

Trafficking along Migration Routes to Europe

Bridging the Gap between
Migration, Asylum and Anti-Trafficking

Briefing Paper

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Photo credit: Roberto Forin, Idomeni transit camp, Greece, 2015.



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Executive summary

The years 2015-2016 saw an unprecedented increase in the numbers of people travelling by sea and overland along the migration routes to the European Union (EU), with almost one and a half million people irregularly entering EU countries.

This situation required frontline responders in these regions to be able to quickly **identify and refer potential victims of trafficking in human beings (THB)** among refugees, asylum applicants and migrants in an irregular situation. It also required the adoption of tailored **protection and rehabilitation programmes** for identified victims of trafficking among these people. This is particularly important for the protection of specific vulnerable groups, such as **unaccompanied and separated children**.

The TRAM research assessment aims to contribute to the establishment of a solid knowledge base on this crucially important issue. It examines the **incidence of trafficking in human beings and risk factors for THB** in the context of the Balkan route and in destination countries. It also looks at the **gaps, needs and challenges that exist in the identification, referral, protection and rehabilitation** of victims of trafficking.

The research found indications that trafficking and exploitation are a major cause of concern for people travelling along the Balkan route, yet the **number of identified victims remains extremely low**. The lack of statistical data is to a certain extent the result of a **vicious circle**, whereby if there is no evidence of trafficking cases among a certain group, the necessary resources are not mobilised to address trafficking and proactively identify cases, which in turn prevents the gathering of accurate statistics. The low number of identifications is also due to the lack of harmonisation and incorporation of anti-trafficking procedures into the first reception and asylum systems for new arrivals, leading to a **disconnect** between the two processes.

The research also highlighted that in the context of the Balkan route, trafficking is often **related to the migrant smuggling process**, with exploitation occurring due to people being in debt to smugglers, and due to smugglers requesting increasing amounts of money for their services. The complexity of differentiating between the two distinct phenomena of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings, and of understanding the points of convergence, contributes to making identification and referral procedures more difficult.

From a migration policy perspective, the research found that **increasingly restrictive border control policies and the lack of legal alternatives for onward movement** play into the hands of unscrupulous migrant smugglers, who use this opportunity to also perpetrate trafficking and other forms of exploitation, taking advantage of people's vulnerable situation.

In the area of protection and rehabilitation of identified victims, the assessment found that national anti-trafficking systems are still mostly geared towards responding to the **needs of particular categories of victims** – e.g., European or Sub-Saharan African adult women who are victims of sexual exploitation, or EU citizens who are victims of labour exploitation – and are therefore struggling to respond to the specific needs of trafficking victims with different profiles, such as people who have travelled along the Balkan route to the EU.

The research also highlighted that in the framework of existing protection and rehabilitation services for identified victims of trafficking, the **legal status** of trafficking victims is very often uncertain and remains linked to their cooperation in criminal proceedings. This situation discourages victims from seeking redress and accessing the long-term protection and rehabilitation services that they are entitled to, while also hampering anti-trafficking criminal investigations.

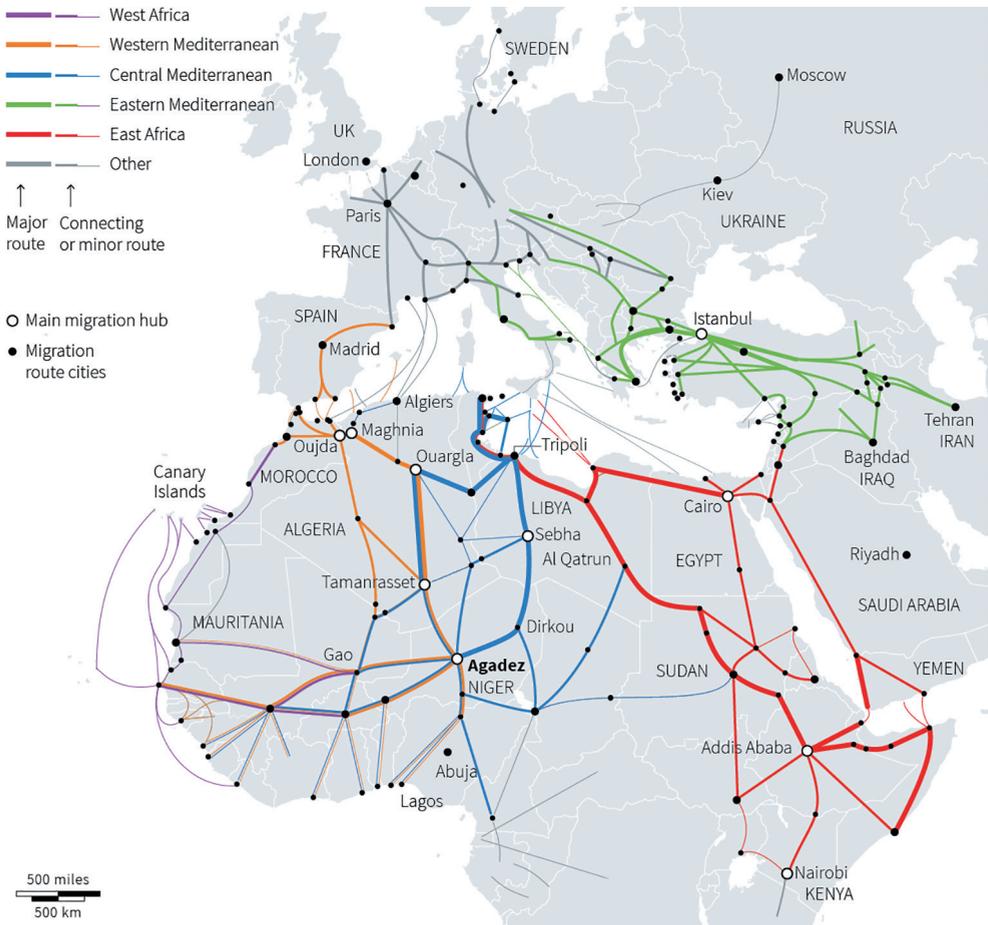


Figure 1: Main migration routes for irregular entry into the EU, 2015-2016

Source: Reuters Graphics (15.05.2014). Europe-Immigration/Niger Routes - Map showing migration routes from Africa to Europe. RTR3PB0F (SIN06).

1. Introduction

During 2015 and 2016, almost one and a half million people irregularly entered EU countries. Most took the “Eastern Mediterranean Route,” transiting from or through Turkey to Greece, and then from there travelled along the “Western Balkans Route” to Germany, Sweden, Austria and other EU countries (referred to throughout as the “Balkan route”). Both in the countries along the route and at destination, national authorities and other frontline responders found themselves quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of new arrivals. Border management, security, accommodation, provision of basic services and initiating asylum procedures became competing priorities, often in the context of a lack of sufficient human and financial resources.

Against this background, frontline responders also needed to be able to identify and refer potential trafficked people among those in transit and new arrivals. In order to do this, relevant frontline responders needed specific capacity and knowledge on trafficking in human beings (THB) affecting asylum applicants and migrants in an irregular situation, and knowledge on the risks of THB, yet this remained limited.

Furthermore, particularly in destination countries, programmes for the long-term protection and rehabilitation of trafficked people among asylum applicants and migrants are also still lacking. This is particularly problematic for specific vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

The project “Trafficking along Migration Routes (TRAM): Identification and Integration of Victims of Trafficking among Vulnerable Groups and Unaccompanied Children”, aims to address these issues¹. The project is organised in three work packages:

1. A research assessment examining indications of the incidence of trafficking in human beings and risk factors for THB in the context of the Balkan route and in selected destination countries, as well as the gaps, needs, challenges and good practices in the identification, referral, protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking among people using this route;
2. A training component on identification and referral for frontline responders, including an e-learning module, two national trainings in Bulgaria and Greece, and two webinars;
3. The development of local-level model strategic plans for the protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking among vulnerable populations in Germany, Finland and Sweden.

¹ The TRAM project is funded by the European Union (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund - AMIF) and co-funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, is being implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), in partnership with Terre des hommes (Tdh); the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat (CBSS); the Greek National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA); the Bulgarian National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB); and La Strada International (LSI).

TRAM research assessment

The research questions that the assessment addressed are:

- What are the risks of exploitation and trafficking for vulnerable migrants and refugees along the Balkan route, including unaccompanied and separated children?
- What are the gaps and training needs among frontline responders working along the route in identifying potential trafficking cases and responding appropriately?
- What are the gaps, needs and good practices in the protection and rehabilitation of trafficked people, including UASC?

The research was carried out in Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Serbia and Sweden. Between June and December 2017, the country researchers conducted a total of 159 interviews with research informants from State institutions, local authorities, national and international non-governmental organisations, academics and other relevant stakeholders.

The research applied an interdisciplinary methodology, combining primary research in the field with secondary desk research, as well as analysing qualitative and quantitative sources. Given the available timeframe and budgetary resources, the direct involvement of, and consultation with, the affected population – i.e., children, women and men on the move along the Mediterranean and Balkan routes or in destination countries – was not envisaged as part of the field research, as it would not have been possible to ensure their meaningful, safe and effective participation. While this choice brings limitations to the assessment, and should be taken as a caveat to the findings, it was not deemed to prevent the research from fulfilling its main objectives.

The country-level research findings, based on desk and field research for the eight countries, together with regional desk research, were compiled and analysed for the regional assessment. The draft report was discussed and validated in March 2018 during a multi-stakeholder seminar in Vienna attended by 55 participants from all eight countries covered by the research assessment.

This Briefing Paper sets out the main findings and recommendations of the TRAM regional assessment, which can be downloaded in full, including all references to field research and literature, at: www.icmpd.org.

2. Trafficking along migration routes to Europe

The importance of the topic of trafficking and exploitation in the context of mixed migratory movements has been acknowledged by several of the main anti-trafficking actors at European and international level.

Among the EU and European-level actors that have issued reports and commentary on risks of exploitation and trafficking in the context of the Balkan route are:

- the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Trafficking (GRETA, 2016);
- the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2017);
- the FAFO research institute (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2017);
- the Mixed Migration Platform (MMP, 2017);
- the EU-funded project TRACE on future socio-economic, political and criminal trends on trafficking in the EU (Weatherburn et al., 2015); and
- the German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings (K.O.K. e.V., 2017).

At international level, a number of actors have also highlighted the issue:

- the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in their 2016 Global Report (UNODC, 2016);
- an Issue Brief of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT, 2017);
- the International Organization for Migration's two Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevalence Indication Surveys (IOM, 2016 & 2017).

Specifically in relation to children, risks and vulnerabilities along the route have been highlighted by:

- the European Commission in a study on risk groups (2015) and a Communication on the protection of children in migration (2017);
- The Council of Europe's Thematic Report on migrant and refugee children by the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (CoE, 2017);
- Missing Children Europe (2017);
- IOM and UNICEF (2017);
- the two UN Special Rapporteurs on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse materials, and on trafficking in persons, especially women and children (UNGA, 2017); and
- the FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights and Harvard University (FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights & Harvard University, 2017).

However, there is limited empirical evidence on the issue, particularly in relation to people travelling along the Balkan route to the EU since 2015. There is a consensus in the literature that does exist around concerns over the incidence of trafficking and exploitation among people travelling along the Balkan route and in destination countries in the EU, as well as on a number of risk factors and vulnerabilities that may render migrants and refugees more prone to being trafficked and exploited.

In this context, several studies highlight how restrictive migration policies can contribute to increasing people's vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation, particularly for certain categories of people, such as migrants in an irregular situation and 'stranded' migrants. Children – especially unaccompanied and separated children – travelling as part of large migration flows have been recognised in the existing literature as particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Another common concern highlighted in the existing literature is the challenges to the identification of trafficked people among migrants, asylum applicants and refugees, often linked to a lack of clear national anti-trafficking guidelines or standard operating procedures in the context of first reception of new arrivals and transiting migrants, as well as in asylum procedures. Related to this, the conflation of migrant smuggling and human trafficking has also been indicated by several authors as hampering a proper understanding of trafficking and exploitation, representing a major challenge to the effective identification and referral of potential and presumed victims.

Due to the very low number of victims of trafficking formally identified among people who used the Balkan route and in the destination countries covered by the research assessment, the literature reviewed points to a significant knowledge gap, particularly on the topic of the protection and rehabilitation of identified victims of trafficking.

3. Incidence of trafficking in human beings and risk factors

In general, the countries covered by this assessment continue to mainly identify EU citizens who are victims of sexual and labour exploitation, and sub-Saharan Africans, particularly women, as trafficked persons. Very limited numbers of people who have used the Balkan route have been officially identified as victims of trafficking in human beings.

The main reasons why there are a very limited number of identified trafficking cases among people using the Balkan route include:

- challenges to identification due to the **disconnect** between asylum and migration actors and procedures, on the one hand, and anti-trafficking actors and procedures, on the other;
- in certain countries, the perception by migrants² and authorities alike that the country in question is only a **country of transit** and therefore it does not make sense for migrants to seek, or stakeholders to provide, support services;
- the fact that there is **insufficient evidence** available in order to determine whether a case constitutes trafficking in human beings; and
- the **vicious circle of a lack of statistics**, meaning that little attention is paid to the phenomenon and therefore there is little effort to identify cases that would lead to statistical evidence.

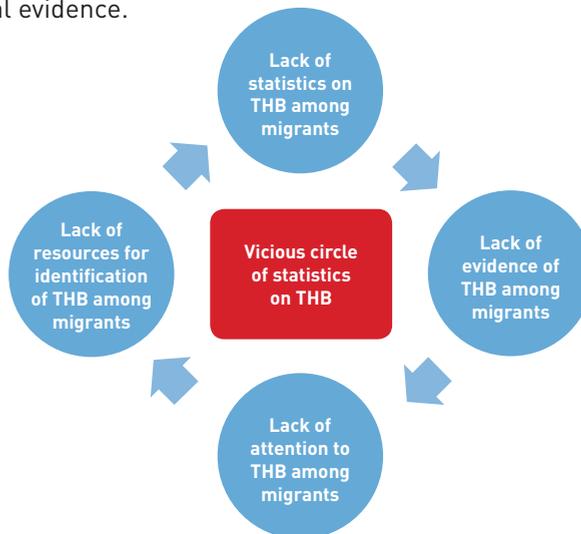


Figure 2: The vicious circle of statistics on THB among migrants

² “Migrants” is understood throughout this Briefing Paper as referring to all of those people who are on the move: asylum applicants, those who intend to apply for asylum, migrants (regardless of their status) and refugees, including adults, accompanied children and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

Despite the lack of data on THB in the context of the Balkan route from existing statistics and official investigations, the research assessment found a number of indications of THB and exploitation, mostly based on anecdotal evidence, which are helpful for a better understanding of recent and current dynamics along the Balkan route.

The main forms of trafficking emerging from the research are:

- **Sexual exploitation**, mainly affecting women and girls, but also boys and men, particularly Afghanis subjected to sexual exploitation as *bacha bazi*³. ‘Survival sex’ also seems to be a prevalent phenomenon, with adults and children in a situation where they have no alternative but to exchange sex for goods or services, or to engage in prostitution. It is often unclear whether cases of ‘survival sex’ also constitute sexual exploitation or sex trafficking.
- **Labour exploitation**, whereby people are in a desperate situation and without financial resources, and in many cases do not have the legal right to work, and some of them therefore end up in a situation of labour exploitation. Labour exploitation takes place in many different sectors, yet there is little awareness of this form of trafficking among the stakeholders in most of the countries covered by the assessment.
- **Forced criminality** is a form of trafficking that is also evident from the research, though it does not appear in the official statistics. Cases include exploitation in petty crime, drug dealing and migrant smuggling.

Furthermore, the research findings point to **two cross-cutting features of trafficking in this context**: its links to migrant smuggling and the incidence of exploitation in transit.

While migrant smuggling and human trafficking are distinct concepts and realities, in the context of the Balkan route, increasingly restrictive border control policies and the lack of legal alternatives for onward movement play into the hands of unscrupulous groups and individuals who offer migrant smuggling services and use this opportunity to also perpetrate trafficking and other forms of exploitation, taking advantage of the vulnerable situation of many migrants.

Most of the indications of trafficking and exploitation reported by interviewees in all countries covered by the assessment point to a connection between migrant smuggling services and trafficking and exploitation.

³ “Bacha bazi” refers to a practice involving young boys, who are dressed in women’s clothing and made to sing and dance at weddings and other parties in front of an all-male audience. The boys are often forced into sexual relations with older men. The practice occurs in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan (Aronowitz, 2016).

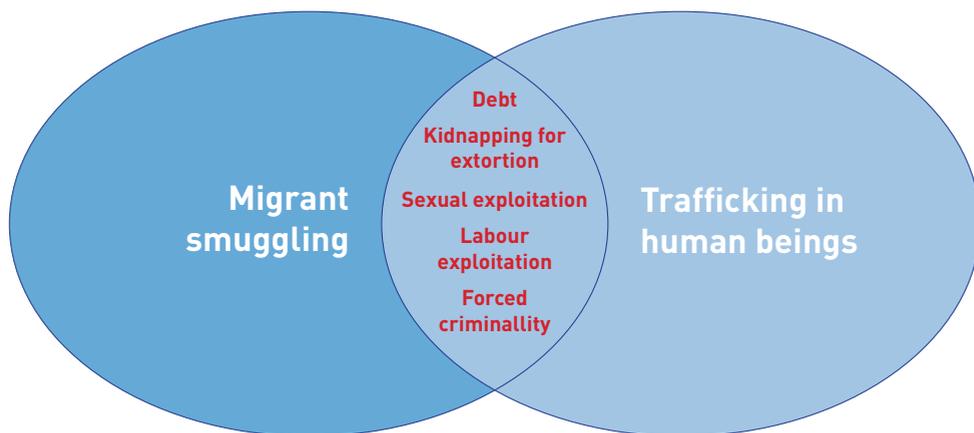


Figure 3: Relationship between migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in the context of the Balkan route

Many indications of trafficking and exploitation emerging from the research concerned cases that had taken place in the countries of origin or previous residence of the people concerned, or along the route, and not in the countries covered by the assessment, which also means that it is more difficult for the authorities to officially identify cases and to investigate them.

The research assessment also identified a number of risk factors for exploitation and trafficking affecting people travelling along the Balkan route and after reaching their intended destination. The risk factors for trafficking in this context include:

1. Factors at the legal and policy level:

- legal status issues;
- related difficulties in income generation;
- restrictive migration policies; and
- risks related to residence at accommodation centres for migrants in the countries covered.

2. Factors at the individual level:

- previous experience of violence and trauma;
- women and children travelling alone;
- lack of awareness of rights, of the local language and of country-specific knowledge; and
- incurring debts to smugglers.

Specific risk factors for THB related to **legal status and procedures** include: receiving a negative decision in the asylum or family reunification procedure; long waiting periods within the asylum procedure; having an undocumented immigration status; uncertain legal status during the journey; and – specifically for unaccompanied and

separated children (UASC) - delays in the appointment of a guardian and/or guardians' insufficient capacity to appropriately care for children. Related to these issues is the **lack of opportunities** for income generation, both en route and in-country.

Restrictive migration policies constitute a risk factor in terms of increased border controls and the restriction of legal channels for transiting, entering and residing in the countries covered by the assessment, and in terms of restrictions on the basic services provided to migrants.

While people are **residing in the various types of accommodation centres**, they are exposed to a number of risk factors, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), involvement in drug use and drug dealing, and contacts with migrant smugglers.

Previous experiences of violence and trauma in countries of origin and along the route also constitute a risk factor. Many adults and children have experienced domestic violence, SGBV, family dysfunction, and conflict and persecution, as well as hardships during the journey.

Many UASC are not provided with adequate care and placement, for a number of reasons, including flawed age assessment procedures and limited capacity at child reception facilities. A considerable number of UASC are reported as having disappeared from care and thus are outside the child protection system.

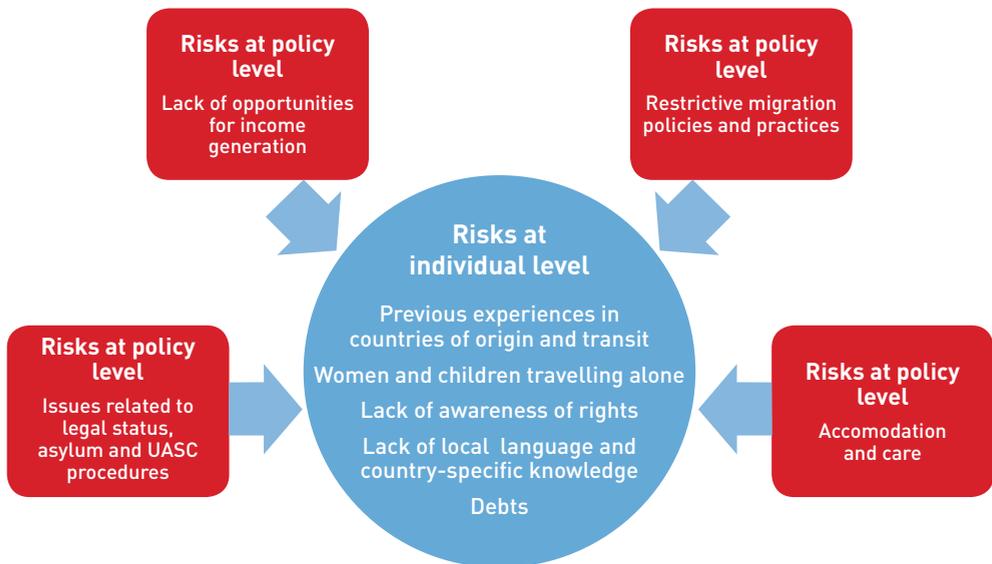


Figure 4: Risk factors for people travelling along the Balkan route and in destination countries

4. Identification and referral procedures

The main gaps and challenges in the identification and referral procedures for trafficking victims among people using the Balkan route identified by the research assessment can be divided in two main categories:

- Challenges in the harmonisation and incorporation of trafficking identification and referral procedures into first reception and asylum systems;
- Challenges linked to the identification and referral of migrants in an irregular situation and asylum seekers living outside the reception system.

There are significant gaps and challenges in the **harmonisation and incorporation of THB identification and referral procedures into the first reception and asylum systems** for new arrivals, leading to a disconnect between the two processes. In practice, this means that anti-trafficking procedures are not sufficiently integrated into the reception and asylum systems, leading to the limited ability of frontline responders to identify and refer people vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation and presumed victims of trafficking.

In this context, the **lack of a formal national referral mechanism (NRM) or other centralised standard operating procedures (SOPs)** was widely reported as one of the main gaps in the identification and referral of people vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation and presumed victims of trafficking among migrants. This was found to be either due to the absence of national guidelines and/or indicators on the identification and referral of people vulnerable to trafficking or exploitation or presumed victims of trafficking, or because existing SOPs were too difficult to understand and, as a result, not used by the relevant authorities.

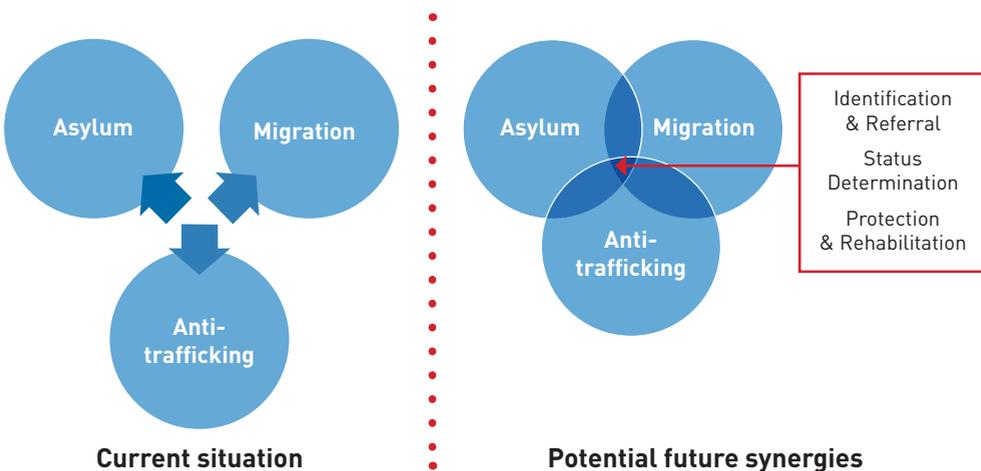


Figure 5: Disconnect between asylum, migration and anti-trafficking – a missed opportunity

As is the case for risk factors and vulnerabilities, also the research findings on identification and referral highlighted **how fast-track procedures** aiming to speed up asylum applications and return procedures, as well as **restrictive migration policies**, affect the capacity of frontline responders to properly identify victims of trafficking among people travelling along the Balkan route and in destination countries.

Secondly, there are gaps and challenges specifically linked to the **identification and referral of migrants in an irregular situation and asylum seekers living outside the reception system**, such as the lack of, or insufficient use of, outreach activities. This was reported as a major issue particularly for the identification of victims of trafficking among stranded migrants and among UASC who have left existing child protection systems.

The assessment also identified a number of specific barriers affecting migrants' access to identification and referral, firstly, **barriers at individual level**, such as fear and mistrust of the authorities, presumed victims of trafficking not perceiving themselves as victims of trafficking or not seeing any advantage to being identified as such, lack of viable alternatives, and lack of attention given to vulnerable adult men and to forms of trafficking and exploitation other than sexual exploitation. Limited awareness of specific forms of exploitation affecting children – namely for exploitative begging, forced marriage and forced criminality – was also flagged as a barrier to identification.

Secondly, **barriers at systemic level** are related to the response to the arrival of migrants and the migration governance system in place at country level. Such barriers include the challenges of dealing with migrants “in transit,” the criminalisation of some victims of trafficking, the incorrect identification of some UASC as adults, and the prioritisation of security concerns and combatting migrant smuggling over the protection of trafficked people.

While some of the barriers are already **well-known in the anti-trafficking sector** in general and may affect both national and foreign potential and presumed victims – e.g., trafficked people not perceiving themselves as victims, language barriers, fear and mistrust of the authorities, lack of attention to trafficking in adult men –, others are specific **to the Balkan route** and disproportionately affect certain categories of migrants, such as migrants in an irregular situation, the large proportion of people using this route who are young men, and certain nationalities, such as migrants coming from designated “safe countries of origin”.

As a general trend, the assessment found that there is too much **reliance on law enforcement and criminal justice to identify and refer** victims of trafficking among migrants. Protection actors, often better equipped to build a relationship of trust with presumed victims, only play a marginal role in such processes. The limited involvement of protection actors has negative consequences both for victims' access to long-term protection and rehabilitation services and for anti-trafficking criminal investigations.

The complexity of **differentiating between the two distinct phenomena of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings** and of understanding the points of convergence also contributes to making identification and referral procedures more difficult.

On the topic of trafficking indicators, while many countries do have a set of general indicators of THB, **few countries covered by the assessment have specific indicators for use in the context of mixed migration flows**. On the other hand, according to interviewees, the main problem is not so much the lack of specific indicators but rather that anti-trafficking procedures in general are not implemented in the context of migration and asylum processes.

Linked to the identified gaps and challenges, interviewees identified a number of **training needs**, particularly for frontline responders, but also for stakeholders in charge of identification and referral in the context of asylum procedures.

5. Protection and rehabilitation

The conclusions that can be drawn from the research findings in the area of protection and rehabilitation procedures are limited, due to the limited experience of competent authorities and other anti-trafficking stakeholders in the protection and rehabilitation of trafficking victims identified among migrants travelling along the Balkan route and in destination countries. As we have seen in the previous sections, this is mostly due to the very limited number of formal identifications.

The main gaps and challenges faced by competent authorities and other anti-trafficking stakeholders in the protection and rehabilitation of trafficked people among those using Balkan route are:

1. **Gaps and challenges in the provision of short- and long-term protection and assistance services**, including:
 - lack of appropriate care and accommodation, including suitable reception facilities for child victims of trafficking and for UASC more generally;
 - lack of appropriate long-term protection and assistance services, including the unpreparedness of the education system to successfully integrate UASC who are or may be victims of trafficking; and
 - gaps and challenges linked to the legal framework and/or coordination mechanisms at national level.
2. **Gaps and challenges in the granting of reflection periods and residence permits**, tied to:
 - fear of contact with the authorities; and
 - residence status being contingent upon participation in criminal proceedings.

As an overall trend, the assessment highlighted the challenges for national anti-trafficking systems – **still mostly geared towards responding to the needs of particular categories of victims, i.e., Europeans or Sub-Saharan Africans, and adult women who are victims** of sexual exploitation - in accommodating and responding to the specific needs of trafficking victims with different profiles, such as people who have travelled along the Balkan route to the EU.

Issues concerning the effective functioning of the **guardianship system** for UASC, including delays in appointing a guardian, and guardians' limited capacity to adequately care for each child under their responsibility, are major shortcomings in the protection measures available for trafficked children.

Obtaining a legal status is crucial for people travelling along the Balkan route. Too often, in the framework of protection and rehabilitation services for identified victims of trafficking, the **legal status of trafficking victims is uncertain and is linked to their cooperation in criminal proceedings**, discouraging presumed victims from seeking redress and hampering proper long-term rehabilitation for victims of trafficking.

6. Recommendations

1. **Improve understanding of trafficking and exploitation among State authorities and other anti-trafficking and migration actors in the context of migration flows along the Balkan route and in destination countries in the EU.**
 - State authorities should invest the necessary time and resources in **identifying and investigating cases of human trafficking and exploitation**. The quantitative and qualitative information collected should be aggregated and analysed, so as to build the solid knowledge base needed to mobilise the necessary resources and inform an effective anti-trafficking response.
 - States should acknowledge **migrants as legal subjects**, with rights and obligations, in all circumstances, and take all necessary measures to provide protection and assistance to victims of trafficking, also among migrants “in transit.”
 - State authorities and all other duty-bearers should regard and treat children on the move as children **first and foremost**. In particular, unaccompanied and separated children should be provided with **special protection measures** as children temporarily or permanently deprived of parental care. As a priority, immediately upon identification, all UASC should be appointed a qualified and independent **guardian** to protect them and ensure their best interests are given primary consideration in all decisions affecting them.
 - State authorities and other anti-trafficking and migration actors should enhance their understanding of the **difference between migrant smuggling and human**

trafficking, which are often intertwined but are distinct typologies of crime.

- State authorities should take all necessary steps to officially identify and investigate cases of trafficking that **occurred in countries of origin or during the journey**, also by strengthening international cooperation on criminal investigations.
- **Protection** should be provided to presumed victims of trafficking regardless of whether it is possible for law enforcement to investigate the case.

2. Mitigate the risk factors related to the legal and policy context and to the individual situation of migrants

- Access to basic services, such as accommodation and healthcare, should be provided to **all migrants**, including asylum applicants, people who have not applied for asylum and people whose asylum application has been refused. All migrant children should be granted access to education, as well as vocational training opportunities for older children. Any barriers preventing access, or limiting access, to education for certain groups of children should be removed.
- Legal access to opportunities for **regular work and other forms of income generation** should be granted to all migrants who remain in a country for a significant period of time, regardless of their status.
- States should significantly expand **legal pathways**, including refugee resettlement, family reunification, and migration for employment and for studies.
- Accommodation at reception centres and other accommodation facilities should remain a temporary measure and all the necessary steps must be taken to improve safety, prevent physical and sexual violence and ensure the provision of basic services at such centres.
- Children should never be held in detention facilities on the basis of their immigration status. UASC must be properly protected with **suitable care placement** – with adequate standards of provision – as expeditiously as possible and preferably upon arrival/identification. Placement should be based on a careful and well-informed assessment of each child’s needs and should promote **alternative care arrangements** deemed most effective in integrating children, including those ageing out of care.
- State authorities and other anti-trafficking and migration stakeholders should organise **information campaigns and awareness-raising** on the risks of exploitation and THB and on the protection and assistance available for presumed and identified victims.

3. Reconcile asylum, migration and anti-trafficking procedures

- Identification of trafficking cases should be **incorporated into asylum procedures** through proactive screening during registration and status determination interviews, including in the context of “fast-track procedures”.
- National **Standard Operating Procedures** for the identification and referral of trafficking cases in the context of mixed migration flows, clearly establishing the roles and responsibilities of all asylum, migration and anti-trafficking stakeholders in the identification, protection and assistance of victims of trafficking among migrants, should be adopted and applied.
- All stakeholders working with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, as well as law enforcement officials, should be **trained in the use of trafficking indicators**, adapted to the specific context of mixed migration flows if needed.

4. Remove, or mitigate, barriers to the identification and referral of victims of trafficking

- **Protection actors should be given a much more central role** in identifying victims and referring them to protection services, in collaboration with law enforcement authorities where necessary, but independently of criminal justice responses.
- Competent State authorities and other anti-trafficking and migration stakeholders should pay more attention to the identification of victims of trafficking among **men and boys** and to **forms of trafficking other than trafficking for sexual exploitation**. Specific attention should be given to cases of exploitation for begging, forced criminality or forced marriage among children.
- State authorities should avoid the **criminalisation or punishment** of victims of trafficking in all circumstances, particularly in the context of irregular employment situations, immigration violations and crimes committed as a consequence of being trafficked.
- The competent State authorities, **in conducting anti-smuggling operations**, should always adopt a **victim-centred approach**, putting the protection and assistance of victims of trafficking – and of victims of other abuses in the migrant smuggling context – as a first priority.
- In the context of the identification of UASC, **age assessment procedures** should be undertaken taking the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. Such procedures should adhere to the highest child rights standards at international, European and national levels. In particular, before and during age assessment procedures, any person claiming or appearing to be under 18 years of age should be treated as a child, and they should be appointed a qualified and

independent guardian as expeditiously as possible, and provided with suitable care and adequate placement.

- Children **who left or were taken out of care** or are otherwise outside the child protection system) should be proactively reached out to in the places where they live and/or work by qualified professionals, and be provided with viable and durable alternatives to their situation.

5. Improve accommodation and provision of protection and assistance services

- Competent state authorities and other anti-trafficking actors should ensure that there are **sufficient shelters available for victims of trafficking**, for the provision of short-term protection and assistance services. Child victims of trafficking should be provided with suitable care and placement options, in line with their specific and individual needs, and preferably outside of an institutional environment.
- International protection, migration management, social assistance and anti-trafficking responses and coordination mechanisms **should be better harmonised**, so as to be able to offer effective protection and rehabilitation services to victims of trafficking among migrants, including migrants in an irregular situation, asylum applicants and refugees. All children, including presumed and identified victims of trafficking, should be promptly referred to the existing **child protection** system and authorities upon initial identification, particularly if they do not benefit from a nurturing family environment, such as UASC.

6. Improve access to residence permits for victims of trafficking

- State authorities and other anti-trafficking, migration and protection stakeholders should ensure that effective protection and assistance services are offered to presumed and identified victims of trafficking, including secure residence status and long-term rehabilitation services, **regardless of their willingness to participate in criminal proceedings** against the perpetrator(s).
- Children, whether they are trafficking victims, migrants in a regular or irregular situation, seeking asylum or not, unaccompanied or separated or accompanied, **should be treated as children first and foremost**, and exercise their rights on an equal basis with national citizen children.

Trafficking along Migration Routes to Europe

Bridging the Gap between
Migration, Asylum and Anti-Trafficking

Briefing Paper

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