improved - I can have a conversation with her. I didn't open up to my mother, I couldn't talk to her because of certain circumstances, but in the meantime situation changed. And I understood why I look at her differently. In addition, I started to go my own way and I shouldn't depend on anything or anyone."

However, there have been cases when victims have reduced to a minimum their connections with the family or refused to get in contact with it, and sometimes even excluded it from their lives. The reasons are often related to the family context and to the role its members played in trafficking, but also to the lack of support when she asked for and needed the most.

„I don't allow my family to get closer, because I don't want them to influence me, I don't want them to dig into my life. We stay together for a few hours, we talk, laugh, joke, but that's it."

„I think it's OK like this, to talk, eat together, help each other in case anything happens, but I don't like to depend on them or they to depend on me."

„I have nothing to do with my family since I left home. I don't want to talk to my mother ... I'll try to call her, tell her I'm fine and to leave me alone. I really don't need any help from her, because when I needed it, she wasn't there. It was ADPARE next to me, they helped me move forward, encouraged me to continue my studies despite many failures. In respect to my future, ADPARE helps me a lot more than my mother."

„I no longer think I have a mother or father, because when I came here I didn't have anyone. I consider that my parents are gone. At the age of 12 I left home and they didn't want to help me. (...) The relationship is broken. Honestly, I really wanted to and I tried to keep in touch with them, but at one point I said no. I also asked them to help me, they didn't want to, and I said that there was no point in talking to them or asking them to help me, because all they did was to hurt me. ADPARE were always next to me, when I needed something they never said no."

The social support network

As all participants in the research state, the assistance provided by ADPARE, backed-up at times by that of the family, was essential at every stage of their reintegration journey, of returning to a more or less normal life, but rebuilt according to their desires and options. For some of them, a very important role in this process was also played by the support, most often moral, they received from friends, colleagues or other close people. The old friendships, if there have been, were in certain cases broken as a consequence of the trafficking episode, and the victims either no longer

trusted those around them or feared that because of it they would be marginalized and excluded from their previous entourages. Therefore, to ask for friend support of meant an act of courage on their part, since they found the necessary strength to talk about what they went through and take all risks.

„In addition to the counselling sessions at ADPARE, I had some friends who were with me and helped me a lot. I used to be rejected in the community, oh, look at that one who went to G. and so on; and at moment I actually couldn't stand it anymore. And I called some friends and told them, please help me because I'm ruining my life indefinitely. And they understood and now we are all OK."

„I've met in college some colleagues older than me and I got attached to them, and we stay in touch. Teachers, especially a priest teacher, who is also a social worker, helped me a lot. There have been established certain connections that made me see everything much clearer - if you want something and you're not alone, then..."

„My friend A., whom I met when I started high school, was constantly with me. Every time I felt the need to talk to someone, she was there and I could call her at any time, she would listen to me, she would advise me to a greater or lesser extent."

However, in the absence of a family or a circle of friends to provide them with material and especially emotional support, sometimes respondents give the family status to ADPARE's team of counselors.

„There was no family when I came to ADPARE. (...) That's why I always tried to find a family among the people around me. And it's quite difficult with people, because if you get too attached, not everyone is willing to give you that family atmosphere. And being aware of that stuff, that I was losing friends, relatives, I focused more on the people from the organization; they are people with me, they help me to go on with my studies, my job."

„The family didn't have the slightest idea where I lived, my only friends were ADPARE, with them I communicated all the time."

„ADPARE is like a family to me, I need advice, I ask for it, I need guidance, I receive it warmly, I mean, here no one yells at you, they explain things to you. They're not like my folks back home who just say no. ADPARE explains to you, this is the situation, it can happen the following. Now, it's up to you, choice is yours."

Even when they have a family, some respondents come to regard the ADPARE social workers as members of their extended family.

„My only friends are my mother, father, brother, sister-in-law and nephew, and the people from ADPARE. They are the ones supported me, understood me, backed me up emotionally, they never rebuked me."

It should be emphasized that most of the interviewed victims show a certain reluctance when it comes to making new friends. Some of them talk about a very small number of old friends with whom they continue to keep in touch after the trafficking case, but most often than not they prove to be cautious about new friends.

„I don't want friends. My friends are ADPARE and my husband. And my parents - well, they are far away. But not the others."

In this context where the ADPARE team is simultaneously perceived as family and professionals who have to deal with a very diverse range of persons, each of them with specific problems, many respondents point out the challenges of ADPARE daily work and express their gratitude for the efforts the social workers put in.

„I consider them more than my family, these are people with whom I cried, laughed, got angry, lived through wonderful things, rejoiced and so on. And many times I feel sorry for them and for their permissiveness. I'm sorry they can't speak up freely and have to shut up, and I'm sorry that not everyone is grateful for what they got. After all, neither your mom, nor your father helped you and did the things some people, who simply shouldn't care knowing your bad character, are doing for you."

„I don't know if I would have their patience they had; here I found out how you have to behave for things to go well. You don't want to look like you are not concerned by the person in front of you, but at the same time you don't want to put too much strain on hem, to smother her, because that makes her move away from you."

„Honestly, I don't know if I would have had so much patience to discover a person."

„The services are very good and I think they paid off with most beneficiaries, and somehow ADPARE should be rewarded for what they do because they are people who have patience and know how to solve any problem of any beneficiary."

The analysis of the interviews reveals a very interesting aspect that falls into the same register of „gratitude" – victims' desire to support in their turn the assistance projects, to help other people who passed through similar situations to those they confronted with.

„Since my junior year in college and my first year at ADPARE, I wanted to do something, I don't know, like in a family, when you help a child and the child wants to reward you, to get the best out of him to thank you. And this was quite difficult because I got stuck. I wanted to do something, I but couldn't..."

„I really want to help people who have been in situations like mine and it is very difficult for them to recover, to continue their lives. And, why not, to give some advice to those I know, to try to help them, to tell them to take some precautions."

„When I got to know them better I really wanted to help them, when I saw what disadvantage girls were coming I donated half of my clothes here. I mean, I wanted to help, as they did for me, I wanted to help other people in my turn."

Most of the victims find it very difficult to talk about the experience of trafficking and, inherently, avoid as much as possible any discussion on this topic outside the ADPARE center.

„I can't say I want to talk about this. (...) Here I can talk about the event, but somewhere else wouldn't have liked to be asked for details. Or no more than the ones I wanted to give."
„I talked to a couple of friends, but still very little. I didn't feel the need to detail or insist on a subject that I don't like."

However, despite the fact that recalling the trafficking experience will never be anything but traumatic, some of them believe that sharing the situation they went through is both a way to support ADPARE's assistance efforts and a red flag for other girls. Projected in a nearer or more distant time horizon, according to the context and mental state of each victim, the account of her own experience, with all its avatar of trauma, is seen as a personal contribution to the trafficking prevention activities.

„Maybe at some point, I'll tell it, yes. To give it as an example, probably, but only when I'm ready. And that person will be able to understand my situation."

„It's still a topic out of my reach. A coworker told me about what happened to her friend and that she told about this only to a few people; and I replied, look, I also felt how your friend feels and my advice to her is to do that. But I didn't give any details. All I said it was, look, I felt these things, in a way I lived something of what she lives, but I didn't think appropriate to tell more. And I would do it only for some people who have been through this. If I met a person who would tell me, look what happened to me and look what I went through, I think at that point I would be willing to tell her what I did, how I acted afterwards, about the help I received and to advise her: look, you could also look for such help."

„I would like to help someone else, to say what I went through so other girls to avoid going through the same shit. Maybe other girls could at some point help them too, to tell us their experiences and maybe we wouldn't get into the same troubles. I would like to talk to some girls and tell them, maybe not necessarily that it was my story, but, that's what happened to a girl so be careful; and if it happens you to go through something like this that's how you have to react. (...) The community police told me that there were other girls who filed a complaint and then withdrew it. I think that if those girls who had already filed a complaint against the trafficker wouldn't have withdrawn it, especially since there were two of them and both minor, I was more likely to be believed. Maybe he wouldn't have harmed me or other girls after me. That's why I wanted to go on with the trial, I wanted justice. And see no more victims".

„I wouldn't tell anyone. But I would share my story with people who would be better knowing it. Want I want to say is that if there were girls in difficult situations or in danger, and if I knew it would help them and they could get out of it, that it would be useful to them, yes, I would tell; I would feel better to talk to them about it"

Sometimes victims find the strength to speak openly about the situation they faced and to use their own experiences as an example to better illustrate the dangers of trafficking in human beings.
„If I'm asked what happened to me, I'll tell it without any problem. Only when I get to DIICOT and they start asking some questions, to go deeper inside, there are some bleeding wounds and when you touch them they bleed worse. But basically I can talk about it, no problem."

„I have not much trouble to talking about what happened to me, on the contrary, it's really easy for me. I believe that if I'm telling this to a guy, he might think, well, there's something in there... I think he maybe catches the idea, he accepts it, maybe he's more aware, look, that's a fact, it happened, so this problem really exists."

„In the sophomore year, I used my case for a project. And it was very easy for me to admit this in front of my colleagues."

More than that, as a result of the psychological assistance and counseling and using information received from ADPARE, certain victims become themselves „counselors" on trauma management for their acquaintances.

„I have a friend who, by the summer, laughed at me, and the same happened to her, except that she was not taken abroad. Now I get along really well with her, whatever advice I get at ADPARE I share with her, because she rarely goes to a psychologist. I advised her to look for a proper job. We help each other."

However different in many respects, these young women still have something in common - the traffic episode. In opinion of some of them, talking about their past, sharing their experiences, emotions and the way they manage to overcome the event is a different kind of therapy, another way to strengthen self-confidence.

„I think it would be nice and beneficial to organize some meetings with the beneficiaries as to get to know each other. Somehow each beneficiary has a more or less ugly story. I don't know if the others went through the same situation, I imagined that my case was the worst, that I went through the worst. And maybe if I listened to other stories I would see that maybe it wasn't me the one who suffered the worst. I would think differently; it would help me."
„After I saw other cases I thought that, actually, I should be grateful that I'm OK. That, God forbid, others were going through even worse experiences than me and that I don't have to judge and be mean as I used to be..."

„I would like to socialize with people who have gone through what I went through, so we can learn of other situations when girls didn't make it, that something much worse has happened to them. I would like to find out about other cases, because that's how we realize how lucky we are to be alive despite the sequelae and trauma."
„Maybe in this way I would feel confident that, compared to other girls, I did the right thing. That I had the chance to run away from there, that I was luckier, I had the chance not to be exploited abroad; I would muster up some courage, since there are other girls who have gone through something similar too. And do not feel so ashamed or afraid that I am not the only one…."

Interviews show that all victims greatly appreciate the services they have received according to the specific needs and situations they faced. First of all, many of them were surprised by the existence of such specialized assistance providers like ADPARE. This fact must be stressed since it raises questions on information and awareness level about trafficking among young people.

„At first I didn't really understand what was going on, not that I didn't believe it, but it seemed very hard to think that there are people who do good things for purely selfless reasons. When you come across so much insensitivity, dehumanization, it is very hard to believe that there still are people who help you without wanting something in return."

„I didn't imagine that there could be such an institution, after all I have lived before."

„It was something unexpected, in a good and positive way, that is, I didn't expect to come here and discover that they are trying to do some things for me. I was amazed, in a positive way."
With no exception, all respondents are grateful for the help and protection they received, but especially for the fact that they were listened to and taken as they are, supported to build up and

follow their plans, to fulfill their wishes insofar as they depended on the possibilities of the organization.

„In my situation it was not possible to do more. In my case, they have done everything they could, they helped me a lot. You can't ask for more than that. Whoever comes to ADPARE will make it for sure, it is enough that person to want to be helped. And not to lie, not to hide things because it isn't good either for her or for ADPARE, it slows things down. To tell what happened and to assume the mistake they made."

„Not even my parents could have helped me more."

„They did what I wanted, pretty much. I mean, there was nothing I asked for and they said no. I talked to them, if it is possible, OK, if it isn't, fine again. But they never told me it was impossible. That's the idea. I don't think I could do this for a person what they did for me."

„Never happened to need something, to have a specific need, and get not support. Their services cover almost everything. I received even the most difficult thing - emotional comfort. Even that I got. ADPARE not only offers a program, but also knows how to approach someone, to motivate a person, to make her to trust them. They cover almost everything".

„They offered me everything they could, I was aware that there were things that were not in their power to fulfill by then. I was happy with what the services I was offered and I still receive. We have to appreciate what is being offered to us at the moment. Sometimes the financial support can't solve everything."

Evaluation of assistance services for victims' reintegration is a difficult process when considering the results exclusively in terms of independence and autonomy, employment or school reinsertion, access to housing or social services. However important they may be, they cannot be considered a measure of a „successful" or „failed" reintegration because this involves aspects that are much more difficult to quantify, such as reconfiguring a personal space, creating a sociability structure in which each victim builds/reconstructs his or her own identity.
Depending on the previous experiences and personal circumstances, respondents provide different answers that summarize the positive results of the assistance process, but have one thing in common - identity recovery.

„For me, the culmination was when I had the strength to stop meeting again that man, to do something for myself, to realize that I have potential and I've left some things undone. And I said, well, if I was able to take them to a point, it means that from now on I must take them further!"

„I'm super happy! ADPARE taught me to create a personality, to know how to say no when it's time to say no."

„What I liked most was that they taught me what is good and what is bad. Meaning, to put things aside and go in the right direction, not in the wrong one."

The manner one of the victims describes ADPARE's work in the field of assistance area and the way she perceives the services provided may work as a general conclusion of the current research:

„You have a very difficult task, it involves a great responsibility because it is really hard to adjust yourself to each person, to mold to what each one has lived, to know how to talk to each person and to listen to them. and take care of that person's sensitivity. I wouldn't change anything that I was offered so far. I appreciate everything, from the warm welcome to the manner of handling critical situations. I don't know what to say. To me, everything you do renders me speechless. Because it's more than I could have ever imagined. And on the top of that, whenever I come here to settle some stuff, something amazing happens: the case manager always thanks me for doing this!"

Conclusions and recommendations

From the interviews can be drawn a series of very important observations regarding certain vulnerability factors that enhance the risk of trafficking - the level of education and the economic condition of victims/families.

With very few exceptions, the educational level of the interviewees ranges from secondary education to upper secondary and higher education (including master degree). About 50% of the respondents fall into the last category. With this in mind, it becomes difficult to make a direct correlation between the level of education and the risk of becoming a victim of trafficking.
A low level of education may still be a vulnerability factor, but its share has decreased significantly especially given that traffickers use subtler methods of recruitment based on elements other than victims' lack of information or knowledge.
The same goes for the material condition of the family, which has often been presented as a very important factor in the dynamics of the trafficking phenomenon. It does not seem to play the same decisive role for many respondents. A good number of them come from families who, according to their own statements, didn't have material or financial problems and continue to have a standard of living often above average. Even those who talk about the precarious financial situation of the family do not indicate poverty or low income as factors that have increased the risk of trafficking.

On the other hand, the poor family relations marked decisively the road to exploitation of almost all interviewed victims. The lack of affection and emotional support, the lack of communication with other family members had the greatest impact on them. In many cases, parents were only physically present, unable to observe and respond to their children's need for affection and dialogue. Already fragile, some of the victims looked outside the family for what it could not offer emotionally and it's been a little easier to fell prey to traffickers. For them, the trafficking episode has exacerbated this pre-existing state of affairs, and the assistance provided by ADPARE, especially counseling and psychological assistance, matched this huge need. ADPARE gives them a „home" [in Romanian, ACASA] feeling, makes them feel safe, the association becomes the family they always wanted.

The community's attitude towards the victim still remains a factor that hampers her reintegration. The lack of information on trafficking in general and on the specific context in which it took place for each victim, equating trafficking with prostitution - an immediately reprehensible and disgraceful phenomenon to those associated with it – at community level result in victims' stigmatization and marginalization; they are even considered guilty and blamed for what happened to them. All these exacerbate the trafficking trauma and heightens victims distrust and suspicion of the specialized service providers.

Added to this are the attitude and behavior of local authorities who come into direct contact with victims of trafficking in human beings. Increasing skills and knowledge of these specialists in the field of victims support services remains a priority.

Victims' evaluation of the specialized assistance services provided by ADPARE should be seen against the conclusions of the „*Analysis of support services for victims of human trafficking*"[5] (2015), a study coordinated by the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons. The aim of that study was the assessment of the national assistance system for victims of trafficking according to the Specific Standards for Specialized Assistance Services provided to victims of trafficking by Government Decision no. 1238/2007 and through international standards and best practices. In this case, the group of respondents consisted mainly of representatives of public authorities at central and local level with responsibilities in the field of victims' assistance and representatives of non-governmental organizations providing specialized services.

In terms of *residential assistance,* the report states that „a first problem identified by the present research, with reference to the centres established under Law No. 678/2001 is the lack of „stability" in time of the assistance centres and of the services provided. (…) We cannot speak of an actual residential assistance to facilitate the social reintegration of victim".[6]

„The majority of interviewed specialists, regardless we refer to representatives of public authorities or of NGOs, consider that the *medical assistance* offered to adult victims of human trafficking is carried out with difficultly. The main causes are the absence of a valid health insurance, sometimes the absence of identification documents, corroborated with the absence of funds allocated for this

[5] Available at http://www.anitp.mai.gov.ro/ro/docs/Cercetare/Analize/Ro20/Analysis%20of%20support.pdf
[6] Ibidem, pp. 31-32

aspect. (…) Access to medical services is conditioned either by the support offered by various non-government organizations, either by the network of informal relations developed locally by the personnel involved in assisting victims.

Moreover, free access to a series of basic medical investigations is not stipulated anywhere. Either we refer to testing for sexually transmitted diseases, either to other diseases for which these persons are at risk, such as tuberculosis, access to such investigations is difficult and lacking continuity."[7]

„The victim's *psychological assistance* can be covered for a short period of time, but problems can occur in accessing this service for a longer period. Reasons relate to the lack of resources. (…) Moreover, in the case of psychological evaluations for courts of law, difficulties occur due to the lack of DGASPC personnel accreditations."[8]

„*Material assistance* (clothing and footwear, hygiene products, school supplies etc.) can be provided at a minimum level, for a short period of time. If the victim is under residential assistance, either we are talking about assisting the trafficking victims in specific centres or specialized structures for other categories of beneficiaries, food, clothing and hygiene products are guaranteed. However, if the victim is assisted at home, in most cases, there are no funds to ensure these products. Given that in any institution that participated in this study here is no emergency fund for the victims of human trafficking, there may be problems in the provision of material assistance."[9]

„There are no funds or services dedicated to special legal assistance for victims of human trafficking, excluding the services provided by the non-governmental organizations involved in this field. In addition, in most cases, victims are assisted in court by *ex officio* lawyers, if the victim is part in a criminal trial. This means that there is no continuity in assisting the victim (by the same lawyer) and there is no time assigned for the legal counselling of the victim (by the lawyer who is assisting the victim), preliminary to the victim's participation to the hearing."[10]

„The chances of a victim of human trafficking to access qualification courses are low, due to the lack of designated programs."[11]

[7] *Ibidem*, pp. 33-34
[8] *Ibidem*, p. 35
[9] *Ibidem*, p. 36
[10] *Ibidem*, p. 37
[11] *Idem*

Recommendations

General

1. Improving the identification of victims of trafficking in persons through training sessions for community law enforcement, with a focus on proactive identification measures.
2. Creating a crisis fund for protection and assistance to cover the immediate needs of victims.
3. Referring victims exclusively to providers of specialized protection and assistance services.
4. Outsourcing specialized protection and assistance services to non-governmental organizations with experience in the field.
5. Allocating individual budgets for victims' reintegration.
6. Carrying out continuous professional training programs for public and non-governmental service providers specialized in the field of protection and assistance of victims of trafficking in persons.
7. Improving the access to information provided by the authorities to victims of trafficking regarding the protection and assistance services.
8. Dissemination by the competent authorities of the good practice of non-governmental organizations active in the field of protection and assistance to victims of trafficking.

Just for us – ADPARE

1. Dissemination of the research results within the NRM and Transnational Referral Mechanisms.
2. Organizing training sessions for the community of non-governmental organizations involved in the protection and assistance of victims.
3. Organizing analysis and training sessions for ADPARE team members, specialists, collaborators and volunteers.
4. Reducing the degree of dependence of the victims on the assistance program and implicitly reducing the assistance time.
5. Establishing victim support groups.
6. Carrying out support groups for parents or people close to the victims.
7. Presenting the research results and recommendations to the *Working Group for monitoring the implementation of measures for the protection and assistance of victims of trafficking in persons and trafficking in minors* for the implementation of the National Strategy against Trafficking in Persons for the period 2018-2022.