

Life Beyond Trafficking: The Re/integration of Trafficked Persons in the Balkans 2007-2014. [Summary]

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In 2007 the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) set up the Trafficking Victims Re/integration Programme (TVRP), which ran until 2014 in Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Romania and Bulgaria until 2011. In addition to the financial support to 15 local NGOs for the implementation of long-term re/integration schemes, the TVRP has played a role in conceptualising the re/integration issue, sharing findings and experiences broadly through issue papers, workshops and trainings, and improving coordination among NGOs and governments. Over the course of the project, 1731 victims of trafficking were helped, or roughly 26% of identified victims in the region, approximately 60% of whom were successfully re/integrated. In addition, over 1190 secondary beneficiaries (normally the families of trafficking victims) received support. Most beneficiaries overall were female, though the proportion of male victims given support rose from just 10% in 2007 to 21.6% by 2014. The largest shift was to a focus on children: in 2007 less than a quarter of assisted cases were trafficked children, but by 2014 that had risen to 70%. Children, especially street children, were identified as particularly vulnerable and as even more difficult to re/integrate, so from 2012 the TVRP prioritised funding on NGOs with expertise in supporting young victims.

There are several key lessons learned from the TVRP. The primary factor in the programme's success was the long term focus of the programme and division into three phases: crisis intervention (0-3 months), transition (4-12 months), and re/integration/social inclusion (13-36 months). Another element was the programme's flexibility to individual NGO and victim needs, and a strong focus on empowering victims to develop skills that would contribute to their own long-term re/integration. In some cases this meant relocating the victims to new communities or new countries to provide the greatest chance at a successful re/integration. Support provided to secondary beneficiaries, such as families, was essential, as re/integrated victims often find communication with family difficult following exploitation. These solutions were reached after developing an understanding of the complex nature of re/integration.

A serious challenge faced by the programme was how to ensure that its successes could persist after the end of the TVRP. One of the most difficult areas has been the securing of sustainable sources of funds other than KBF or GIZ funds. Beyond just losing funds, there is worry that the NGO network might collapse without TVRP support. Despite this, the provision of care for victims of trafficking across the region has definitely been improved. Although the project has concluded, the Foundation continued to host workshops discussing lessons learned. Long-term socio-economic inclusion rather than simply short-term rehabilitation, they note, was the most critical factor in its success. The TVRP also developed a matrix manual for monitoring the work of NGOs, which can be used as a kind of guideline and resource for other NGOs hoping to learn from the experiences of the TVRP.