

RESEARCH-ACTION REPORT

“ HUMAN TRAFFICKING : from exit to insertion, barriers and leverage ”

Study of 21 experiences of victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation who were supported by Amicale du Nid in 2015



We would like to thank in particular those persons who agreed to share their story in the interest of research and helping us improve the support we provide for other victims.

We hope that the courage they have shown in doing so will contribute to a better understanding of situations, provision of social and educational support that meets victims' specific needs, and improved access to fundamental rights for victims of an international crime that represents one of the most serious violations of human dignity and integrity.

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INTRODUCTION.....	5
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	5
METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
 A. HOW DID INTERVIEWEES DESCRIBE THEIR ENTRY INTO A SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING AND THE OBSTACLES THAT PREVENTED THEIR LEAVING?	 13
1. HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THE DEPARTURE FROM THEIR “PREVIOUS LIVES” AND WHAT LED THEM INTO A SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING ?	13
a. Escaping a context of political, economic and social turmoil at all costs.....	13
b. Poverty and duty to help the family.....	15
c. A context in which violence against women is dominant.....	19
2. HOW DO VICTIMS DESCRIBE THE PROCESS THAT TRAPPED THEM IN A SITUATION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ?.....	25
a. The conditions of the journey and irregular residence status, which place the victim in a situation of dependence, in an unfamiliar environment, and keep her in fear of the authorities	25
b. Deception and the inability to go back.....	28
c. Tangled bonds of domination and dependency – a finely spun web.....	29
d. Isolation: the keystone of the system of control	35
e. Violence related to exploitation	38
f. Prostitution-related violence and its traumatic consequences.....	40
g. Psychological consequences of violence leading to increased control	44
 B. HOW DO THE PEOPLE INTERVIEWED EXPLAIN HOW THEY GAINED FREEDOM FROM THE SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING AND THE LEVERAGE THEY USED TO MOVE TOWARDS SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INCLUSION ?	 49
1. HOW DO THE WOMEN EXPLAIN THEIR MOVEMENT TOWARDS FREEDOM FROM THE SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING ?.....	49
a. A flaw in the system of control.....	49
b. A meeting that provides a break from isolation.....	51
c. Reframing the law, which names the crime, the victim and the criminal.....	55
d. Pregnancy and the birth of a child	56
e. An act of violence too far	58
f. Choosing oneself	60
2. How do women describe the process of emancipation from sexual exploitation and the movement towards an alternative of social inclusion ?	65
a. A relationship of trust	65
b. Sensible advice and support to access rights.....	67
c. A home, safety and independence	70
d. A space to talk and be listened to	72
e. Another activity – a real job.....	75
f. The prospect of regularisation.....	76
g. Plans in the country of destination	77

CONCLUSION	81
SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE RESEARCH-ACTION PROJECT.....	81
MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES.....	84

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

▪ The fight against trafficking

“Whereas prostitution and the accompanying evil of the **traffic in persons** for the purpose of prostitution are **incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person...**” Thus begins the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. Human trafficking was condemned by the United Nations General Assembly following the Second World War. At the end of the 20th century however, the end of the Cold War, liberal globalization, and brutal political and economic transitions led to growing inequality between and within countries, contributing to a **resurgence of the phenomenon**.

Trafficking is a **serious violation of fundamental rights, and of human freedom and integrity**, committed by exploiting the most vulnerable people in society, through deception or force, in order to make financial gain. This crime is committed on a large scale: the only existing world estimate, given by the International Labour Organization, puts the **annual number of victims at 2,450,000** (based on numbers reported by national governments) and the profits made from the exploitation of victims of forced labour at 21 billion US dollars for 2009 alone¹. **Money is the main motivating factor for traffickers**, and the size of the system of exploitation reflects demand for the service provided. According to the UNODC, the main forms of exploitation are **prostitution (79% of cases)**² and forced labour (18%). The same report shows that two thirds of victims are women and 13% are minors.

▪ An international crime

In 2000, a protocol was added to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which defines human trafficking as follows :

“... the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, **for the purpose of exploitation**. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” It specifies that **consent of the victim is irrelevant** if the trafficker uses any of the means included in the definition.

¹ ILO, *The Cost of Coercion; Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, International Labour Conference, 98th Session 2009, Geneva, 2009

² http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf

Victims' rights were specified in 2005, in a **Council of Europe Convention** that aims to prevent trafficking in human beings, protect victims of trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and promote co-ordination of national actions and international co-operation. The Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) is tasked with monitoring implementation of the Convention.

▪ A concern for the EU

The institutions of the European Union have put in place two major instruments to harmonise the policies of member states on trafficking :

1. Directive 2004/81³ on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings and who cooperate with the competent authorities. All victims who are not EU citizens should be granted a period in which to reflect on their position.
2. Directive 2011/36/EU⁴ on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA. It explicitly states that the definition of human trafficking also covers trafficking for the purpose of forced begging, forced criminal activities, organ trafficking, illegal adoption and forced marriage. This instrument also introduces minimum sentences for traffickers, and improved victim protection and assistance.

The Directorate-General for Justice (DG Justice) has established the Prevention of and Fight against Crime (ISEC) programme, which provides funding for the project “ THB: from exit to insertion, barriers and leverage ”, currently implemented by Amicale du Nid (in France) and Gender Alternatives (in Bulgaria).

▪ The legal framework in France

In 1960, France ratified the 1949 United Nations Convention, and rapidly changed its legislation in view of abolishing prostitution, with two orders. While the aim of convicting procurers has been upheld (France has a solid set of laws in this respect), the commitment of the authorities concerning the prevention of prostitution, and provision of support for victims, remains too limited. France ratified the Palermo Protocol in 2002 and the Warsaw Convention in 2008. Both European directives have been transposed into French law: **the Internal Security Act of 10 March 2003 introduced human trafficking into the French penal code**. This act was completed and amended by those of 24 July 2006 and 20 November 2007 on immigration, integration and asylum, which defines conditions for access to the right of residency. On 5 August 2013, new legislation aligned the definition of trafficking given in the French penal code with that of the Council of Europe. The relevant article reads as follows :

Article 225-4-1 of the French Penal Code amended by Act N°2013-711 of 5 August 2013 - Art. 1

1. - Human trafficking is the recruitment, transport, transfer, accommodation, or reception of a person for the purpose of exploitation in one of the following circumstances:

³ Council Directive 2004/81

⁴ Directive 2011/36/EU

- 1° Through the use of threats, coercion, violence, or deceptive tactics against the victim, the victim's family, or a person in an established relationship with the victim;
- 2° By a legitimate, natural, or adoptive ascendant of the victim or by a person who has authority over the victim or abuses the authority conferred by his/her office;
- 3° By abuse of a situation of vulnerability, due to the victim's age, illness, infirmity, physical or mental impairment, or pregnancy, either apparent or known to the perpetrator; or
- 4° In exchange for or by means of granting remuneration or any other benefit, or a promise of remuneration or advantage.

Exploitation, as mentioned in the first paragraph of this section I, is the act of placing the victim at one's disposal or that of a third party, even if unidentified, for the purpose of either allowing the commission of the offenses of procuring, assault or sexual abuse, enslavement, submission to forced labour or services, reduction to servitude, removal of one of the victim's organs, exploitation of begging, or of working or accommodation conditions that violate the victim's dignity, or coercing the victim to commit any crime or offence.

Human trafficking is punishable by seven years' imprisonment and a €150,000 fine.

Other legislation is important with regards trafficking, such as circulars from ministries that specify how the law should be applied. The last two circulars to date are :

- ⇒ The circular of 22 January 2015 on criminal law policy in the fight against trafficking, which was sent by the Minister of Justice to judges, asking them to prosecute more frequently under this criminal classification;
- ⇒ The circular of 19 May 2015 on residence permits, which reminds prefects of Article L316-1 of the Code for Entry and Residence of Foreigners and Right of Asylum (CESEDA) concerning the granting of a permit for any person who collaborates with the police.

A national plan for 2014-2016 aims to promote the actual application of these measures. However, in practice, **it remains very difficult for victims of trafficking to access their fundamental rights**, beginning with information on their rights, health care, protection via access to residence and work in the event of a complaint, and in situations in which it is impossible to denounce the trafficker, respect of anonymity, safe and secure accommodation, the minimum resources required to remain free from exploitation, information regarding the progress of legal proceedings, the right to request asylum, etc.

A draft law to support the fight against prostitution (which has yet to be enacted) provides for the right to a protection and assistance system for all victims of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, the granting of a provisional residence permit (APS), repeal of the offense of soliciting, education in schools on preventing commodification of the body, and the creation of a fine punishing the use of prostitution. Amicale du Nid strongly supports the implementation of these measures, which will make it possible to provide better protection and support for victims of trafficking.

▪ Amicale du Nid

Founded in 1946, Amicale du Nid is an **independent, secular, non-profit organisation**, recognised by the French state as a public-interest organisation. It considers prostitution to be a form of violence, which undermines human dignity and gender equality. **Salaried professionals working for the**

organisation provide outreach, welcome and support services for people who are currently, or have been, in a situation of prostitution, or who are at risk of entering such a situation, in order to promote their inclusion in society and the world of work. Its secondary mission involves research and training actions to improve understanding of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Amicale du Nid employs **200 professionals in eight locations:** Marseille, Montpellier, Toulouse, Lyon, Grenoble, Paris, Seine-St-Denis and Colombes. The organisation's team meets more than 4000 prostituted people every year, welcomes and supports 3000, and provides accommodation for more than 500. Approximately 900 social actors have taken part in our training sessions.

Over the past ten years, there has been a significant change in terms of the people the organisation works with, with increasing numbers of foreign women in an irregular situation, from Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria and Cameroon), Eastern Europe (Romania and Bulgaria) and China. Experience of providing support has shown that victims of trafficking were trapped in a system of exploitation, which is based on the fact that men purchase the use of their bodies, and that traffickers seeking to make quick, low-risk profits organise the market for them. The fight against trafficking should, therefore, involve the prosecution of consumers as well as traffickers. **Victims should receive suitable assistance from professionals who have undergone specific training on the violence committed against women that is inherent in prostitution, as well as the resulting psychological consequences. They should receive social and educational support to help them become independent, and possess the resources needed to make their own decisions in life, beginning with accommodation, and a residence and work permit.** The fight against trafficking may only make progress if all of these conditions are provided.

▪ The “ THB : from exit to insertion ” project

All organisations that provide support for victims of trafficking are aware of how long and difficult the process of moving away from sexual exploitation and towards social inclusion is. The traumatic nature of violence suffered, the very real threats made to families, the “ omerta “ that reigns in this world, and sometimes the cultural gap, hinder understanding of the realities faced by victims of trafficking. **It is, nonetheless, vital to meet the challenge of clearly understanding complex situations related to trafficking, as well as the obstacles faced by victims, and the means that can be used to help them gain freedom from networks of sexual exploitation.**

This project, which has received funding from the ISEC programme of the European Commission's DG Justice, for the period running from 15/09/2014 to 15/09/2016, aims to study the experiences of victims involved in order to identify obstacles to their emancipation and potential leverage that can be used to provide help. It is led by a Franco-Bulgarian partnership, which enables consideration of the subject from the point of view of both a country of origin and destination. This report concludes the first part of the research-action project, which is based on meetings with victims of trafficking, as well as professionals providing social support in France.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

▪ Research-action : understanding in order to act

The aim of this research-action project is to **better understand the personal experiences** of victims of trafficking, from the situation of sexual exploitation, to exit and then inclusion, including the various stages of their journey, obstacles encountered and leverage used to overcome them. Based on a collection of personal accounts, the study aims to **develop a framework of understanding that enables** a more precise and rapid grasp of the issues at play, **in order for us to perform our social action mission as effectively as possible and suggest changes in public policy.**

The aim of the research is therefore action. The questions asked and approach adopted are based on the legal framework and the following premises :

1. Trafficking in human beings is a violation of the fundamental rights of the men, women and children who are victims of it, and undermines human freedom, dignity and integrity.
2. Victims are holders of rights, which they should be able to access, and are entitled to find a place in society.
3. Amicale du Nid's principal mission is to reach out to, welcome and support victims of trafficking, in order to help them access their rights and ultimately achieve autonomy.
4. It is the responsibility of public authorities to create suitable conditions for victims to exercise their rights.

The aim is to gather the points of view of people given support, regarding their experiences and overall situation, identify commonalities that enable better understanding of the mechanisms at work, barriers and leverage, and, based on this improved understanding, provide more effective support for victims of trafficking in developing their own solutions, and put forward changes in relevant public policy.

▪ **The approach: listening to knowledge gained from experience**

The project as a whole **considers victims of human trafficking to be experts on their own situations, authors of their own stories and actors in their own support.** We stand to learn the most from their experiences, both in terms of the objective dimension of events experienced and the relatively subjective dimension of their interpretation of situations. The following analysis is based on interviews with 21 people supported by Amicale du Nid and affected by the issue. It is first and foremost their accounts that throw light on our understanding of the phenomenon. We also look at the **points of view of 21 social workers on other experiences**, including their analysis of barriers and leverage, gathered during individual interviews or working groups, which complete and enrich our initial interpretation, and throw light on the various accounts given.

We introduced the project and suggested doing **interviews with people supported by various branches of our organisation, who had experienced trafficking, who had made significant progress in their journey towards exit and inclusion, and who had gained enough perspective in relation to their own story to be able to talk about it.** 21 people agreed to be interviewed, aware of the context and purpose of the research, and motivated by the prospect of helping us help others more effectively. All of the interviewees were **adult women** (even though some had been exploited from a very young age), of **five different nationalities**, including 14 from Nigeria, four from Bulgaria, one from Ivory Coast, one from South Africa, and one from Albania. This sample was formed by the conditions of the study, but we should not forget other victims of trafficking, including French women, children, men, and transgender people, who go through the same process,

with differences specific to their background and the organisation of the network, but for whom the consequences of sexual exploitation and the journey to escape remain largely the same.

▪ The interview methodology : free expression with a clear purpose

The interviews were conducted in a semi-directive manner, allowing the interviewer and interviewee to speak freely, following an introduction that was systematically given :

“ Thank you for agreeing to meet me. As your assigned social worker explained, I am working on a European project on the topic of human trafficking. The aim is to better understand the situation of people who are victims of exploitation, and how to help them find a way out. From your experience, you have a lot of knowledge that can help us uphold the rights of victims, and provide more effective support to find a way out of exploitation and integrate into society. I’m interested in finding out about your journey, what you experienced, what the hardest things were, and what helped you. ” This is followed by a **free discussion**, during which the interviewer intervenes mainly to reformulate and ask for more specifics, bearing in mind the main topics to be covered : the migration journey ; the situation of exploitation ; the factors that sparked a desire to find a way out ; difficulties encountered and help received; advice regarding support. The purpose was clearly to allow interviewees to lead the interview to areas in which they had something to share, in order to avoid becoming hemmed in by a list of pre-set questions, and to let them express their way of thinking and their interpretation of experiences. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and two hours, and most lasted approximately an hour and a half. They were recorded and transcribed in full. These word-for-word transcriptions formed the raw material for the study.

▪ The analysis methodology : how to understand the processes at work while respecting the diversity of individual journeys ?

The initial idea for the project was to **classify significant parts of interviews into types of barriers and leverage**, in order to form a grid of indicators that could be used to assess the person’s situation and **define the main stages from sexual exploitation to social inclusion**. An analytical framework of trafficking victims’ experiences was therefore developed, along with social workers, with the aim of creating mutual understanding and sharing experiences of providing support for people in situations of trafficking. This involved classifying in a table the answers to the following questions :

- ⇒ What were the main stages in the person’s journey and what were the factors that served as a tipping point towards finding a way out ?
- ⇒ What were the obstacles/brakes/factors in the way and what were the levers/catalysts/factors that helped victims of trafficking escape the sexual exploitation network and move towards social inclusion ?

1. **Background before trafficking** : What were the specific vulnerabilities, significant events, points of support and resources of the person in her original environment ?
2. **Moving away and the beginning of exploitation** : What caused the person to leave ? What were the conditions of the journey ?
3. **In the situation of sexual exploitation** : What were the specificities of the system of coercion and dependency? What means were used by the person to protect herself ?

4. **Towards exit and inclusion** : Which event or meeting led to a change in the victim's perception of her situation and enabled her to glimpse a way out? What vision does she have of her experience? What progress has she made and what difficulties did she encounter ?
5. **Today** : What are her prospects for the future ?

While the above questions were not necessarily asked in the same order, or in the same way, they most certainly guided the direction of interviews. Of course, by allowing interviewees to speak and express themselves freely, stories were told, with their own internal logic, implications, representations of the world and present context, **and no framework can be flexible enough to reflect these subtleties**. In other words, the non-directive nature of the interviews, the focus placed on the representations interviewees have formed of their experiences, and the meaning they attach to them, as well as a strong commitment to remain as faithful as possible to the words used by interviewees, and to what is implied, led us to **refine the questions as the study progressed**.

From the diversity of experiences described emerged similar forms of trafficking, with differing manifestations and methods. The idea here is to put forward a model of the system and understand the process leading to exploitation, as well as the dynamics of exit, **without ignoring factors that demonstrate its limits, but rather using them to highlight subtleties and enrich our thinking**.

▪ Constructing the questions: what are we really looking for ?

It was by selecting interesting parts of the puzzle that I was able to re-specify what I wanted to understand: **Is it possible to find a way out?** If so, how? And how can we help people to do this? **What are the conditions required for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation to free themselves from the system that has enslaved them ?**

▪ Structuring the answers: a twofold process

When I asked interviewees how they found a way out, **they all began by first telling me how they got there**. They felt a need to explain how they got caught up in the net before really addressing the question, which shows that the need to make sense of what happened requires them to return to the point in their story when a destabilising influence entered their life. This is why I decided to separate the analysis into two parts: **firstly, the process that leads victims into the situation of sexual exploitation and traps them there – what was their experience of this ? Secondly, the dynamics that open up the prospect of an alternative and lead to autonomy at all levels – how do they perceive this ?**

Certain stages, barriers and levers are common to different situations and **enable assumptions to be made as to how the mechanisms involved in human trafficking, as well as in the dynamics of exiting towards inclusion, operate**. The first part of this section aims to identify and throw light on the difficulties, challenges and means of coercion encountered by victims, and to study the way in which they describe them. The following part will look at how they describe what has helped them, and what they need, in order to develop suitable responses. With this in mind, we are not so much interested in the facts and events related to trafficking themselves, **but the way in which they are described by the person who experienced them**. Respecting what is expressed by the

interviewee and integrating it into a shared analysis, structured with common points of reference, is a delicate task. This is why the following should be read only as **an attempt to build a framework for understanding the journeys of people** who are experiencing, or have experienced, trafficking for sexual exploitation: a model whose purpose is to throw light on interactions between systems of domination, coercion and dependency, on the one hand, and victims' personal journeys on the other.

▪ The proposed assumption

The individual experiences of the people involved in this study can be seen as part of **structurally unequal systems of social relations, within the family, community, society, and the world** (as women first and foremost, as members of an underprivileged social group, and as migrants in an irregular situation, for the most part), **which traffickers/exploiters use for the purpose of exploitation, for considerable financial gain**. Victims are taken wherever demand exists and are treated as objects by both the procurer and the buyer.

These experiences can also be seen as part of **a resistance against oppression and a search for independence**, driven by emancipation strategies that vary according to means available under the given conditions. **The ability to gain freedom from a situation of control depends on a multitude of factors, which we will attempt to identify** through analysis of the interviews.

The variety of situations and experiences encountered will highlight all of the slight differences in the journeys taken by the brave women I met; women who, in the face of concerted attempts to enslave them and reduce them to objects, position and assert themselves as individuals striving for a better life.

A. HOW DID INTERVIEWEES DESCRIBE THEIR ENTRY INTO A SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING AND THE OBSTACLES THAT PREVENTED THEIR LEAVING ?

While they vary in order and importance, a number of **features of a process that locks victims into a system of control** emerged during the interviews. What is of interest to us here is the way in which victims understand and describe the story of their experience. All the women interviewed describe the circumstances that led them to leave their previous lives and the sequence of events that led them to be dependent and tied to prostitution, isolated and terrified, lost and without a voice, in a state of shock and sometimes resigned.

I. HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THE DEPARTURE FROM THEIR “ PREVIOUS LIVES ” AND WHAT LED THEM INTO A SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING ?

In this first subsection, I have selected extracts, from among all of the interviews, in which the women explain the sequence of events that led them to leave familiar surroundings for a foreign destination, where they did not really know what awaited them. While each situation has a multitude of contributing factors, these factors overlap and intersect: all of these victims of trafficking began their lives in areas plagued by violence, corruption and poverty, and where the role of a woman is to help her family. **It is often a destabilising event, or a movement to escape persecution, that excludes the victim from her social group of origin, isolates her and leaves her vulnerable to recruitment by a trafficker.**

a. Escaping a context of political, economic and social turmoil at all costs

▪ Civil war

“ **With all the family problems**, the person told me she could help me, that I could come and help her look after her children, because she had nobody to look after them (...). Many people make mistakes because they are tricked. **Many people come because of their family situation.** Many people have lived through war. **With the war going on in Nigeria, we had to leave my father because they’re killing people over there. You can’t just sit there and watch it happen, because they’ll kill you, they’ll kill your whole family. You tell yourself that you have to do something to help your family.** We left, we had nothing. Then I was asked to come, and I said yes, maybe I can find a way. Once I left, I heard that my brother had been killed. I cried, but I couldn’t help them. They can’t leave there without means. **The war has been going on for some time, that’s why I came, but I didn’t know it was for prostitution.** ”(3)⁵

➞ A young Nigerian woman who, like many, **fled a situation of violence and war**, which forced her to depart. She left the place where she grew up with the idea that it was her duty to do something to save her family. When she was offered an opportunity to migrate, she accepted in order to flee and with the aim of helping her family. The extent to which she has internalised an allocated role, which could be described as sacrificial, and which is often seen among eldest daughters in the state of Edo from where she comes (as well as in other places), is evident. Also

⁵ The number in brackets at the end of each quote refers to the interview conducted with a victim of trafficking. For obvious reasons of confidentiality, first names and specific locations have been anonymised in order to make it impossible to identify the women who told their stories.

evident is her hope for a better life, and, as with most women interviewed, she feels the need to state that she was **deceived regarding the activity she would perform** in the destination country and, more generally, regarding the intention of the recruiter, who adopted the discourse of a helper or saviour, hiding the plan in order to place her in a situation of sexual exploitation and make as much financial gain as possible.

▪ Political conflict

“ Everything’s completely changed now. My father-in-law died: he was shot. He was on his way to the chemist’s to get his medicines. They shot him, in 2011. They held the funeral. I had nothing, nothing, nothing. He was shot for no reason. In Ivory Coast, things were crazy, they killed everybody. When my uncle died, **I was totally lost**. There was **a crisis in Abidjan**, and all my uncles, **all my uncles were killed: they were massacred, all because they supported the president in power**. They were massacred, they burned down their houses, emptied their bank accounts, and all because they were on a different political side. **Everything was a mess, which meant that when I met the man, he made me trust him**. He told me that when you come to work, it will be in a restaurant just like here, but you will be better paid, you will be able to help your parents more, you will find a husband. It was difficult to refuse such an offer. ” (7)

➞ During an escalation of violence following elections and confrontations between supporters of the outgoing and incoming presidents, which led to more than 500 deaths, D brutally lost one of her relatives and all her points of reference. She clearly explains how this **crisis situation** placed her in a position where she forgot her instinct to be cautious and trusted the first person that came along, because **any opportunity to escape seemed like a godsend**.

▪ Religious tension

“ **I am Christian. I had problems with Muslim people** so I move to Lagos, in Nigeria. In Lagos, I found **a man that I can have a better life. I was really impressed**. I thought everything would be OK. I never know what I would have to face. He paid the tickets and everything for me. We flew to Austria, and then to Italy. In 2001, I went to *Sicilia* [Sicily]. I was there. **The man brought me to another lady**. She said that I had to sleep with white people to collect money for her. **You don’t have any choice**. ” (5)

➞ In this account, where the reason given for leaving is to escape inter-religious massacres, the way in which the events are described clearly shows the **recruitment strategy** employed by the trafficker: he makes grand promises, fires her imagination, pays for everything for her and then takes all her decisions; he “ brings ” her, moves her like a pawn, and she finds herself caught in a trap from which she can see no escape.

▪ Corruption of law enforcement and the legal system

“ When I was at university, a group of girls, known as the ‘Black Bras’, asked me to join their group. When I refused, they threatened me. At first, I thought they were joking, then I went to the police. The police told me there was nothing they could do. On the day of exams, **I saw the body of my room-mate on the floor. I realised then that they would come back for me. I rushed back to my family right away**. My parents were scared, so they took me to the church. I stayed there for several weeks, and as nothing happened, I returned home for the Christmas period. There was somebody who I was very close

to. We ate and slept together. She was my friend. She told me that her big brother, who was in Italy, had a solution to help me leave the country. He needed somebody to babysit his child. If I came he would pay me. I was very happy. I said no problem. ” (14)

➡ In this extract, L (who is also the eldest of her siblings) flees persecution by a confraternity of women spreading terror as an organised gang⁶. It is the **absence of police protection, an absolute need to escape, and fear of death that push her to leave**. It is not clear here whether the persecution and recruitment were linked, but, once again, **the person accepted the proposition because she had been made vulnerable by a serious situation**. She was not seeking to leave or emigrate – she was at university and had plans for the future in her own country – but the murder of her room-mate upset the normal course of her life. **A person she trusted offered her work in Europe**, and so she left.

b. Poverty and duty to help the family

In the majority of situations, **the family plays a crucial role** in the decision to leave, which varies from case to case (for example, the death of a parent as a destabilising factor that encourages children to migrate), according to the community of origin (for example, speaking in very general terms, the predominance of the group over the individual in African cultures), and according to the role allocated to women and girls. Sometimes the decision is clearly part of a **well-known economic survival strategy that involves sending a member of the family abroad to secure an additional source of revenue for the household**, with varying degrees of knowledge of living conditions in the destination society and varying degrees of complicity with procurers. The decision may also be based on the migrant's desire to support the family, without actually being asked to leave.

▪ Sent away by the family

“ I was in Africa with my uncle and he sent me to France with a woman. He told me that I could study, work and lead a good life there. I came with her and lived with her in Paris for two weeks. It was very difficult, because nobody told me that I would have to prostitute myself. I didn't want to, it was a disaster. She showed me where to work and called my phone all the time to ask for money. She shouted. I had no solution. The other women showed me what to do. I didn't want to do it. **It's important for people to understand that I didn't know, that I didn't have a choice**. At first, I resisted, I told her it was not possible. I called my uncle to tell him. He said : yes, my girl, that's how it is, you need to repay the debt. He wanted money too. ” (6)

➡ I didn't decide to migrate. In a manner of speaking, her uncle sold her. This situation shows that in some cases **the “ network ” is simply formed of links between close or distant family members, people smugglers and procurers**, who jointly organise the recruitment, travel, accommodation and exploitation of a person, **abusing her trust and the authority of her “ uncle ”**, or, as in the following extract, her aunt :

“ Was your situation in Nigeria OK ? No. Is that why you decided to leave ? “ No, I was happy. **Some of these want to send me study abroad, maybe I would get a better job, a better life, and help my brothers and sisters**. (...) I thought : it is my Auntie ; she cannot do something like that to me. I went to my Auntie, she said : **yes, I brought you come with my money**. You have to pay me back my money. If you want to go to school, go, but you have to give me back my money. ” (10)

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confraternities_in_Nigeria

➤ From the way in which O describes the reasons for her departure, she had no desire to migrate. She speaks of **pressure from “ certain ” members of her family**, but we will never know the extent to which they were aware of what she would face once she arrived in Spain. Sexual exploitation here is due to her own aunt, her mother’s sister, who dangled the possibility of studies before her, moves her (the verb ‘bring’ is used once again), and places her in a situation of prostitution with a huge debt to repay. In such a situation, where **the victim is related to the exploiter**, it is always particularly difficult for her to consider herself a victim, to denounce those responsible (firstly to her own family, who are in this case, for example, financially dependent on the aunt, and even more so to the police, which would be considered a serious betrayal) and to find a way out.

▪ Migration to fund a child’s studies

“ Once I asked my mother (I don’t have a biological mother anymore; I was born but I don’t know where she is), I said to the person I call my mother: when I see the suffering, where were you before you brought us into the world, with your husband? She said: yeah, it’s your father, *blah, blah, blah...* I said to her : you, you were with him, you had kids all over the place, and today they suffer. How do you think the children are going to have a good future? The parents need to help. It’s not possible. I have a daughter, it was an accident, but I’m happy today. **When I was pregnant, I cried every day, how am I going to bring up this child ? Then I decided to leave for the city to pay for the child’s education.** When I arrived there, I met some criminals. I agreed to leave home, **they sold me and I paid.** I didn’t continue with prostitution, **and I didn’t bring other children to take my place,** to pay for my girl’s studies. ” (17)

➤ P’s reaction to the woman who brought her up, but who didn’t pay for her education, is to leave her child with her to go and work to fund her studies. In the background, one can observe **limited access to schooling⁷ and contraception for girls, the consequences on a woman’s life, and, in this context, the persistence of a certain desire for independence**, to build her own future, by migrating and enabling her daughter to go to school, and thereby escaping the social cycle in which a woman’s role is to be a mother. This gives rise to questions related to links of solidarity between family members, the issue of parental duties, and, in this case, the refusal to perpetuate the system of trafficking by becoming a procurer in turn.

*What was the situation like in Nigeria at the beginning, before coming ? [Sigh]. “ Very difficult. The woman appeared on the street and she suggested that I come to Europe. **I was pregnant. I was with my father and my youngest brother. There was no money. I had to send him to school, but my boyfriend had no money. She said she could help me.** I went to see my father, and I told him that it wasn’t prostitution: she told me that I would work in a supermarket. **I had to convince myself and leave.** When I arrived, I had to go and work on the street. ” (20)*

➤ As in the previous extract, the reason given for leaving is the need for money for the child. Responsibility for funding the child’s education seems to fall on the shoulders of the mother, who had to “ convince ” herself. The ideas of sacrifice, duty and moral obligation can be found here.

⁷ There is a 42% rate of illiteracy among girls aged 15-24, compared with a rate of 23% among boys of the same age.
http://www.unicef.org/french/infobycountry/nigeria_statistics.html

▪ Recruited by a “saviour”

“ I came in 2007, somebody helped me to come over: a lady. She met in the salon. She said to me: you make good hair, if you come to Europe, you can make good money. **I thought I could give it a try. Because of my family. We are not good. Poverty. Because of that, I said OK.** She did the travelling papers. We went to Lagos. So I came over. When I came, it was not what she told me, it was not what she proposed to me in Nigeria, that she asked me to do when we came after, it was to prostitute. I said this was not our agreement, she said : *nanana*, if I forgot things, I made vaudou, *tout ça*. She start threatening me. **I know my family is poor, if I don’t do it, she would go back, make problems, those kind of stuff.** ” (8)

➞ The reason given for departure in this account is also to help the family. The degree of involvement of the family in the organisation of the journey, their knowledge of what will follow, and their share of the contracted debt differs with each case. However, what remains the same is the **recruiter’s method: an agreement based on deception combined with threats to the family**. Even in this situation, where E is aware that she has been deceived, she continues to say that the woman “ helped ” her to migrate.

“ In Africa, **there are always people who come to you offering help...** I met the lady in the hairdresser’s salon. She asked me if I would like to go to Europe. Of course, it was my dream. She complimented me on my hairdressing, and told me: don’t worry, I can get you out of here, you can earn a good living hairdressing. They hire lots of people in Europe, you just need to say OK, so I can help you, to buy the ticket and all that... When you get there, you pay me back for the ticket, and for the money you use after. Yes, no problem, when I come, I find work, why not ? And that is where it started. **At the start she told me not to tell my family.** You must make it a surprise. I asked why ? I’m going to Europe but I don’t know to which country yet. They said it was a good idea if you work in a hairdressing salon. Then she tells me that she’s already helped other people. **How can she trust me ? Trust... We will go to see somebody who can.... Everybody must be in agreement.... If I do this my family will not die, if I must get to Europe... It is like a contract. At the marabout, they told me that we have to cut your ... cut your hair, they said it’s your life, the hair from before is your life. I did everything.** When I arrived in Paris at her house there were lots of girls. I asked: when do I start to work ? The person that was there said you start work in two days. So in the morning I said let’s go, but they told me it was at night. A hairdresser’s open at night ? That’s strange. The person made me go outside, with the other girls, and showed us where to work on the street. I was shocked, I cried and cried... He said to me: alright, think hard, because **at the marabout he said everything, you agreed, you have to give everything, you have to keep going.** From that point on I continued to pay back my debts. It was then that she told me I had to pay back €60,000! ” (15)

➞ These two stories are very similar to one another, as well as many others: the recruiter seduces, flatters, positions herself as a providential saviour, and **obtains a form of contractual agreement** by taking the person to a marabout. This **highly developed technique of enslavement is rooted in the local culture**, where there is a widespread system of beliefs, including aspects of animism and vodun (or voodoo), in which spirits and invisible forces possess a significant ability to help or harm. The ceremony is held in a temple in the presence of a person with a spiritual role, originally to ensure the protection of ‘juju’. A practice of using healers, priests or native doctors – people imbued with religious authority – has developed, in order to conduct a striking ritual, with symbolically important proceedings (“the hair from before is your life” : by taking the person’s hair, the sorcerer takes control of her life), which can even include scarification⁸. The striking effect of this ritual, which is used to force the person involved to

⁸ For further information, see the following work by Bénédicte Lavaud Legendre:
<http://comptrasec.u-bordeaux.fr/ouvrages/b-n-dicte-lavaud-legendre-dir-prostitution-nig-riane-entre-r-ves-de-migration-et-r-alit-s>

promise silence, obedience and payment, is such that it **places the victim under the exploiter's domination**.

“ When I was in Nigeria, there is this man I know where I was working. It was a regular client. Because I work like a secretary in a shop. This client always come to buy material. After some time, I had a very serious moto accident, I lost the job and went back to the village. When he came to the shop, he asked about me, **they told him what happened to me. He started calling me to know my situation and everything, so we became friends. One day, he asked me if I would like to [go to]Europe. I said : for what ? I hope it is not for prostitution. He said : no.** A friend of his wife is looking for someone to help her in a shop, it is not about prostitution at all. ” (9)

➞ Here again, the recruiter presents himself as a saviour, following a road accident that weakens the victim, and he takes the time to win her confidence. We can also see that **B was aware of the risks related to migration and the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual exploitation**. Like many others, she decided to try her luck, justifying this decision by the fact that she thought that prostitution existed only in Italy and not in France, that the man had not taken her to make a vow before a marabout, and that she trusted him. It is important to recall here that **consent to migration does not mean consent to exploitation. Nobody consents to the denial of their freedom if they have an alternative. If the person has no alternative, such consent is vitiated by the abuse of vulnerability**.

▪ Recruited because of vulnerability

“ I arrived in Europe in 2004. In Nigeria, my Mum had six children, and I was the last. What's more, the situation was really difficult for us. To go to school, we had to walk there and come back to eat. I only went to school in the morning. **I didn't go to all the classes**. Later, when I was 19 years old, a lady offered me... Because over there, I worked in many places. I worked in the markets, I helped people run their shops, then I did hairdressing, braiding and even dress-making. So this lady said she had a salon in Italy, and she said she could help me. **That way I could come, work and help my family**. I travelled via Libya, on foot, by bus, and then we took a boat to go to Sicily. Once we arrived, she didn't want me to stay there, because you know once you arrive they will try to keep you there... She sent me money to go to her place. So, I escaped. She was in Verona, so I went to Verona and she guided me. Once I arrived, during the first week I asked: where is your salon ? Because there were other girls who lived there. She said yes, you're going to go out with the girls, and they will show you. I said : the girls go out at night. She said: yes, you will see (...) During the year and a half that I lived with her, I heard how she spoke on the phone. **She would say “ Is she nice ? Does she listen ? Is she a patient person ? ” She asked all these questions. She also asked about their level of education, because she knows that if you have a good education that you won't listen.** ” (13)

➞ The place of women in society, and lack of career opportunities for those with little access to education, mean that some are prepared to face anything – to cross the desert and sea to reach an unknown land and place their fate in the hands of a stranger. The second extract illustrates V's awareness, after arriving, of the **targeting of victims by the procurer according to psychological and social criteria**. Organisers of trafficking choose people in a position of weakness, because an absence of alternatives ensures their dependency and submission to the system of exploitation.

“ I am from South Africa, Johannesburg, I found myself to be grown in the streets. There, I grew up, I did not know anything about my family, if they are dead, or alive, or I am abandoned. **I found myself alone**. There I started to work off, because in

South Africa, you must take care of yourself. Then I worked to wash glasses of cars at the stop sign. A particular woman picked me up in the streets, she promised to give me a good job, a good life. So, as a young girl, she promised that it would be better for me to come with her, where she would help me, because staying in the streets is not too good for me. She proposed me a good life. From there, she took me to her place. After some weeks, she was giving food, she was giving me everything. Later, she said: now it is time to learn how to make money for myself. I was thinking: but she promised to give me a job, what kind of money am I going to make ? (...) These Madams, they always come up with a good option : you are in the streets, you have nothing, dirty clothes, washing glasses, every day in a particular place. **She sees you, and she says to herself, it would be good for my customers, she makes up a story to convince you to follow her, she promises you everything. Who am I to say no ? For the first time of your life, somebody is trying to bring you up from the street**, from a life of suffering, you say yes, you have to give it a chance... **Before that, they take you, they make you very happy, they win your heart**, to be sure you would not go back again. ” (12)

➞ This account reveals the madam’s strategy, and L’s clear-sightedness, in hindsight, regarding the **manipulation** used by this person, who enjoys a position of strength in a particularly unequal relationship. The most striking aspects of this situation of trafficking are the **extreme destitution and isolation** of the victim, and her low self-esteem (“ who am I to say no ? ”), on the one hand, and the use of seduction and false promises, as part of a **deliberate strategy to irrevocably bind the person, by placing her in a situation of expectation or indebtedness**, on the other.

c. A context in which violence against women is dominant

▪ Intra-family violence

“ At the beginning there was trouble between my mother and my step-father, who didn’t get along. My mother worked, we went to work, my brother was in prison, my other half-brother was in the army, my sister didn’t get along with us either : **our family was always fighting**. We didn’t have regular times at home anymore, no particular time to come home. So I met the sister of these men, who was there, who told me: yes, you can come. She put me to sleep with medication, we crossed the border, and when I woke up for the first time I was in Czechoslovakia. The second time in T. ” (2)

➞ This account takes place in Bulgaria. D is 14 years old and she seems to have been somewhat abandoned by her family, which is in great difficulty. She finds herself taken against her will in a car bound for France. She was taken as a minor, recruited by force by people who she did not know. Even though this case is a minority among the people we met, it illustrates the use of **coercion and the abuse of vulnerability** in its most extreme form.

▪ The “ lover boy ” or “ prince charming ” procurer

“ **He married me to put me on the streets. He didn’t love me. Before, in Bulgaria, he said to me : you are pretty, I want to marry you. I didn’t know he wanted to put me on the street. After, we went to Poland. There was no normal work. He shouted, got angry, he put me on the streets.** And then I got married with him. When I left, I was never alone, he was always with me, impossible to speak with my family. He was always there. The family knew nothing. He was interested in money and nothing else. All of his family are like that, putting girls on the street. ” (18)

➡ Three of the four Bulgarian women who I met were recruited at a very young age by men who promised to love them forever, and then **married them in order to prostitute them**. While this **recruitment process** is not specific to a community – it also appeared in the story told by a woman from Ivory Coast – it works particularly well in a **system of beliefs in which fulfilment for a woman means finding a soulmate, and in which relationships between couples are marked by passion, possessiveness and violence**. The woman is seduced by delusion, gets married, feels bound to her husband, thinks that there is no way to return and, in the absence of alternatives, sees no other choice but to submit to his control and desires, as if she belonged to him, “through love”. Subjugation in such cases is not a result of financial debt, but another form of contract, which creates an emotional and legal bond between the victim and her procurer. In both cases, an **initial commitment begins the process of control**.

▪ An overbearing patriarchal system

“ In December 2008, my husband’s mother died. My husband loved his mother very much. She was ill. She had cancer. He did a lot for his mother : he went to Turkey and Italy to do things for her. When she died, he was very upset. He drank a lot. Before, he never drank. He changed totally, like a different person. I saw him lost. I went to the park with my daughter, and a man walked up by the pushchair. He said : hello Madam, I see you come here crying every day, what’s wrong ? Tell me. I saw that you were very unhappy, he said. It was like I saw an angel. I finally had somebody to talk to. I couldn’t talk to my son, you see, I couldn’t say: “ Daddy... ”. **I needed someone to talk to**. My girlfriend, my colleague at work said “ you don’t look well ”. I said “ yes ”, but I didn’t talk about my husband. Because before, she saw me with my husband. We were fine. I couldn’t talk to her. I needed somebody else to talk to. And I found this person.(...). **One day... a lot of arguments at home**. One day, I made a cake with candles and everything. One morning, he said to me: “ M, I promise you, I’m going to stop drinking. I see you suffer, and the children. ” That’s what he said. I was happy. I said thank God. Now, I can go to work in peace and then I’ll come back home and cook something special. I called, he said “ I’m on my way ”... 30 minutes, then one hour later, until midnight, there was no answer. I was very upset. I took my car and called Z. He said “ yes ”, and I left. There was no control. A lot of stress. I saw him as a soul [...] That night, my life ended. He called me. He lied to me. He changed face. OK, finished. It’s very difficult **because I left on my own two feet**, to protect my family. That’s why. ” (4)

➡ To give some background, M lived a quiet life in Albania with her husband and two children. When her mother-in-law died, her husband began to drink in excess, became depressed and aggressive and the relationship deteriorated. It was in this context, because **she couldn’t criticise her husband among her friends or family**, that she met this man who seduced her, had a sexual relationship with him, and **he then blackmailed her**, threatening to reveal everything to her husband. The method used in this case is also carefully developed. By **using the victim’s value system** (in a socio-cultural environment in which it is difficult for women to talk to a colleague about a violent husband, and in which adultery is so unacceptable for a woman that she chooses to leave her life behind rather than assume the shame), Z induced a strong **feeling of moral failure**, then used this feeling of guilt to undermine her self-confidence and subjugate her to his will. In this case, he calls her repeatedly, and she obeys all his demands, through shame and fear, to the point where she agrees to leave her family home without knowing where he will take her.

“ At the age of 17, I finished school, and I wanted to go to university, but in Bulgaria, there’s so much **corruption, if you don’t have money, you have nothing, you’re nobody**. Nobody called me back even though I was accepted at university. It was my school teacher who came to tell me that I had been accepted. We called the university, but we got a negative response. It was not possible for her to pay. I studied chemistry, and at that point I was so... **I took it very badly. It was unfair**. I completely changed. I left everything behind. I was a very good child, I’m still very good. From that moment on, I started going out with friends and everything. My mother was in Turkey looking after elderly people. I was at my grandmother’s, so she called my mother to tell her that I didn’t listen, they took me to the doctor, **and the doctor said that I was no longer a virgin, and they shouted at me, because in our country it’s shameful**. They found work for me at a car wash, and a hotel-restaurant. During those two months a boy came along with his friend, and he started flirting with me. I started becoming attracted to him, I told my mother, and she said that she wanted to see him, because in Bulgaria there’s a lot of mafia, no justice and no equality. **Young, naive, I was happy to be entering adult life. I thought I was an adult**. We started going out, two or three times, he brought me back to his home, I met his mother, he met my mother. She said to me : I don’t like this person, he’s not a good person for you my girl. She felt that he was bad for me, that he could make me do things that were bad for me. From that moment on, I didn’t listen to my mother, I got into arguments with her, I packed my things and said I was going to live with him. **After two or three months we got married, but we kept our surnames. I said OK, I got a red passport, which we need to leave, and he said you’re going to go to Italy with I’s wife**. We’ll come a week later. He already knew what his wife was doing in Italy. **And just like that, I said OK, because I was in love...** I thought we would build a normal family. **I trusted him**. Without telling my family, we took the bus to go to Italy. We went to the apartment in the town centre of Rome. **I asked when our husbands would come. She said that they would not come: we are going to work in prostitution**. I said what ? She said: didn’t they explain to you ? No they explained nothing. And because I was only 18, my first time outside in Europe, I didn’t know anything, no language except Bulgarian, and Turkish. **I told myself I had no choice, and I began to work**. ” (19)

➞ S said that she wanted to study, but because she is a woman, a member of the Turkish-speaking minority, and from a socio-economic background in which studies remain a privilege, she did not get a chance. In an environment where the oppression of women is such that she is taken to a doctor to check her virginity, and **degraded because she did not conform to traditional expectations of a young woman, she married a man who would eventually place her in situation of prostitution**. This pattern echoes the previous extracts we have seen, while taking place in an entirely different context. She agrees to leave for love, and then to prostitution because she sees no alternatives.

▪ Sexual mutilation

“ I left because of a circumcision. **I refused and so I left**. In our country, female circumcision is a tradition. Circumcision has to be performed before the first child. My mother tried to negotiate for me, but she could do nothing. I was 24 years old when I left. **Recruiters look for girls on their own**. A boy told me that his sister had a hairdressing salon in Europe. ” (16)

➞ This account illustrates the nadir of patriarchal dominance and sexual violence: genital mutilation performed in the name of controlling women’s sexuality. **Refusing this tradition leads to exclusion**. Any woman who does not comply with the moral code of her community is isolated, which is what attracts the recruiter, who is described here as a predator. Such vulnerability makes it easier to manipulate the victim and establish a system of domination. This reason for leaving is mentioned in several accounts.

▪ Forced marriage

“ When my father died, I was ten years old and we were five children. I was at school and I wanted to study. After my father died, my mother met another man. She came to stay where we were, but my mother was always running here or there, she didn’t care about us. She didn’t have the money to **pay for school, for studies. It was too expensive.** After, my mother sent me to a boarding school. Actually this boarding school was made so that children would stay there and not come home. It was a school for children with no parents. After school was finished, my studies were not finished, but I wanted to begin something. I wanted to begin. **Then my mother forced me to marry, but I did not want to stay with him.** I did not want to marry. After I felt sorry for my husband, because after three months I did no cooking, no housework: I wanted to go to school. *How old were you when you married ?* 16 years old. He was nice. But then I got pregnant and it was hell. I went to see my mother and told her that I did not want to stay with him. My mother told me to stay with him. At that time, I would have preferred that it was my mother who had died and not my father (...). So then, **I decided on my own that I would leave him.** It was miserable, I had nothing to eat, nothing. I did not even tell my mother so I would not upset her. **I decided to take things into my own hands. I met a gypsy who had girls who worked for him in England, something like that. Papers and all that. And so I agreed. Even today it is my own decision.** And then I decided. My mother didn’t care. I left the child with her. Afterwards I left him because I understood more or less how it worked. He locked the girls up in rooms, let in anybody he wanted, and he took everything for himself. ” (21)

➞ M’s situation was marked by the death of a parent, a mother involved in prostitution, and being spent to a specialised school⁹. Her mother married her against her will, and **the only path to freedom open to her, to leave a difficult family and marriage situation, was to go abroad.** She willingly made the decision to find somebody who could acquire papers for her, and from the rest of her account it becomes clear that she knew that it would involve prostitution. She later discovered the conditions of exploitation.

⁹ In Bulgaria, discrimination against Romani is such that most children from this ethnic minority, who have a low level of schooling due to cultural (language) differences with the main population, are placed in specialised educational establishments, for children with disabilities of all kinds.

To conclude this first subsection, which provides initial background information, we can observe both the diversity of situations encountered and common **destabilising factors** :

- situations of social, political and religious **violence**;
- an environment of corruption, in which the poorest segment of society has no access to rights;
- a socio-cultural context in which the **place of women** is defined by a damaging system of values, whether it endorses the role of the obedient woman (for whom education is not a priority), the submissive woman with no desire (who owes loyalty to her husband in all circumstances, and is not allowed to enjoy sex) or the caring mother (whose role is to provide for the needs of her children).

The most striking feature of all the accounts given is that the organisers of trafficking deliberately target women in situations of vulnerability. **Their descriptions of being seduced, deceived and trapped systematically take place in a context of crisis that has weakened them. Such targeting is the starting point of a strategy of control, and a series of methods employed to ensure submission of the recruited person.** These recruitment techniques are used to progressively imprison

the victim. Having been destabilised by a traumatic event, she is fascinated by the promise of wealth or love, agrees without caution, commits without knowledge and, once trapped, finds herself in a state of shock and dependence. While **recruitment methods take different forms, in line with local values and beliefs, the mechanisms are similar** in a number of ways :

- there is an abuse of vulnerability and absence of alternatives;
- the recruiter uses seduction, wins the victim's trust, ensures her loyalty and builds her expectations;
- the commitment binding both parties is vitiated by false promises and the victim's lack of ability to negotiate, due to the unequal relationship between the parties;
- the commitment is made within a framework of guarantees that prevents the victim from breaking it, at the risk of serious consequences (either real or imagined).

This recruitment method results in a **system of invisible constraints**, with the victim's inability to escape partly based on psychological factors. Victims are unable to escape this web of internal conflicts without first unravelling the trap that was laid for them, and understanding the fact that they were deceived in order to place them in a hopeless situation and exploit them for financial gain.

2. HOW DO VICTIMS DESCRIBE THE PROCESS THAT TRAPPED THEM IN A SITUATION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ?

In this second subsection, I have selected all of the extracts of accounts in which victims explain the **progressive entrapment** that held them prisoners of sexual exploitation. Each situation involves a wide variety of methods, as part of an **overall system of violence**, which includes **tangible and visible constraints**, such as abduction or illegal confinement, more complex methods, such as confiscating identity papers and threatening retaliation against family members, and **intangible mental barriers**, such as psychological control by undermining self-confidence, ensuring silence through shame, etc. Procurers make use of various combinations of such methods to lead the victim to believe that she has no other choice than to submit to the power of the exploiter, and even to accept her situation.

In response to the question ‘what are the three main obstacles to finding a way out,’ here is one of the answers given, which I have included here as an introduction because it clearly shows the invisibility of the net that imprisons victims:

“ First: **fear**. Second : **loss of self-confidence**, no assurance. **No support** from anybody. Three : **fear of the police** here – that’s the last. Even if you don’t want to pay, you don’t want to go to Nigeria. The fear that comes from thinking that something bad will happen to me. You’re **afraid of what she will do, what she will do to your family**. That is very important. Not enough confidence in yourself. You say to yourself: if I stop this work¹⁰, will I be able to continue my life? How will I manage ? ” (13)

a. **The conditions of the journey and irregular residence status, which place the victim in a situation of dependence, in an unfamiliar environment, and keep her in fear of the authorities**

▪ A dangerous journey, over land or by plane, which weakens the victim and involves her in the act of fraud

“ I went to Lagos to get my passport. I stayed there for three months. The man tried to be nice at first. I didn’t know that he had plans. **He wanted to rape me**. When I was in the bathroom, he wanted to take a bath with me. I said no. He came in and pulled my trousers. I tried to defend myself and we fought. He climaxed and then left me there. I said : if you try again, I will go to the police. It was in Nigeria. He begged me, and I said no problem. There were lots of girls there, some no more than 15 years old. They came and went. **He gave me another girl’s file**. ”

Somebody else’s papers ?

Yes, they have a printing company that makes files, according to them, and when I went to the German embassy, they told me to say that I managed a company, was married with a child, that I managed the company of my husband, a businessman who travelled all the time, so I had to go to Dusseldorf for a printing trade show to purchase machines. **I went to the embassy, I said what they told me to say, and they looked at my passport. That is how I arrived, from Germany. I took a plane and a bus to Milan, then Turin. Before I arrived at the station, the guy was already waiting for me. When I arrived at the station, I asked somebody to use their telephone. I called the guy waiting for me, I told him I was in the train, and he asked me what time I arrive. I didn’t know, so he asked me to put the other guy on the phone, who told him when we arrive, and**

¹⁰ The word ‘work’ was used by almost all of the women interviewed as part of this research-action project to refer to prostitution. It is the word used by exploiters to establish their domination and legitimise their position (as if the victims were able to use the money obtained, as if they worked in safe conditions, as if the activity could lead to inclusion in society...), while accusing the more reticent of being incapable, lazy, etc.

when I should get off the train. The guy came and took me to his home. I met his girlfriend, I didn't see a baby, so I asked him and he said that wasn't important now, what is important is that I request asylum. I said no problem. He took me to get an asylum request file, and the same day he took me to see a girl. That girl took me to another girl, telling me that she was so lonely, that she knew nobody in Italy. She took me to the bus station and the girl said I had to go to work. I said : what work ? She said that I should **come without asking questions**. She asked me if I had made an asylum request, and she asked me: didn't he tell you ? I said he didn't tell me anything. She said that she didn't want to be the one who told me: come and find out for yourself. We went to a crossroads, and she told me that I should stand there and if a customer comes I should say it is 20 euros. If the customer says it is too expensive I should say 10 euros. So I asked why ? She gave me some condoms. I said : never, this was not the agreement. ” (14)

➞ Journeys are made in different ways according to the distance and control methods used. Certain women describe an extremely long and **perilous** route over land and by sea, or as in the above account, they are subjected to **rape** (which is sometimes used as part of the process of exerting control and undermining the victims' integrity, in order to make her more submissive and demonstrate that her will is of no consequence, that she is not an individual). Remotely guided from point A to B, like merchandise, by a well-organised system, which gradually provides pieces of information, victims are made **totally dependent on the network to arrive at their destination**.

“ Because when I went to Lagos, a man just took me, bring me to another state, I was to be ready, not to see my home again, I took my own bag, went to the address, buy a plane, but the man said: there is a problem, I should stay and wait. I was there alone for one week. After one week he sent a driver to take me to the airport, **he gave me a passport, with my picture, but not with my name, it is another name, and another age, not my age. I said it is not my name. He said that everything is already arranged, everything is ok. I was so scared, what would I say at the airport if they ask me questions.** When I got to the airport, it was my first time at the airport, **I think the driver is working with the man two, he knows everything about the business. He said I should wait in the queue.** The man looks at the passport, looks at me, and said I should pass. There is another man, they ask me questions [...] and when the man was to ask me another question, I saw an immigration officer who made a sign to tell him not to ask question and let me pass. After I took my luggage, and my handbag, later the driver took my luggage and said you are not going with this. You are going just with your handbag. Don't worry. **Before going, the man gave me a phone, and he said he would be calling me. When I arrived France, he called me, he asked me to destroy the passport.** I was very scared, “ how will I destroy the passport ? ” “ Try to destroy everything, ” he was shouting at me, “ go and do it, after you say you don't have documents ”. I was looking everywhere, I did not know what to do, he was calling me all the time. I went to the toilets, it was very hard to destroy, I just remove the pictures, I let everything in the toilets, and I left. I was so scared to meet the police. I was at the airport, just walking around, like someone who is lost. I had to stay in the airport for four days. I don't know what to say, I was just there without taking shower or eat. On the fourth day, there was one security man at the airport, who took me to meet the police. They took us to a waiting zone. I met with the Red Cross. **The man in Nigeria was still calling me, he said he would send a lawyer to take me out. If they free me, I would go and meet the person I am going to meet. I said OK.** There was a lot of Nigerian girls there, with the same lawyer. I think they are paying him too. The lawyer is also involve in this human traffic. It is a very popular lawyer. I went to the court, the judge allows me to go, he did not know anything about me. This lawyer took me to his office, once we go there, he was like ... he asked me to sleep with him. ” (9)

➞ This account is interesting in that it reveals the number of links involved in the trafficking chain, to varying degrees, including certain members of the embassy's official personnel. **By involving the victim in the use of false documents, and placing her in a situation of fraud, the organisers of the journey and exploitation ensure her obedience during later stages of the process.** Here, the trafficker creates the conditions necessary for the victim to be placed in the waiting area, and then ensures that she will go to the procurer before

allowing her to leave. This provisional detention conditions B to be **afraid of the authorities and to regard the police as a threat, due to her irregular situation.**

▪ Confiscation of identity and/or residence documents as a means of blackmail

“ I left for Holland. I stayed there for one month. I worked there too. My husband came back to take me because apparently he missed me, but that was nothing but lies, talk, acting. I said: no, I don’t want to go with you anymore. He used to hit me a lot. He took me, he hit me, **he made me fall, he took my residence permit.** My passport was with me, but he took my residence permit. I hid. I was afraid because he wanted to hit me. ” (19)

➡ The confiscation of identity papers is just another means of placing the victim under pressure: a form of violence through the **appropriation of a document that allows a person to exist in society, and a way of sending her a message of domination, to show her who she belongs to.**

“ On the first day, I put on a pair of jeans, as usual. The other girls around me were wearing little things. The Russian girls had a bar, they were dancing, doing acrobatics. I had never seen this in my life before. I cry, I said this is what I am going to do... I cry. Then, they do the splits, I have goose bumps, I cry. I say : “ My lord, my lord, why ? *Ah, ay, ay, ay !* ” **But my passport is in their hands.** ” (7)

➡ In this situation, it is the **confiscation of D’s passport by the procurers that prevents her from running away when she realises what awaits her, prevents her from seeing other ways out, and leads her into a situation of prostitution.**

▪ Use of fear of the authorities, administrative detention and expulsion as a means to ensure obedience and impunity

“ In the salon, it started like that. I refused, she hit me... **As I had just arrived I didn’t know how things worked.** She said to me : **if you don’t want to, I’ll call the police,** and they’ll send you back to Africa. I was afraid! I said : no don’t call the police. After a few months, I began to prostitute myself. ” (12)

➡ When they arrive in France, the victims do not know the laws or how institutions work, they do not understand their environment, and the language barrier means that their only source of information is the person exploiting them. By convincing the victim that she is at risk of imprisonment (a threat that is strengthened and made more plausible by the fines and arrests for passive soliciting and causing a public disturbance made by municipal police forces) and forced expulsion, by demonising the police, and by telling her that she is a criminal in the eyes of the law, procurers put her in a position in which they are the only people who can provide help (because they know how things work in France). She is, therefore, unable to complain about the violence she is subjected to.

“ When I arrived, I took a photo of his passport to show to the police, but I was afraid that... **I don’t have any papers : if I go to the police, I don’t know what will happen to me.** ” (14)

▪ A feeling of being outside of the law that makes the victim vulnerable to all kinds of abuse of power

“ Even the police come and threaten you. There’s nothing you can do. I don’t know about the others, but it happened to me. I was afraid. I was so afraid of going back to Africa like that. Because at the time, my family had no stable place, no hidden place. Because of all the killing going on, like with Boko Haram now. How would I be able to find my family ? He threatened me. I didn’t look at the policeman’s name because of fear. He showed me his police badge. I thought he was a customer; he didn’t come in police uniform. When he arrived, it was at Mercadet. He took me to a house, entered the code and I went up. As soon as we entered, he showed me the police thing. So now what ? **You can’t scream : if you scream, I’ll tell people that I’m doing my job. Now you need to do what I say. Give me what I want. I cried, because someone takes control over you. That’s what he did.** Not even a cent. I looked, I said my God. Even policemen, in this country ! That’s no way to live: there’s no security. You don’t know how the person lives, what kind of pain the person is going through in their life, and you come along to take advantage and then leave with a clear conscience... I don’t know. **But there’s nothing you can do. No witness, no proof.** ” (3)

b. Deception and the inability to go back

Recruiters are well aware that victims are unable to go back, which is why they are able to promise the impossible and convince them to follow them, while making the most of their lack of knowledge of the destination country :

“ She’s in Europe to bring girls over. She asks her sister: I need a girl... She knows very well what you will be doing, but she won’t tell you. She’ll tell you that you’ll be a hairdresser: my sister needs a few people. She’ll even show you a photo of her (so-called) hairdressing salon. You tell yourself that it’s a good opportunity. **You don’t know that you will need papers, because we do not have them in Nigeria.** ” (13)

▪ Deception concerning the activity

“ It’s very, very difficult, because we don’t know that we will be doing prostitution. **Afterwards, we have no choice. We cannot go back.** ” (1)

➞ Most of the women we met state that they did not know, otherwise they would not have come. All of them also say that other women knew, making a very general distinction between those who knew, made a choice, are free, see the activity as a profession in order to send money to their families, and become procurers in turn, and those who are trapped, give all their money, and are looking for alternatives. Comparison of the various accounts shows that there are **very different levels of information regarding conditions in the destination country and the activity proposed**, and that the “contract” established at the outset is vitiated to various degrees according to the initial situation.

▪ Deception concerning the conditions of exploitation

“ Well, yes, it is my family after all. I want to help them out of poverty. We have nothing to eat. Sometimes we go to sleep with empty stomachs. That is why I came here. But they didn’t tell me what I would be doing here. They didn’t tell me you’ll be

offering up your arse to the homeless, Arabs, whoever, white men, you'll have ten men a day, **you'll be working from 10 in the evening to 6 in the morning.** They didn't tell me that. ” (17)

▪ Deception concerning the existence or amount of debt

Because you didn't know how much it was before ? “ No. She told me it was just the money for the ticket. It's not expensive. I'm going to help you because you're nice, you're courageous. So I asked: how am I going to find €60,000 ? My whole life collapsed then. I told myself : **I don't have a choice because I don't know anyone, nobody can help me. I continued to work on the street to repay my debt.** If I don't bring back money one day, I have to go back on the street to find money. ” (15)

“ I forgot to say something. If there was something you could do in Nigeria... Some women knew that they were coming to do prostitution, **but they did not know that the amount to pay back would be so large.** They count in nairas. They don't know what the euro is... She comes to help them, and then she cannot, and then **she becomes a slave...** ” (14)

➡ The moment when victims become aware of the precariousness of their situation and the amount they have to repay, when their dreams of riches collapse and turn into nightmares of prostitution, **the shame of not having seen, understood or known, and the destabilising new environment in which they do not know the rules of the game, undermine their sense of identity and self-esteem, and increase their reliance on the community network that receives and houses them. These also provide highly effective means of controlling newly recruited victims.**

c. Tangled bonds of domination and dependency – a finely spun web

Human trafficking is not done solely through physical coercion and visible imprisonment. This is sometimes the case, as shall be seen in the following subsection. However, in most situations encountered, the means of domination are far more subtle. **The victim thinks that she has consented to the exploitation suffered** (which in no way alters the fact that an offence has been committed; however, she doesn't see herself as a victim, since she agreed), whether it is part of a marriage where she has to earn money for the household, whether she was sent abroad in order to send money back to support the family, or whether she has to repay debt for which her parents stood as guarantors. In some cases, these **various means are combined with each other**: there are **several forms of exploitation** that vary according to the way in which exploiters use the value and belief systems of their victims. The following descriptions are taken from accounts given by Nigerian women exploited in Paris. They form an organisational example which shows that **trafficking is part of a complex system combining objective factors** (accommodation, physical coercion) and other more **subjective** factors (promises, blackmail, debt). The aim is to identify points of reference within this complex area in order to support victims as effectively as possible.

▪ Exploitation justified by debt contracted at the beginning

To provide an example, in certain contexts, and in particular in the state of Edo in Nigeria, the debt system used to send young women to Europe seems to be practically institutionalised by organisers of trafficking. Reimbursement of the advance given to fund the journey can be guaranteed on several

levels, through an agreement made between families and before a spiritual leader. The person sent to Europe finds herself bound to a commitment which, if not upheld, will have repercussions on her family. An account given by a young woman is as follows :

“ I couldn’t go on. If I had stayed, I would have killed myself, or I would have killed him. I didn’t want to commit a crime, so I found a solution for my family. I didn’t stay for Ayelala¹¹, I stayed for my family. I wanted them to be OK. I wanted a place where they could be safe. Yes, they raped my sister. I am so angry about the fact that the police did nothing about it. I want him to pay, I want him to pay with his life for what he did to my sister. It’s the biggest regret of my life. Nothing that he did to me hurts as much as the rape of my sister. It makes me feel like dying. **My parents went to the police, but the police are only interested in money. The boss has so many people working for him. How much do I have to cause him problems ?** The police won’t arrest him. *Do they know where they are ?* Well, yes, yes, his sister knew. **He sent his sister over there to have my parents sign a paper that said I have to pay €50,000.** At the lawyer’s. You can imagine how corrupt the country is. You can imagine why the girls are afraid to denounce him. **The lawyer is involved with those people.** *An official paper ? ...Exactly. They signed. I have to pay.* ” (17)

➤ This extract shows that the organisation of trafficking can take the form of a mafia-type system, in the sense that it is maintained through infiltration of civil society, involving members of the police, judiciary and religious organisations, who have a common interest in making financial gain. The system is constructed in such a way that betraying the procurer would amount to dishonouring commitments made to society. The inequality of the relationship between the parties to the agreement and above-mentioned deception should be enough to justify non-repayment, which demonstrates the extent of control exerted within the relationship.

The following account shows **that the feeling of debt also has a strong psychological aspect**, related to the **moral obligation to reciprocate** for the opportunity to migrate to Europe, accommodation provided, and **family and/or community solidarity** – a combination of factors that makes understanding situations a complex task.

How does it work with the person who brought you over and the €45,000 ? Is there ever an end to the debt ?

“ Yes, one day the debt is finished ; one day it isn’t. But **it’s up to you to decide** : your life or the other person’s money. ” (3)

This mechanism is not only used by Nigerian networks. There is also a **system of debts to usurers** who apply interest rates from ten to twenty times higher than those of banks in order **to fund journeys from Romania to France**, for example. Children are sometimes held as security in the event of non-repayment. This form of debt involving family members is widespread: while the methods of coercion used are varied, the underlying mechanisms are very similar.

▪ The guarantee of a spiritual leader and psychological conditioning

The strongest barriers to ensure a person’s obedience are more psychological. The aim is to build a **mental prison that traps people in their shame and fear**. The spiritual hold of “ juju ”, as described by several Nigerian women, begins with a ceremony which, through symbolic acts, such as drinking a substance containing blood, leads the person to believe that something inside of her can

¹¹ A widespread sect in the state of Edo, this goddess cult was founded on the sacrifice of a young slave woman. Temples organise rituals before the departure, involving symbolically significant acts, such as leaving parts of oneself with the other party, or allowing “juju” to enter oneself by drinking a strange brew and/or through scarification. The oath spiritually binds the victim to the creditor/exploiter.

control and watch her, **preventing her from revealing the secret, at the risk of serious consequences, death or insanity :**

“ He said that when my period comes I should call him, so that they can take me to the place where I would swear an oath. Not that they didn’t believe me, but they wanted me to promise that when I go to Italy, I will not give up the brother to the police, that I will not kill the brother, that I will not run away from the brother’s home. I said no problem, because I was so desperate, I wanted to leave, I was so afraid. **When my period came, I called the uncle, and they took me to Ayelala. They took my tampon, which had my blood on it, and the *jujuman*, who did the voodoo, he took my hair, and pubic hair from my vagina. The *jujuman* made me promise that I would not kill the brother, that I would not give him up to the police. I had to drink the mixture, so that if I ran away, I would die.** ” (14)

➔ **The conditioning ritual has a strong psychological impact** on some people. The hold becomes mental. Sometimes the women believe, sometimes not, and sometimes their beliefs change over time. Nevertheless, there is an omnipresent threat, all the more insistent because it is invisible and shared. The women who have gone through the ritual share their fears, blaming “ juju ” for their health problems or accidents.

“ Before no, I did not know, all they say is: come, let’s go, we will meet somebody. Once you get there, you have to swear to pay, not to make trouble, not to go to the police. They make you swear to it... They did not put marks on my body, I was different people, I was asked to drop my pants, you understand ? Afterwards they gave me something to drink. I promised. Let me tell you how magic works. **By the time you refuse to pay, they would punish you spiritually.** I will tell you a secret. There are some girls who have refused to pay, **they see their period every day.** You see ? It is possible. It happens. **There are some that pee in their trousers, in their bed. What the voodoo does, it scares you.** Believe it or not, Africa have magic and it is powerful. There are some madam go with the asset of magic. You would not know you have been followed by a magic, they would make you a magic that you would never stop prostitution because you have been controlled by that magic. Maybe you cannot understand. ” (12)

“ Usually they make threats: if you don’t bring me my money, you know that we took an oath together, I will ask the person to make something happen to you. I have seen **Nigerian women die in their sleep, or have an accident : it is because of the oath they have taken.** ” (20)

▪ Dependence on a network of solidarity that relies on prostitution

This dependence is formed through the **accommodation provided, by the exploiters or at their homes**, which places the relationship in a context of daily life, as well as by the fact that they are the only familiar people in the new environment, sharing language, the experience of migration and providing knowledge of the destination country. They make prostitution appear to be the only means of survival.

“ The person who helped me, we were two in the same room. She said to me : no, you cannot stay locked up indoors. **Everybody goes through this, I can’t feed you and pay for the hotel for you. I do the same work too.** If I did the same as you, we would never manage. I saw that she was right. And if the madam goes to Africa, she’ll hit the family, kill the girls and everything... Then the girl told me that if this is how it’s going to be, you have to find a place to stay. **I have helped you enough already. I have my problems too. She was in the same situation as me, but she started earlier.** She gave me courage, she told me that **it isn’t easy, but you have to fight.** How do we fight ? Who will feed you ? Who will give you a place to stay ? Look around

you, there is nobody, you don't have a choice. **She went to work on the street and I cried all the tears in my body. The next day I decided to go. That is how I started.** ” (3)

➡ Beyond debt, the victim is faced with a struggle to survive upon arrival in the destination country : **where to sleep if not taken in or given accommodation by the madam and/or other prostituted women?** They are the only source of support, however complicated the link that binds them, and the system is constructed so that they appear to be the only community of solidarity at the time. Being surrounded by other people in the same situation makes prostitution seem more ordinary and helps share the shame. The other women have gone through the same ordeals and dependence on the group encourages compliance with the rules in place.

The issue of accommodation referred to in this account is crucial: it is impossible to legally rent accommodation in France without a residence permit, bank account, etc. This means that **the only options for the victim to have a roof over her head are at the procurer's, or a hotel, both solutions leading to prostitution**, due to the sum of money demanded on a daily basis.

▪ Threats to the family

“ We went to a crossroads, and she told me that I should stand there and if a customer comes I should say it is 20 euros. If the customer says it is too expensive I should say 10 euros. So I asked why ? She gave me some condoms. I said : never, this was not the agreement. I started making trouble with the girl, asking her to take me back to the house. She took me back to his house. When I arrived, I cried and said to him : this was not our agreement, I was supposed to do babysitting. I cried and he told me : I make the decisions here, **you don't have a choice, if you don't prostitute yourself, I will deal with your family, I will send people to your home to deal with your family.** ” (14)

➡ The trap is very well designed: the person commits to reimbursing the cost of her ticket and papers, thinking that she will be doing babysitting or hairdressing. Once she arrives she is forced to prostitute herself to repay a considerable sum of money and, if she does not pay, her family will be put under pressure for the contracted debt and subjected to violence. This leads to situations where **it is the family that pressures their daughter to repay the debt.**

“ After a day he said to me: if you want to run away, if you want to leave, **I know where your family is, in Abidjan.** At some time, he had rented a house, just a little house for my parents, just before I came to Switzerland. So he knew where they were. ” (7)

➡ In this case, we do not know if the procurer pays the rent for the parents' accommodation. However, the very fact that he knows where they live prevents D from fleeing, for fear of vengeance.

And you say that they threatened your family ?

“ They threatened my family right after I contacted my mother. I cried, I told her that I had problems, that I couldn't come back. My brother was hidden because he was wanted for imprisonment, so he could do nothing. But he went to this large family anyway, 40 to 45 people : **he went to ask where I was, because he was not sure if I was in Bulgaria or not. He wanted to know where I was. They fought, there was gun fire,** and I said alright, forget about it. It was not worth it. I said forget about it, leave it. He went to prison and now I don't talk to him anymore. ” (2)

➞ Threats against the family can take different forms according to the context. What is important is the extremely widespread and effective nature of this means used by exploiters to exert pressure, in the sense that it uses anxiety to paralyse any rational thought and desire to escape the relationship. **Various kinds of threats may be used, from kidnapping a brother, to raping a sister, burning down the home, killing the parents, damaging a reputation, etc.** Networks adapt their practices as required, but the underlying mechanism remains the same : exploiting the fear of seeing relatives suffer as a consequence of one's own actions.

▪ Threats carried out

Threats are sometimes carried out, to upset the victim and ensure her submission, using the family in her home country as a means of exerting pressure: a person is sent to **intimidate the family** and the mother calls begging her daughter to pay the debt. For the exploited person in such a case, far removed from her family, both geographically and in terms of realities experienced, there are no other ways out.

“ I cried and he told me: I make the decisions here, you don't have a choice, if you don't prostitute yourself, I will deal with your family, I will send people to your home to deal with your family. I started to beg him, saying OK, I will work. They went to my family's home anyway, **they hit my little brother, he almost died : that is how I started prostituting myself for him.** ” (14)

“ The last time she paid somebody to kidnap my mother. It was in 2010. People looked for my mother everywhere ; she was at the market. Later somebody called me. It was a private number. **Yes, I am calling because your mother is here with us. You don't want to pay your debt. If you don't pay we will kill your mother.** I asked : what do you want now, because I don't have all the money. She said to me : you can pay! I said : I don't have any money. They ask me to send money to free my mother. I sent €1000. They left my mother. **After that, it became a family problem, against me.** ” (13)

➞ These acts of violence have a serious effect on the victim, because she feels guilty, and because the family group itself may blame her and place responsibility for the attack on her shoulders, undermining the relationship with her family.

▪ The ambiguous role of the family: pressure from the family, the gaze of the society of origin, and sacrifice rather than exclusion

As we saw in the last subsection, the family often plays a role in the decision to leave. It is evident that the family also plays a **role, whether active or passive, in the process that enslaves the victim of trafficking**, especially when she lives in particularly difficult conditions. The family may sometimes be **aware of the situation** or **involved in the exploitation to varying degrees**, or at least hope to receive income from the daughter sent abroad. The family may also be used as a means of exerting pressure, through the threat of revealing the activity of prostitution, demanding money for the debt, or subjecting them to acts of violence. In almost all cases, **control is exerted via the victim's family**, and the shame of finding herself working the street instead of succeeding abroad. As long as the family is not aware of the sexual exploitation, it is difficult for the victim to complain : she is seen as the “chosen one”, sent on a mission, and not repaying the money that funded her journey would

make her appear to be a bad daughter. **Trapped between the expectations of the family left behind, and the unbearable reality faced, it can seem easier to sacrifice oneself than to disappoint :**

“ Yes, there are girls who have already done this and continue in order to help the family. That way, their family is happy, because there is a **big difference between our money and the euro**. Families are happy as they are not the ones who worked for it. They don’t care about you and what you do, and yet you bring in the money. They won’t tell you : I need money, give it to me right away. They will say “ I have a pain here, I have a problem... ”. **Because you are not there, you do not see, you do not know, you are concerned. You ask if the person went to hospital, and they say “ I don’t have money ! ”** The families never ask **where the money comes from.** ” (13)

➞ In cultures in which it is normal for each member to contribute to the survival and continued existence of the family group, in which it seems obvious that whoever is better off should share and in which it is up to children to look after their parents, **a heavy burden weighs on the shoulders of the emigrated person. Sometimes this burden is accepted as inevitable, which means acceptance of the sacrificial role assigned.**

Are you close to her? “ She is my mother’s sister. *Have you told your parents ?* Yes, but it is a big war in the family. Because she has money, she has connections, she can pay the police, she can have my parents arrested. She doesn’t give a damn about my mother. **There are many arguments because of me. It was not easy at all. I wanted to avoid problems so I told myself : OK, it is not an easy situation, but I think it is my fate, I need to carry the burden of destiny.** I need to accept it until something forces me to quit. ” (14)

➞ Relationships between the network (in this case the aunt, and her contacts at the embassy and in the police force) and the young woman are so unequal that there is **no possible margin for negotiation**. For a time, it becomes easier for her to accept the situation than to try to denounce her :

“ Imagine if I was a procurer (I would never do it because I hate it), I know who this girl is and who brought her. I would go to see that person and say : it was her who denounced you. She is in big trouble. Her family is in big trouble. She can never show her face in Africa. I know how it works. ” (17)

➞ The community of origin will support the person who facilitated the migration, and who is therefore seen as a sponsor, rather than support the young woman who refused to pay and denounced her procurer. **Rebelling against the false promise made and the inequality of the contract means losing the support of people in the country of origin.**

▪ Inversion of guilt

“ When I told the girl that I had to give 50,000 euros, she said : do you know how much that is ? She calculated in nairas, and I went: haaaaaaaaaaaaa ! I want back to the shop and said that I could not: how would I find that sum? He said to me: you will do like the others. So I raised my voice, I started to speak loud, and him and his partner started telling me to shut my mouth: why are you shouting like that ?

- It annoys me !

- You were dying back in Africa, didn’t that annoy you, **we bring you hear to get you out of the shit and you scream.**

In my head I said : **yes I was dying but that is not your problem. I was lost.** I cried all night. The black marks there are the tears. I thought that it was over for me. Sometimes it is so cold it stings, it is incredible. ” (17)

➡ P shows her strength of character by refusing to agree to a vitiated contract and refusing to pay a debt whose amount she had not understood, by performing an activity that she had not agreed to. Despite this, she allows herself to be **destabilised by the manipulative argument of the “ concerned saviour ”, who transfers the burden of guilt to her.** It is very important to take into account this strategy in order to understand why the victim finds it difficult to see herself as a victim. In many cases, **she has internalised the trafficker’s vision of her situation.** The **feeling of not having been careful enough, and of self-blame,** only becomes stronger the more isolated the person is.

The establishment of this unequal relationship and **the debt, whether financial or moral, puts the person in a situation of obligation, or even enslavement.** Because this violence takes place in an unknown environment, the abused person can rapidly lose her sense of identity, and become confused as to what is normal and what is not. She loses trust in her own judgement, and can partly adopt the mind-set of those exploiting her, particularly when the abuser displays no doubt or guilt and exploits the abused person’s shame of not understanding what is happening to her :

“ **On one hand it was me who accepted, on the other it was...** I don’t know. I can’t explain to you either why I do this work, and don’t have a normal job (...). **I understand nothing** of why my life is like this. **It is my fault. My fault of my life, it is me.** In my future, it is me, not somebody else. It is normal that people make profit, look, lie, they are selfish. It is very rare to see somebody honest with a really good heart. ” (19)

➡ S is aware of the fact that her vulnerability has been abused, yet she feels guilty for not having understood and being unable to defend herself. It is as if **she had internalised the exploiter’s perception of herself as a weak and easily-manipulated thing, a consenting victim,** and this feeling feeds the vicious circle of low self-esteem, dependence and exploitation.

d. Isolation: the keystone of the system of control

While the above paragraph showed a process specific to a type of trafficking network organisation, isolation is a method used by all traffickers, exploiters and procurers to make “ their prostitutes ” weaker, more dependent, more submissive and more profitable, whatever their country of origin.

▪ An unknown environment and the language barrier

“ I was in my corner. I came from another world and I arrived in another world. I’m mixed up, I don’t understand and don’t know who to talk to (...). **I am in a country that I do not know,** it is not that I’m locked up in a house, it is not that somebody locked me in with a key, no, but I can’t even... I don’t know anybody. ” (7)

“ At that time **I didn’t know anything, not the organisation, I did not even speak French.** It was hard for me to get out. I cannot move in this county because I have nothing. ” (3)

“ I took the opportunity to call my mother, because before I could not reach her. **I did not know the code.** I thought that it was the same number we dial in Bulgaria, so I could not manage (...). I didn’t know about social help, the places to go to eat. ” (2)

➞ These three extracts describe the distress of having no points of reference and **understanding nothing about how the surrounding society works**, even international telephone dialling codes. Any migrant who has never left his or her home environment before can have this feeling of not knowing how to manage alone, which in these cases is exacerbated by **solitude, the language barrier, and the situation of dependence created by procurers, who use their knowledge of the new environment and language as a means of control.**

“ Me before **I understand nothing, I don’t know: he understands, he speaks French, he manages everything.** He go to the social services, the papers. When I went to speak with social assistant, I did not speak French. She was not interested in me. She sent all money to his bank account, to his card. It is him who knows everything, it was him. ” (18)

“ I wanted to escape. He took me for another place, where I did not know anybody again. ” (5)

➞ The above account clearly illustrates that isolation is part of an overall strategy of control, which is the reason for **moving a person from one country or city to another. This is a very effective and commonly used tactic**, which not only denies the victim her freedom of movement and individuality, because she cannot decide where she wants to go, but, above all, she finds herself “ once again ” in a place where **she knows nothing about the law, administrative procedures or language.** It is, therefore, impossible for her to find information sources other than the procurer, who can exploit this monopoly to continue misinforming the victim about the police (who will arrest her), non-profit organisations (that are part of the police), the lies that she has to tell the OFPRA (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons), etc. This **places victims in an irregular situation vis-à-vis the authorities, makes them feel complicit and increases their vulnerability.** When a person has already declared a number of false names and given false accounts, who will believe her when she is finally able to tell the truth ?

▪ A law of silence between prostituted persons, their families and the rest of society

“ And then I got married with him. When I left, I was never alone, he always with me, **impossible to speak with my family, he always there: the family know nothing.** He was interested in money and nothing else. Before it was not possible to speak with the mother, otherwise he hit me a lot. With him I could never leave alone with the family. No way. If I could speak with the family, it would be finished a long time ago. When I went to Bulgaria in 2011, at last I could speak with the family. ” (18)

“ We came back to Bulgaria one week before Christmas. I was very angry with him, because before going back to Europe, my grandfather died. **My family called me saying we must come back. Him, he said : no. It is not true, your family is lying,** to make you go back and take you away. It is not possible they are expecting you, it is not true. So, no, he did not let me go back for the death of my grandfather. And then he said that I had to go to Italy to work. ” (19)

➞ These two accounts of close surveillance and psychological manipulation show the extent to which **control can be exerted over relationships with the family**, which may already be complicated by migration, money-related issues and taboos surrounding the activity of prostitution.

“ You have to go to Nigeria and give the information that the promises are lies, that in Europe they will have no help, they will be like in prison, they won’t be able to talk anymore, they will be watched. **The man who brought me, he made sure that we did not stay together, so we would not plot against him. That is what I believe. He stopped us from talking to each other.**” (14)

“ *And with the others?* **It is dangerous if I am friends with the girls who work with this lady. Because if they are together with this lady, she will report everything that I do. So distance with the girls who live with me. Because I don’t know, it is better to be careful. It is war with the other girls.** Only the bosses among themselves know who is the boss. The girls think that the organisation is the police. If you go to the organisation, nobody will be friends with you. ” (16)

⇒ The term “ divide and conquer ” could be used to describe the strategy used by procurers. They establish a law of silence through various means, such as force or controlling movements and telephone communication, or more elaborate methods involving complicity with more senior prostitutes, who are “ promoted ” and used to train new arrivals and explain the rules of the game. **The mutual mistrust established in this way prevents any collective movements of emancipation.**

“ Once I was pregnant, there were organisations like Amicale du Nid that gave us condoms, so I asked if they could do an abortion for me, and they said no problem. When I told him, **he hit me and said that if I am going to the organisations, it means I am going to the police.** I said : no, I am not going to give you up to the police (...). And I had a friend who I met in Lagos, before doing my passport. I saw her at the place where I worked. She was supposed to call me, **but I was not allowed to receive calls from anybody in Europe.** She never called. ” (14)

“ **The traffickers prevented us to talk to anyone.** If you talk, you are in trouble. You have to say you live in an hotel, you have to say we work together. At the beginning, when you arrive, you believe everything they say, then you lose so many things. It is so far from home, you don’t know what to do. **Because another girl could betray you, you have to pretend you are ok with the situation.** ” (11)

⇒ The outside world is described and perceived as threatening, non-profit organisations are conflated with the police (and are therefore seen as a threat to anyone in an irregular situation or working as a prostitute), and a whole web of lies is spun to prevent any risk of denunciation and to ensure impunity. **Each person is alienated and alone, allowing the system of exploitation to continue.** The violence suffered and the feeling of having been betrayed, manipulated and used make victims suspicious of others in general :

“ There was one customer who I talked to a lot. But when he was with me, he did nothing with me, nothing. He saw something in me. He said to me : “ This environment isn’t for you. What are you doing here ? ” But then, I didn’t dare explain to him. At the same time, all this was happening. The customers know the other customers, they call each other by their names, the man knows who pays well, he tells me: go and talk to him... So I thought about it, but then **there were films I watch. I was paranoid. I thought: if I talk to a customer, what will happen to me ?** I was just there imagining all kinds of things. ” (7)

“ So, it’s like, when I wake up I begin, I always think: if my husband hadn’t pushed me, I wouldn’t have done it, I don’t think so. Everybody who loves me, all that... I don’t think so, **because if my husband, the father of my daughter, he pushed me to do that, then since that day, I don’t believe in anybody.** ” (21)

➡ Safe in the knowledge that their victims are completely isolated (geographically, linguistically, culturally, socially, emotionally and in relation to the family), exploiters treat them as their property, commodify their bodies, and view them not as human beings with rights, but as sources of profit, which can be subjected to all forms of violence to ensure that they make money. Relationships with customers, who likewise view them as consumer goods rather than human beings, also strengthens their fear of others as potential aggressors.

In all relationships of control, **the strategy of isolation makes the victim suspicious** of everybody and reluctant to seek help or answer questions from the rare people that show an interest in their fate:

“ Before that, there was a woman, a white woman, from Switzerland, who came to talk to me from time to time. After, I understood that she wanted to know who I was. Everybody could see that maybe I was anxious, what my work was. She could see that I wasn’t well. There are people who see that a bit. The woman talked with me from time to time. **I was afraid, I was suspicious.** ” (7)

e. Violence¹² related to exploitation

Acts of violence inflicted as part of exploitation¹³, the use of victims as tools for profit or pleasure, with total disregard for their identity, human dignity and individual will, contribute to exploitation insofar as they aim to reduce women to consumer goods, property and slaves.

▪ Gender violence: rape and forced abortion

Many women report being subjected to sexual violence by men involved in the exploitation network, and are regularly forced to have abortions through physical violence or medication :

“ **He whips me.** I go to work at night and again early in the morning. If I make the smallest mistake, he always looks for a chance to punish me. That’s how I started selling my body for him. I had so many abortions for him. Once I was pregnant, **he forced me to drink strong alcohol and he gave me 5 Cytotecs to take. I didn’t know what it was. I was scared that he wanted to kill me. I drank. Hours later, I began to bleed and bleed and it didn’t stop. I was more than a month pregnant, but I continued to go to work** to avoid him, to avoid him bothering my family. When did I realise that I couldn’t carry on ? One day I came back from work, **he wanted to rape me. I said that I can’t. I was so tired. He was strong. He hit me, I have a scar, and I went to hospital.** ” (14)

➡ In a previous extract, L tells how she wanted to have an abortion at the hospital, but her procurer did not allow her. **Refusal of access to healthcare** is also a widespread form of violence, which can threaten a person’s life :

“ For six years, the fibroma was in my stomach. I don’t go to hospital. I never went to get treatment, never. ” (7)

¹² Understood as the use of physical or psychological force to coerce, dominate, cause harm or death. According to the WHO, violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power [...] that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.”

¹³ Understood to mean making excessive profit from a person through the use of an unequal socioeconomic relationship.

▪ Intimidation, giving the impression of being all powerful and instilling fear

“ He threatened me. He wanted 1000 euros, or he would hurt my family. His wife pointed her finger in my face. When somebody bought me a present, shoes, they said that I stole their money. But what money? It’s my money. The money you made. But I made it. **You take 100 cocks, and the money is for them. They have no pity those people. They are people without hearts. You are nothing for them. If they can’t manage you, they sell you to somebody else, who will really beat you up bad.** ” (17)

➔ The aim is to **use fear to reduce the other person to living merchandise**, to lock her in a destructive relationship, convince her that she is nothing and that her fate is in the exploiters’ hands.

“ One day, I was on the street and a customer came. He took me to a place that I didn’t know. He looked at me. We were in the car. He said to me: you have a god who is following you, a living god. He said to me : I didn’t come and pick you up to do anything with you. I said : ok, so why did you bring me here? He said to me: **I came to kill you.** I had a shock. I wanted to open the car door but it was locked. What did I do to you ? I don’t know you. He says: no you don’t know me, **somebody sent me.** I said: who did ? I don’t owe anything to anybody except the person who bought me, but who? He said to me: something in you touched me, I’m going to drop you off where I picked you up. But go home. Don’t stay on the street. I begin to tremble, cry. He says to me: calm down. I was afraid. Shall I take you home? No, take me back to where you picked me up. ” (3)

➔ In the same way as the “ juju ” ceremony, or threats to the family, the demonstration of force (with a weapon) to **impress the victim, make her lose confidence, remind her who makes the decisions, and condition her to subjugation** can be particularly traumatising, as in B’s case. Submitting to the other person because of fear, because they have succeeded in convincing us that we have no choice, produces a feeling of no longer existing as a person. The victim appears to be free, because there are no outward signs of domination, but in reality control is invisible.

▪ Confinement

In two of the 21 cases, physical confinement was also used. It is part of the conditioning that aims to make the victim feel powerless and prepare her for a life of prostitution :

“ The first day, they tied up my hands. At the time, I fight back, I defended myself. They hit me, and I resisted. After I **saw that they hit me all the time, I said ok, I will do what you tell me** to my ex-boyfriend. He said ok. I said: please, I’ll do what you say, don’t do anything to my family. **He leaves me in the room.** The other girls go out at night. **A customer comes one day,** like that. One day at midday I was very bad, **I can’t breathe, I don’t eat** (one pizza for three days, hot, cold, you eat or you die), my head’s not well because I’m afraid, I don’t know what’s happening with my husband, my son. I asked the man who kept me **like in prison** if I can go out for five minutes. ” (4)

▪ Surveillance, confiscation of personal belongings and complete exploitation

Many women were very badly affected by the fact that the procurer confiscated clothes given to them by customers, simply because they were **the only things that really belonged to them.** The materialisation of a personal link with another person appears to be a threat to the **total control of**

the trafficker over the victim, as the only protector, and that confiscation is also a means of reaffirming domination.

Constant surveillance, confiscation of belongings, refusal of basic freedoms, continually changing rules governing the debt and arbitrary punishments all bring to mind the idea of slavery, and all contribute to undermining human dignity and integrity.

“ After two months, I was making so much money, when I get home, she would collect all the money, **she search my bag to check where I put the money**. Once I bought a note to write all the money I gave to her. Once day she find out, she destroyed the note. If I go to M, she is around, she watches me, she records my clients. If I go home, she says: where is the money you did, there is more, where is the money. **I am not allowed to buy my own food**. One day, she found some coins in my bag, two euros, she was very angry. She said: **every money, even one euro, you make it is my money, because I am the one who brought you here, you don't have the right to take this money**. ” (9)

“ I had to pay 50,000 euros. Paying never ends. **If I make the smallest mistake, it's 500 euros. He checks the minutes on my telephone. If I call, he will know I used it. I pay. He checks everything I do. If I use even one second, I have to pay 500 euros**. I was not allowed to calculate. I sleep on the couch, I pay 200 euros. I can't go to sleep before 2 a.m. when they go, I wake up very early. **I have never been free**.

How long did you stay ? 4 years. I arrived in France in June 2014. I was pregnant. I had another abortion in August. **He kept me like an animal. If he wants sex, and I refuse, he takes money from me. He takes the decisions. He controls me. He controls my life. He controls my family too**. ” (14)

➞ Being **treated like an animal**, not only owing money, but being punished for refusal to agree to sex (which is seen as normal), and total control, show **the extent to which the relationship of ownership can go**, and how strong the resulting feeling of no longer belonging to oneself, and **no longer existing** as an individual, can be.

▪ Undermining self-worth as a means of domination

“ He doesn't call people by their names, he uses nicknames, like '*sori*', which means dumb. **He gives nicknames to people**. ” (4)

➞ Being **renamed by somebody**, whether as part of the activity of prostitution, or part of an asylum request, denies the person's identity, her filial bond, her origin, and her very integrity.

“ They look at you. Lots of girls look at you. You pay a fine if you a pregnant. **Your life has no value for them**. ” (11)

➞ This kind of humiliating, insulting and derogatory behaviour, intended to weaken the recipient, contributes to the loss of self-esteem, and is an effective way of breaking a person, in order to ensure that exploitation continues.

f. Prostitution-related violence and its traumatic consequences

▪ Memory of the first time

“The first person who sent me to prostitute myself was my husband. He would like to sell me really. I don’t want to. Later I understood a little. I paid back the money, because I thought I want to leave somewhere else. But first customer, I did not want, I thought it was an apartment for the cleaning. He came, and I was there like that. He says:

“So?

- What?

- You know why you are here.

- Yes, I know.

- So what are you waiting for?

- Waiting what?

- **Take your clothes off.**

- **Are you serious?** I’m married, you’re crazy. Leave me alone.”

He starts to explain to me. **I cried with shame.** Ever since I don’t believe guys who say I love you.” (21)

“ He introduced me to two girls. He said: you do like them. He explained to me: that is 50 euros, that is 20 euros. It was him who told me how to do it. I felt cold. The guys went past and said what’s up. I didn’t know it means ‘what’s up’. I looked at them like a dummy. I came back with my hands empty. He was annoyed. I had nothing. One time somebody asked me to do it with him for 30 euros, but it wasn’t 30 euros normally it was 50-60 euros, like they said. **But I agreed so I would not come back with my hands empty, or he would tell me off. He took off the condom and he came on me. Can you imagine somebody you do not know, how you would find that. It was dirty. I was wet everywhere. It stinks, and I was disgusted. I hid in a corner, I left the girls.** ” (17)

➔ The majority of women we interviewed had a very vivid and marked memory of their first experience of prostitution: **an event that divided their life into a before and after.** It clearly appears that initially it is not the judgement of others that causes hurt, but the disgust (a physical reaction to very precise details involved in the situation) and **shame** regarding the **humiliation** and a feeling of human indignity, which can lead to self-contempt. Even for women who were aware they would be prostituted, the first experience is a discovery of how it really is, and its effects on the body and mind. Following this first experience, it is the repetition of violence, over and over, that marks women:

“ You take 100 cocks. ” (17)

▪ Stigmatisation

“ When I was on the street, when the cars go by, you see how the women inside look at you. **I feel like when I go somewhere, prostitution is written right there!** (she points to her forehead). ” (13)

➔ **The contemptuous look of passers-by,** persecution by the police for passive soliciting and public shame are also **forms of symbolic violence**, which reinforce the isolation and negative feelings that people in a situation of prostitution can already have towards themselves.

“ I know a girl who comes to my place, but I can’t... I know that I was in this situation. She goes to the street, it’s not that it’s not my problem, it is my problem because I want her to find a way out, for her to leave this business. Sometimes she comes to my place, she wants to eat, she goes to take a plastic plate, and I say no. **She tells me that she is not clean**, she says you have children, I still go to the street. It breaks my heart. **She feels guilty**, like when you feel like other people are better than you are. ” (13)

“ Already, in my country, when you have two boyfriends, people say you are a slut. Imagine if you sleep with everybody. That person is no longer a slut, **even a dog is better than that person**. Sometimes it annoys me, even though I’m married, **I always have that in my head, that bad life that I lived. Sometimes I went crazy in front of my husband.** ” (17)

➔ The further removed the act of prostitution is from received education and the norms of the social group to which the person belongs, the more it affects self-esteem: the way people judge themselves in relation to their own values. Disgust with the act of prostitution can become disgust with oneself, in that it undermines physical and moral integrity. The shame caused leads to a loss of energy and huge psychological damage.

▪ Daily violence and constant danger

“ I started working, for 4 years, in H, it was not easy, the trafficking is too dangerous. If you have not been inside you don’t know what it is, you understand? It is not a good work, it is too dangerous, some of the clients they are crazy, some of them left the prison, **you come there, you don’t know. you follow some clients, they want you to sleep with their dog, they beat you, they take the money you work before, they want to do a kind of nonsense, it is not what they told you, what you agree with them. They come they pick up in the street, they said 1h, you go with them in their house, once there it is something different, they want to video you, they can beat us up, they throw us out, some of them they threaten you with knives and guns, they are four.** ” (8)

“ There are a lot of risks. **When you go out at night**, you don’t know who you are going to meet, **you can be forced, or die, and get some disease, you might get raped, you have to live with these things for the rest of your life.** ” (10)

➔ Beyond the extreme conditions of the activity and its consequences, including working at night, prostitution is an act of violence in itself, and involves all forms of dangerous and traumatic acts of violence, such as those described here.

“ Being over there and giving your body to any person, you don’t know who, **it is sadness that kills people**. It could be a murderer, a good guy, you don’t know. They pick you up, some don’t even pay, you get raped, you get hit. **The person can do whatever he wants with your body.** ” (3)

➔ Customers who see **the prostituted person as an object strengthen the control system used by networks, by contributing to their dehumanisation**. Dispossession of the body, constant anxiety about a life-threatening environment and the need for constant hypervigilance wear down the person’s psychological strength.

▪ “Decorporalisation”¹⁴ and health consequences

“ You go out on the streets, you put up with so many disgusting things. You can’t bear it, it is not pleasure, it is nothing. It really is a **body without a heart**. In little words. I **find it like death, you feel nothing**. ” (21)

⇒ “ A body without a heart [...] It seems dead ” : these statements, like so many others, say more about the trauma caused than a long essay. By protecting herself against regular and repeated physical violence, **the person creates distance from herself: she describes herself as numbed and is no longer in touch with her own body**. Sometimes she does not register her pain, and no longer looks after her health :

“ When I came back to France, I was operated, I was afraid. They took out a fibroma, like that. Maybe it is because of the champagne. I could not go to the hospital. When I came back, I was so thin, so thin that when my brothers saw me, they did not recognise me. I was thin. When my big sister saw me, she said to me : Wait, have you been locked up ? They say you are in Switzerland, a county like Switzerland... You come back and look how thin you are. Even my hair, I had no hair left, **I was so anxious, even though I had lots of hair like West Indian women**, I didn’t have time to take photos, **but I had more hair. All my hair was gone**. ” (16)

⇒ This distancing sometimes goes hand in hand with **consumption of psychotropic substances of all kinds, such as alcohol, cocaine, crack**, etc., and various forms of addiction, which are another way of numbing oneself in order to cope :

“ To go to prostitution, you **have to be addicted to something**. You must be on one. To be wild, to giving up to a man. **If you have no, otherwise you would be ashamed. You need some drugs to do that**. ” (12)

▪ Post-traumatic disorders : state of shock, temporary amnesia, confusion, flashbacks

“ There are things like a signature, **it is marked on your body. You cannot forget. You lie there and flashes come back, dirty pictures in your head, you cannot forget**. Sometimes, you feel sick, you go to wash yourself so many times, but you can’t. ” (7)

“ As soon as I started working, **once you start to work, you forget everything, you tell yourself that life continues. Once you have accepted, you have forgotten, you see the others, you don’t know how they arrived, you tell yourself : no I must continue**. Many people work there for ten years without knowing that they are not living a life. Many do not know that the life they are living is not a life. ” (3)

“ People on the streets. **Many are confused. Most, they do not know what they are doing**. They are abused by bad people. After, you do not know what you are doing. It is difficult to leave the street. ” (5)

¹⁴ A concept developed by J. Trinquart: “ a process of physical and psychological modification corresponding to the development of sensory problems affecting the body schema and simultaneously leading to a **split in body image**, ultimately **resulting in the loss of a person’s complete occupation of their body**, which in turn leads to neglect of care for the body and health. This process is caused by the need to adapt to a context of regular and repeated attacks on the body, or attacks which create an experience of **extreme instrumentalisation of the individual’s body**. ”

➡ The accounts show the extent to which prostitution leads to serious psychological consequences : **insomnia, intrusive images in which the person continually relives violent scenes, blackouts where, at the other extreme, she forgets entire periods of her life, confusion**, and inability to give rational meaning to experiences. These difficulties also **make it difficult to imagine alternatives, to ask for help, to make a request, to be believed, and to exercise rights**. Post-traumatic states can lead people to unconsciously put themselves in danger, to have **totally inappropriate reactions to situations encountered**, to appear detached when describing their worst memories, laugh nervously during interviews, or, conversely, suffer a huge anxiety attack due to a small detail.

All of the above form **obstacles on the path to emancipation and exit from the system**, in particular when victims have forgotten their aggressor's telephone number and address (their complaints will not be considered), or when they describe events in a disjointed manner (making it difficult for the person listening to understand or believe events told in an illogical way).

For example :

“ I tried to make a complaint against her, but I had nothing: no address, no telephone number, no photo, nothing. For my asylum request, I made it in 2010 too. Rejected. It finished in 2011. I know that it didn't work because at the OFPRA, **I was too scared, I could remember nothing, I could not manage to speak.** ” (6)

➡ The fear of having become insane only adds more troubles, and these consequences only increase the victim's vulnerability and strengthen the exploiter's control.

g. Psychological consequences of violence leading to increased control

▪ Numbing in order to cope

“ What is difficult is that when a person is prostituted, they see it like a profession. It is difficult to find a way out. Many people see it like a profession. At the beginning it is difficult for them, **and after they no longer use the exit doors, they stay there, they stay stuck**. When you are stuck, not just in terms of this work, everything going on around you, **it is stuck too... mentally you are stuck, finished, dead !** When you see this as a profession, mentally you are dead. Clothes, the body, they find it pretty and it becomes a priority. They always want to buy this, **they do not live in their body anymore. They do not think well any more**. They continue, they do not think it is dangerous any more, that it is not good for the health, for others, for the future. They do not think this anymore, because they see it as a profession. ” (13)

➡ This extract reveals **a form of over-adaptation, progressive habituation** (the person resigns herself to accept the situation because she sees no other alternatives at the time) and/or **mental dissociation**, which disturbs the ability to think and make judgements.

▪ Paralysis due to control

Certain people, like S, seem very aware of the abuse they are being subjected to, and of their share of responsibility for remaining in the situation, without however being able to find a way out :

“ But I was aware of what was happening in my life. It is not because I was stupid, that I did not understand, that I did not see, that I did not feel, I continued to do it. And today I cannot give an answer to myself. I talk to myself, every day, and I do not understand. I don’t know. I was stupid. **I saw my life, but I continued doing it, and I did not understand why. I was very young too.** I asked myself: why is my life always the same ? Why didn’t I dare to change something ? I still ask myself, every day, every evening, I ask myself why I did this. I saw it all, people making profit in front of my eyes. Why didn’t I stop ?” (19)

This is how she explains it further on in the interview :

“ I was taken mentally, I was not myself. Through my conscience they made it so I don’t think well. They made it so I don’t think well. They blackmail me. When I think well, they say: no, it is not true, it is you who is not thinking well.” (19)

⇒ S precisely describes how mental manipulation is used to establish psychological control, the aim being to alter the person’s perception of reality through various means of seduction, persuasion and submission, including undermining her self-esteem.

The following account given by D shows the same idea of **shock** in the face of a situation that is unclear to begin with and progressively becomes worse. Fear, isolation and brainwashing lead her to remain for six years without being able to find the inner strength and external support needed to leave :

“ Yes, it is like one time, I explained one time to a friend, not long ago. She said to me : Ah, D, you could have run away. It is easy to say these words... You remember in the USA, they show a couple who locked up a man and his wife for eighteen years. You can ask yourself why don’t they run away... **You know what they put in your head: you don’t know.** Those people, they were in a neighbourhood, they can run away, but they did not, they were there. **People don’t know how they work on your brain, if you ever run away... there are things that happen like that. You don’t know how to explain it.** I was scared, I understood **that I was caught in a vicious cycle,** I was **afraid** for my life, and because he knew where my parents were, honestly, I was **mixed up,** honestly, I did not know what to do. One year, it goes by, the second year, I see that they have taken my passport, they told me: we will get a passport for you. They said we will make a work contract. I have no work contract. I was not the only one, maybe the others, there were other girls, they were used to it. I don’t know, **I don’t understand, I don’t know who to talk to.** ” (7)

▪ The phenomenon of returning to the exploiter

“ The man I was with left me. He said: I am giving up, I can’t continue with you. I left, I don’t know where to start, I look at my son, my little was two years old, what do I do ? Should I abandon my child in the street ? What about my stomach ? I don’t know where to go, back, front or anywhere. **I was just thinking, everything turned upside down.** Am I back on the street again ? When I was with the man, I thought everything would be ok. And now, I don’t know what to do, it was a very big decision to take, I have no money with me, just me, my kid, my belly, my phone. **So what I did, I called my Madam,** I called her because I thought: since I have a child, I am pregnant, I am going to become a liability for her, she would not allow me to go to prostitution again, she can allow me to help. She told me : you must go back from where you start. Either you go back to the street, either you come back with me and start the business again. I can’t feed you and your baby together. I beg her. She said : there are still men who like pregnant woman. It was not easy with her. ” (12)

⇒ The victim has been made so weak, and **conditioned** to such an extent, she thinks that the procurer is the only person who can help her, that she is unable to manage alone, and that her only choice is to return. She is aware of **no other solutions.** Sometimes, loss of

accommodation, or a break-up, can lead the person **to resume prostitution, in the places that she knows, taking the risk that she will be seen by the procurer** and fall under his or her control once again.

▪ A future as a procurer

For similar reasons of having no other points of reference, of seeing no other options, and being “damaged” by acts of violence inflicted on them, some victims in turn gradually become exploiters of other young women by necessity :

“ My boyfriend, my pimp was in Holland. I didn’t know what was happening over there. Actually, he had another girlfriend, he had another two girls working for him. I didn’t know. I was never ok with somebody working for me or for him, I was always ok just for me. I didn’t agree. And all of a sudden he said: listen, I’m going to send you a girl from Holland, a Romanian who speaks a little bit of Turkish, that way you can speak with her. **You teach her the job. I said: listen, if this girl comes, I will have problems, they will think I am this girl’s pimp.** He said: no, don’t worry. I said : how is this ? Where does this girl come from ? He didn’t explain clearly. I said ok, bring her. He sent her over from Holland, again by bus. I picked her up at the station. I start talking with her. I take her back to mine at the hotel. She takes her shower. We go to eat. **I did everything I could for this girl.** That night at work, I brought her to my place and she hid herself. I could see that she did not want to work. She was not at ease. She was not used to this kind of work, on the street, because like I told you in Holland, it was in a bar. **I saw she was stressed, panicked. She didn’t want to. After ten minutes on the first day I took her, I saw she was hiding in the trees, she was not even on the edge of the road. I came next to her and said: what is going on ? Why are you like this ? Why don’t you want to ? Come closer, that way you can work. ”** (19)

“ **That lady she had to work for somebody too. She is a boss today but she was also the slave. It’s like I’ve suffered, so I’m going to make somebody else suffer. Every person has their turn.** The difference is that she knew. There are two kinds of girls: those who knew, and those who didn’t know. Those who chose to come and prostitute themselves, sometimes later they have enough, they want to have a family, so they have to bring other girls to work for them. ” (16)

➞ The victim becomes a procurer under the weight of the system, **because she obeys orders, or as a reaction, in order to improve her situation and repay her debt more rapidly.**

To conclude this second subsection, the **means used to coerce and create dependency** by organisers of trafficking to effectively exploit their victims, whether working alone or in organised networks, can be summarised as followed :

- The recruitment tactic, which creates a commitment and **binds the victim** to her exploiter ;
- The deception at the heart of this commitment, from the discourse of help to the intention to make profit, leading to a duplicitous game of **community solidarity and exploitation of human beings by others** ;
- Irregular travel and residence conditions and use of the **victim's belief that she is at fault to impose silence, fear and isolation**, and to ensure impunity ;
- The use of **threats to the family**, to enslave victims through blackmail ;
- Physical **violence** in order to terrorise and ensure submission ;
- Undermining personal integrity through **objectification** (being reduced to merchandise, both by the procurer and for the client) and **psychological control** of all kinds (from vodun rituals to marriage), which place **the feeling of having no choice** in the victim's mind.

What is particularly striking here is the overlapping of various methods of domination, both visible and invisible, physical and psychological, which together form a **system of control that can sometimes lead the victim to internalise her abuser's viewpoint** (this can clearly be observed in cases where the victim goes on to become a procurer). By playing the role of both friend and boss, saviour and exploiter, by receiving and threatening, advising and inflicting violence, the procurer is able to convince the victim that she understands nothing, that **the situation of**

debt and prostitution is normal, and that life is just like that.

In summary, these accounts throw light on the crime of trafficking and illustrate, through various examples, **the process leading to sexual exploitation**. It begins with and by recruitment (abuse of vulnerability in a violent socio-political context, using seduction to bind the victim to a contract vitiated by deception), then during transport and reception in the destination country, to **set up an organised system of control**, which uses physical coercion (violence, confiscation of identity documents, confinement, etc.) and psychological manipulation (conditioning rituals, threats to the family, double standards, changing names, intimidation, misinformation, isolation, etc.), the final aim being to **submit the person to prostitution for maximum financial gain**.

It is important to bear in mind that what creates and maintains these situations is a **system of values in the destination society which tolerates** the fact that the body of a vulnerable person (due to an irregular situation, inflicted violence, etc.) is made available by a procurer (who exploits vulnerability to make money) for another person (who considers that his irrepressible sexual needs take precedence over the physical and psychological integrity of the person from whom he buys the service), in the same way as a mere consumer good¹⁵. The customer, who is complicit with the procurer, creates and supports the market by bringing money, thereby creating and maintaining the sexual exploitation of people who have no alternative. **The indifference of citizens regarding these situations is all the more serious in that it strengthens the procurer's domination** over the person being prostituted, because trafficking is seen as a logical and almost acceptable result of

¹⁵ For further details on analysis of the system of prostitution, see: Cyrille Mbiaga, "Le système prostitutionnel, sources africaines dans le paysage français" (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2014).

injustice in the world, as a “ normal ” situation.

Given the above, the women interviewed as part of this research project should be applauded for the courage and intelligence they have shown in freeing themselves from this conditioning, escaping the vicious circle in which the consequences of violence make the system harder to leave, and gaining enough perspective on their own stories to be able to share their vision of their experiences with us.

Their understanding throws light on our own and reminds us that the people who have endured this process of seduction, deception, manipulation, terror, silence, isolation and dehumanisation, and paid dearly for allowing themselves to be deceived, trapped and abused, can nevertheless be **actors in their own lives, capable of fighting to create survival and empowerment strategies**, which can be facilitated along the way through the provision of the support necessary to escape and create alternatives.

B. HOW DO THE PEOPLE INTERVIEWED EXPLAIN HOW THEY GAINED FREEDOM FROM THE SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING AND THE LEVERAGE THEY USED TO MOVE TOWARDS SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INCLUSION ?

While varying in order and importance, various **factors contributing to exit from the situation of trafficking for sexual exploitation and social inclusion in the society of destination** emerged during the interviews. Once again, what interests us here is the way in which the people interviewed recounted their stories. All of the women, in their own way, described a series of events (which will be identified in the first subsection) that led to **a kind of moment of realisation**, when their perception of the situation changed in some way, and then **the long and arduous journey** to find ways to overcome the obstacles standing in the way of a better situation (second subsection).

I. HOW DO THE WOMEN EXPLAIN THEIR MOVEMENT TOWARDS FREEDOM FROM THE SITUATION OF TRAFFICKING ?

In a context where victims have an irregular residence status, are conditioned to fear the police, are dependent on those exploiting them for survival, live in constant terror that the least mistake will lead to terrible consequences for their family, have nobody to talk to, are numbed by acts of violence inflicted on a daily basis, and are racked by shame and guilt, how is it possible to see that other alternatives are possible ?

In this first subsection, I have selected extracts from among all of the interviews in which **the women explain the various sequences of events that led them to see the possibility of leaving the situation of sexual exploitation and moving towards more acceptable life alternatives**. It is very difficult to identify the factors that lead to the moment of realisation (does anybody know why they change their perception?), so we shall look at the avenues for reflection that were opened up as the interviews progressed. There was a factor, however, that was found in all accounts, regarding individual will and a decisive moment of choice :

“ And on the subject of finding a way out...

The most important thing is for the person, for him or her – because there are men too – to **make a personal decision that if I find an opportunity to stop, I will do it**. That is the most important thing. It is not by giving the person a job, by arresting the procurer, it is **up to you to be determined to leave, as soon as you have a better option**. ” (12)

➡ According to L, simply opening the door is not enough: in order to leave, the person has to understand that staying inside is no way to live and has to be aware enough to see that the door has opened. The person also has to **allow herself to believe that she can make it out**, that she can face what is on the other side of the door alone, that she can abandon everything that is keeping her inside, and that she has **the right to take the decision to leave**, and the strength to take each step towards the door.

a. A flaw in the system of control

▪ A moment when the grip loosens

In a certain number of cases in which coercion is applied in a very tangible way, through confinement, surveillance or isolation, the catalyst for leaving is a moment when the pressure lets up.

How did you manage to find a way out ?

“ The first day, they tied up my hands. At the time, I fight back, I defended myself. They hit me, and I resisted. **After I saw that they hit me all the time, I said ok, I will do what you tell me** to my ex-boyfriend. He said ok. I said : please, I’ll do what you say, don’t do anything to my family. He leaves me in the room. The other girls go out at night. A customer comes one day, like that. One day at midday I was very bad, I can’t breathe, I don’t eat (one pizza for three days, hot, cold, you eat or you die), my head’s not well because I’m afraid, I don’t know what’s happening with my husband, my son. I asked the man who kept me like in prison. **And I knocked on the door, I said: mister, please, I need to breathe because I’m dying here. Because it’s true, it’s very dirty here. I’m going to die. I need to breathe. I haven’t been out for ten days. I cried, I’m very nice with you. Because I resisted the first two days, I was very strong, but after I obeyed, I was very good** because I could see that there were not too many other solutions. He said : OK, go on then. I went to the forest. I saw the sea ten metres away. **My head told me that is real death. Because there is the sea, death. It is better than prostitution.** ” (4)

➔ Here, M can no longer stand physical confinement : the situation is totally unbearable, so she devises a strategy to find a way out and flees.

At what point did you decide to file a complaint ?

“ In 2011, when I went on holiday with him, he was with me every day, he never left me alone. **One day he went to do the papers with the family, my big sister came to the house for a coffee, I talked about all of that, and she said to me : but why are you still with him ? Mama said you go now and file a complaint against him. I said that I wanted a divorce.** Before it was not possible to file a complaint, I was all alone. ” (18)

➔ R was under constant surveillance by her husband and procurer, but **a day arrived when she had an opportunity to spend some time alone with her own family. She was able to confide in them**, and they clearly told her that her current way of life was unacceptable. R immediately had a moment of realisation and lodged a complaint against her husband.

▪ A sign of change

A time comes, or an event occurs, which reveals the inconsistencies in the discourse of the exploiter(s), demonstrates the manipulation behind the promises, or reveals that threats made were baseless. This **sudden awareness** of the exploiter’s intention or weakness begins the process of emancipation. It will, above all, have an impact because it changes the person’s perception of her own margin of manoeuvre. While this change in perception may only initially manifest itself in small acts of resistance, it signals the end of the process of control via the opening up of paths towards exit.

“ I didn’t stay for long. **Five months with them. I arrived in September, until February, because they were arrested by the police.** It wasn’t me who denounced them, it was them, her boyfriend who denounced him. Her boyfriend was caught on the border from Spain, he was carrying money in the car boot. They took him to the police station. The criminal asked me where is the boyfriend. He called him, he didn’t even know he’d been arrested by the police. After, the police came. Her boyfriend saw that the situation was becoming serious and he started giving everybody involved in the business up. I was outside, and when I came back at about 6.30 a.m., I opened the door and it was a mess everywhere in the room: saucepans in the corridor, I couldn’t even get through. There was nobody in the house. I thought it was a burglary. **I called the criminal’s family, he had sisters here. I explained the state I found the house in and she said : it’s the police, you need to disappear from that area. I left.**

They told me to go to the two girls who brought me onto the street. Her brother would come to collect the money. I gave him 10,500 euros. I said stop. ” (17)

➞ Following the arrest of members of the network, P continues to follow instructions for a time, which shows that **the moment of realisation does not instantly occur and that a physical opportunity to escape does not necessarily lead to a refusal to continue**. In this case, it takes the person some time to see that the network has weakened and decide to stop paying money.

“ But she died. She said that she had the power, she put all her hope in the juju, and she died. God let her die. That was how we understood that we were free. Before, we couldn’t say anything to anybody, or we would have been punished by the juju.” (11)

➞ In this very interesting case, the procurer dies, but the network remains operational. B and T (two very young women displaced and prostituted by the same madam, who developed a secret friendship, despite the fact that it was forbidden, and, as friends, were able to gain perspective and understand their situation) have their moment of realisation when the madam, who led them to believe that she was all-powerful and protected by “ juju ”, dies of cancer. **The system of control collapsed as soon as B and T realised that the magic of voodoo was not as effective as it seemed**. The trust they built together, and the small space of freedom that existed between themselves, were enough to encourage them to leave.

“ I was very scared. After two months I refused to work, then I was working. I was making so much money. When I get home, she would collect all the money, she search my bag to check where I put the money. **Once I bought a note to write all the money I gave to her. Once day she find out, she destroyed the note I said: why? She said: for security purpose.** ” (9)

➞ The above series of events acts as a catalyst for the victim : she does not immediately implement a strategy of escape, but understands that the madam is not as strong as she appears, that she also has fears, and that the balance of power can shift...

b. A meeting that provides a break from isolation

▪ An outside view of the situation and a person to confide in

“ Before I met AdN, there was somebody who I knew from before in Nigeria, he was a man. As soon as he saw me he said: **what are you doing here ? It is the same question that I ask myself. I don’t know.** He said to me: what kind of work do you do ? I said to him: you see, where did you find me ? He said to me: **no, you do not deserve this. I said to him : I have no other choices. Later we went to the coffee shop. He said lots of things that touched me deep down. I started to cry.** He said to me : I am also in a very complicated situation, I cannot help you, I cannot give you accommodation, but I can’t believe that you are here. ” (3)

➞ A meeting that takes B back to who she was before, makes a dent in her state of paralysing numbness, and opens her eyes to the kind of life she is living.

“ Three weeks later, one month, I met a white man who really helped me. A French man who spoke English. He asked me what I do, all that, and he said to me: you are too young, too little to be doing this. I met him at Darty, we exchanged numbers, and I told him we could see each other during the evenings, because I could not go out during the day. I arranged to meet him. He came to see me. **He said to me : what do you do ?** I said, this is what I do. **He said to me : it is not good, why do you do this ? I feel like I saw my father. I opened up. I explained everything : somebody brought me here, he left me with a criminal who asks for money from me, you see. ”** (17)

“ One day, I said to her : can I trust you ? She said : I can see that you are not well, **how long have you been here for ?** I can't explain to you, it is too complicated. She said to me : yes, that man, people have told me about him, he often does this to people. **So, one day, I explained to her a bit about the stories. I started to cry. She said to me : so what do you want to do ? ”** (7)

➞ Being considered as a person rather than an object to be exploited for profit or pleasure, receiving some attention, **putting words to experiences, and expressing her pain, fears and wishes, makes it possible for the victim to focus on her own thoughts and intuitions, simply by being listened to.** Moments such as this can also lead to increased awareness and provide access to key information, such as the address of a specialised organisation.

▪ Guidance towards a specialised organisation

“ At her house I met a man, very nice, and he asked me how I feel. What happened to you ? **He said if you don't feel well like that, you should leave, you can go to Lyon if you like, there are organisations there. He paid for the train ticket for me. I never saw him again. ”** (6)

What gave you courage ? “ **I know people,** because in 2013, the police caught me. I stayed in a detention centre for 45 days. They wanted to take me back to my country. I was lucky. I got out and they said I had seven days to leave. I didn't want to go back to Spain, because I came through Morocco and stayed in Spain for seven years with traffickers I lived with. I paid, paid, paid. I know a girlfriend over there. I said : we leave, how will we do it. She said we go to France. We arrived in Toulouse, **I didn't know anything, I made my life there. I saw a father with a family, and lived with him. I asked him for help. I still live with him with my family today. He told me about Amicale du Nid. ”** (1)

“ The lady who I lived with, maybe, she had pity on me. She saw and **she told me : I have a friend who knows an organisation that looks after people like you. You should go and see Amicale du Nid. That is how I went to F, to the daytime reception.**” (7)

➞ Because **a specialised organisation understands the complexity of the situation,** is equipped to deal with the issues of prostitution and trafficking, can **ensure confidentiality and provide suitable solutions,** such guidance is often beneficial in that it offers a break from isolation, an end to silence, and an opportunity to deconstruct the methods of domination used by exploiters, one by one, with trained professionals.

▪ Visiting Amicale du Nid : a door to the outside world

In the context described in the first section, in which people are paralysed by fear and numbed by violence, it is clear that they are not always in a position to visit a specialised organisation. It is

sometimes necessary to reach out to people, and simply offer the prospect of something new, or the possibility of something better, in order to break the suffocating routine seen in the previous section.

What stopped you before ?

“ I was afraid for my family, I didn’t know what to do, where I will go, what will I do with my freedom. Freedom does not mean living like animals. How will I manage ? I am near my family, but me too how will I manage ? Chances for freedom : but how will I manage ? **I was afraid, but also I didn’t know what to do. When I saw the organisation, I saw that there was a chance. When I didn’t know, I didn’t know that there was a chance.** So I have courage, I say : OK, we will do like what we said. ”
(1)

➞ The possibility of finding support, an unconditional welcome, and people to talk to and think about solutions with, allows victims to feel that they are not alone and believe in other possibilities. Even a place where they can be themselves with other people can make a difference :

In the end, what made you listen ?

“ One day I said to myself: OK I will listen, several times. **One day they said to me : you can learn French, there is a school, you can come here. So I told myself I would go. Amicale du Nid also suggested other things, to leave life on the street.**”
(15)

➞ F explained to me that, for a long time, she closed her ears to social workers offering support, because she thought they were part of the police or did not see the point, until the day when the combination of circumstances described above made her decide to listen, to try, to look for new solutions and strategies, and she came to the French language class.

▪ Solidarity in pairs

In one of the cases mentioned above, two people exploited by the same procurer grow close, despite being forbidden to talk to one another, and gradually build trust. They manage to express their dissatisfaction with their situations, push back against the isolation established by the network, and work together to find a way out :

How did you escape ?

“ First we start to build trust because we start to talk to each other. We realise we can be free from this bondage, that **there might be something much more better than going to the street.** One person alone cannot do this. Nobody know we are together. We were looking for an association that we could trust. ” (11)

▪ The possibility of accommodation

When accommodation at the exploiter’s home is the main obstacle, meeting a man to live with can sometimes be a first major step towards emancipation, as in the following account, in which B describes a true love story. She recounts their meeting, their discussion, and how it changed her perception of what had happened to her :

How did you manage to find a way out ?

“ I found **somebody who gave me support**. I met a man. Before, I returned again at night to work on the street. After I found a companion, he took me as a customer, he talked to me, he said: but wait, what are you doing on the street ? I said :

- Yes, but I don't have a choice, I need to pay for food and my hotel.

- Do you want to live with me ? Do you want us to go out together ?

- We'll see, let me think.

He called me, I called him. All of a sudden, he stopped calling me. It discouraged me. One day, I call him, he doesn't answer his telephone. He thought that I'd found somebody, but it wasn't the case. I left, I wrote him a message to say: you suggested going out with me, and now you don't answer, if it is because of that, you think that it's a problem, it doesn't matter, forget it. The next day, I call, he gives the telephone to his friend who tells me that he is not there. I say that it is just to find out if everything is OK. Tell him I said hello. I didn't call again. He called me, and said to me :

- Where are you ?

- Why ?

- I just want to know if everything is OK. Can you come and see me tomorrow, to talk.

- When ?

- Tomorrow night, after work.

I went, we talked, he said that he saw that I was a good person, that we can try. He said that I must not go back to the street again.

I said to him :

- It is not my choice being here, it is not that I like it. The money doesn't interest me. I want a stable place. At the hotel I cannot prepare, it is not a life, but God gives me courage.

- Do you want to come and live with me ?

- I don't know you, you don't know me, you can't bring somebody to your home.

- It is just to see if what you say is true, if you really do not have a place to go.

- Yes.

- For me there is no problem. Will you come tomorrow ?

- Sunday.

He came to help me carry my luggage, and there **I had a home with him. I stopped going on the street. I did not need to pay rent anymore. I had help to buy food. That is what helped me to find a way out. We stayed together for six years.** And then before anything could happen, we broke up.

This is to say that for many people who are there, when they find somebody to motivate them, who gives you support, you can find a way out (...).

Because to live with a man, if a man makes you leave the situation, it is not easy either. Not all men, I don't know how to say, understand. **Many will make you pay for the things that they give you. Many girls prefer to suffer out there instead of being in the hands of somebody who will make you suffer at home.** ” (3)

➤ B's account describes the beginnings of a true relationship, which would end six years later (because she was a Christian and refused to have a Muslim wedding, he gave in to family pressure and married another woman), but significantly helped her in finding a way out, not only in terms of accommodation, but because he considered her to be a life partner, offered her a safe place to be and, therefore, offered an alternative to prostitution. This is far from being a miracle solution to the problem and, as B explains, in other stories, the customer who presents himself as a saviour will introduce other forms of violence, exploitation and control. Without wanting to feed the stereotype of a strong and protective man, and a weak women who needs to be protected, several accounts lend weight to the idea that, **at a certain point, being seen as a woman who is desirable as a partner, developing an emotional relationship, and sharing a home with a man, can be a way of escaping the network of exploitation.**

While finding somewhere to sleep and share daily life is an essential point of support, it can also place the person in a situation of extreme dependence in relation to a violent man who knows she has nowhere else to go :

How did things go afterwards ? What were the main stages in your journey up until today ?

“ At the beginning, I was at a lady’s, a Nigerian woman. She always wanted us to pay more. One day the police came to her home. I ran away. She was so angry with me. **I went to the hotel, but after it was too expensive. I ended up with a white man, I lived with him, but he didn’t want to let me outside. Once I left through the window to go and see some friends. He threatened to kill me. He tore up all my things.** Then I called a man from Mouvement du Nid, who found me a place at the hotel, but not for long. ” (6)

➞ This account clearly illustrates the need to offer suitable, safe and stable accommodation in order to be able to find a way out of the situation of sexual exploitation.

c. Reframing the law, which names the crime, the victim and the criminal

▪ Arrest of the procurer

“ I spoke with Amicale du Nid in T. The police came to get me in Italy. They said : **you are a victim, you shouldn’t hide, come and we will fight for you.** I came back to Nice. The papers were complicated. They transferred my file to Valence. I arranged a meeting with N. Then N arranged a meeting with the police. I went to stand as a witness. For me it was no longer a denunciation, he had already been arrested for his own problem. The judges really wanted to know if it was true or not. They looked for me, and I had to go. ” (17)

➞ Encouraging a person to give evidence as a witness is sometimes a difficult experience, but sometimes it is the moment when **the person becomes aware of her status as a victim of trafficking and of the rights she has as a victim.** In such a situation, police intervention to help the victim shows her that the police can also provide help and protection, and calls into question the message of the network to be wary of the authorities.

▪ Information about the law

Between the moment when you arrived and were afraid, and the moment when you found the courage to say now it’s over and if you continue I will go to the police, you understood lots of things, experienced many stages, and received a lot of information. Can you tell me more in detail about these stages ?

“ Before I thought that it was like in Africa, with the police. Here, in France, people explained to me **that we have rights, that freedom is for everybody. You don’t have to be a slave for somebody and give your money to them. If you turn them in to the police, they can arrest them and put them to prison. I said: it’s true!** I told myself I would use that against her. From that moment on I had the courage to tell her. ” (14)

How did you find a way out ? “ To find a way out of exploitation, I threatened the procurer that I would denounce her if she made problems with my family. I have her photo. But really I am afraid, because if I denounce her, one day she will get out of prison, and what will happen to my family ? ”

The moment of realisation ? “ It was when I understood that I could put her in prison. It was the organisation Cimade that told me. After shouting at her and threatening her, I freaked out. But I decided, once you have made a decision you find a way.”
(16)

➞ When the person understands that she is a victim in the eyes of the law, that debt bondage, sexual exploitation, rape, abuse of power, etc., **are not normal**, that in theory **being in an irregular situation does not imply having no rights**, and that the judiciary and police have a real protection role, everything changes. Part of the shame and guilt is removed to make way for anger and an overriding desire to triumph and defend oneself.

▪ Changing the balance of power

“ To the person who brought you, it is not that you will hurt her, but you threaten her too. It is threats, threats, threats. And then you can find a way out alone. **If you touch my family, I will tell the police that it is you who brought me here. That is all. You leave me alone, I leave you alone. If you don't bother me, I won't bother you. But if you hurt me, remember that we are in a country of law, you can go to prison yourself.** The person is not stupid, everybody is afraid to go to prison. ” (3)

➞ In this extract, B describes her realisation that in France the law on trafficking can be applied, and the police can play a role of protection. Using her knowledge of the system to threaten the person who threatened her is a **particularly effective means of defence**, which creates distance and demands respect. It makes it possible for her to leave the situation of exploitation, which has already lasted too long, with her head held high and without fear. Changing the balance of power in this way is a fundamental step along the journey towards social inclusion in the country of destination, which may or may not involve formally filing a complaint.

d. **Pregnancy and the birth of a child**

Along with pregnancy comes an urgency to create another lifestyle for the child to be born, an obligation to refocus on one's own needs, refusal of prostitution, and a change in social status to become a mother. For the network, a pregnant woman represents the risk of being identified and attracting the attention of the police. Recognition by a French father is also a key towards establishing a regular status and the prospect of finding another way out.

▪ The desire for a better life for the child

What helped you the most ?

“ I think it was **when I was pregnant. I was in love.** I think that I wanted to have something with the man who got me pregnant. I wanted to see the other side of the world, the good side, the side where people don't go on the street at night. **I wanted to see what a normal life was like. I wandered when it would happen and the baby was the opportunity I was waiting for.** I gave birth and called my son Destiny. It was the moment for me to leave this side of the world (...). When I arrived in Europe, I saw my dreams fall apart. **When I got pregnant, I started to catch up with my dreams, by telling myself : I know that I can do it.** ” (10)

What gave you the determination ?

“ What gave me the determination for me to leave this life is : first of all the protect of my children. I know what I passed through in the street, so looking at my children, I would never want them to go and suffer again, I would never. I said to myself : my children must be with me, no matter what it takes, I must fight. In a good way. No matter the stress or the pain. I must make sure I would be a good mother to them. So that when they grow up tomorrow they would not judge me on my past. They would judge me on the present. ” (12)

➞ **Pregnancy can be the catalyst for other kinds of realisation : a change of self-image**, allowing oneself to say that the child deserves a better life, a change in one's hierarchy of values and priorities, **regaining hope and determination to move forward**, to be a “ good mother ” and protect one's child from violence.

Children involved in situations of trafficking are sometimes used as a means of exerting pressure, making threats or blackmail, whether in the country of origin or destination :

“ The situation is difficult for me in Bulgaria. The car of his family always drive around our home. Especially, he is very angry. His mother, his father always around. We never talk. When my daughter goes to school I am worried. I ask somebody to go with her, or I worry. ” (18)

▪ A change of status in the eyes of the community, the network and society

“ I get out from the situation when I became pregnant, my Auntie asked me to go to France. I met a woman, she was afraid because I was pregnant, my Auntie did not tell her I was pregnant. When I came, it was a mess. **The woman in L was afraid that I was pregnant, because of the police, she did not let me stay. She said no, I can't. Because when the police found out I am working and pregnant, it will bring a lot of problems.** She sent me to G, to a woman with 2 children. There was no space for me, that is how I came to Amicale du Nid, it was 2 years ago, I am really, really happy, that I am not part of that job anymore. If you tell people what you do for your living, it is so embarrassing, it is not a thing to be proud of [...]. **Now, even if she finds me, there is no way I can give any money, because I have a baby, I don't work, I have a family. I can't go back to my old life. ” (10)**

➞ The status of mother-to-be can sometimes make the person less easy to exploit and less profitable in the eyes of exploiters and traffickers. It may be seen as more legitimate for her to stop prostitution and delay repayment of the debt to the community, and more necessary to protect her in relation to the French authorities. Pregnancy opens access to accommodation more easily than it would otherwise be for a woman alone working on the street.

▪ A child with a French father

“ I tried all the contact to find the father, but a friend of mine helped me to get the number and called him to explain the situation. **He was not so pleased but he had no choice because I was pregnant. One day, I took the decision, I would travel to France to look for him.** I had to try, because if I would have stayed in Swiss, I could not have my freedom, I could not protect my children, because she is the one that always make me travel. I abandoned all her network, all her business. **Coming to France would give me freedom and protection.** I think about all this. ” (12)

➡ L lived in Switzerland in a situation of sexual exploitation in which her children were sometimes held hostage (members of the network kept them during holidays to allow her more time for prostitution). When she discovered that she was pregnant, the prospect of having a child with a French father appeared to her as an opportunity for support from the father, **for a regular situation**, for a new life elsewhere, and led to her decision to escape.

e. An act of violence too far

Several women we met explained that their decision to leave was taken following an act of violence that was too much to bear – the tipping point that led to exit – with the thought in their minds that things could not be any worse elsewhere.

▪ A moment of realisation

How did you leave ?

“ It was not easy, I pay the amount, I gave her about 30,000 euros, 32,000, I don’t remember, it is a long time ago. One day I said it is not a life, I can’t continue like this. I said I have to stop because the last one. I finished a day so I wanted to go home, I found somebody that said he can drop me off. I said OK, but I was not too comfortable. But since there is no train, I said OK, let me go with him. So we are going, he did not go to my direction, so I told him you are not going to my direction, I am not a newcomer, he went out of P, he said it is the right direction, I became uncomfortable because I knew it was not the right direction. I said I want to piss, he said OK, he stopped along the road. **I came down, he came down too, I said you can stay inside the car, I want to piss, I can to the other side of the car, he moved forward, I run, it was very dark, it was like 2 a.m., the road was so lonely, I don’t even know where I was, he started to pursue me on the road, it was so scary, he almost hit me with the car, I jump.** That night, it was something else, I saw a car coming, I asked help, he said there is a police car coming. When he saw me talking with them, he stopped, he did not move, the police said I have to come with them and make a complain, they can’t do anything to him but I have to come with them. I said no, I can’t go to the police, I did not want to go to the station. They went to meet the man, control the papers, asked him to drive off. The police asked me if I want to come with them, I said no, they said they can bring me to a night bus station, I go in their car. **After that day, I decided that no, I can’t continue. If I had died, the lady would not ask for her money. She would not have her money, because I am already dead. It is too risky. I decided, I said no, it’s not worth it.** ” (8)

What really made you decide ?

“ I don’t know. It just came. **That day, I was really myself. That very day, something click in me.** Before, some customer come inside the car with their guns, they say give me your money if not I blow you off, this kind of stuff. The police, they know we are prostitute, they can do nothing. So, that very day it was like... I said it is not worth it. It is not easy. It is too dangerous.” (8)

What made you decide not to fear the voodoo anymore ?

“ I said to myself I am ready to die, anyway I go, I want a normal life, this is not a life for me, I cannot live in bad conscience, I know what I am doing it is not good. I cannot move in, I cannot move out. I have to run away. **And if you want me to die, let me die. I don’t really care what can happen to me. I was ready to fight. Let life decide. Now I can see my decision that I took in 2010 really helped me a lot.** And also, this opportunity to tell associations and receive advices, they should take decision with their hope, decide with their heart, not let people decide for.”

This day was very important...

“I said God you can take my life but, for what I have done, this is the worst thing, I don’t want this fornication. If you decide I should live, I am leaving now. But that moment when I left Italy in the train, I was happy little, I did not know what to

expect. Here I found Amicale du Nid, they gave me their card, it was somebody that directed me, I showed somebody in the street the card, they directed me. Then they showed me a lot of things, the market, the *bibliothèque* [library],... all the things to be happy. I had my life back.” (5)

➞ In both of these accounts, the decision becomes a **question of survival**: instinct takes the upper hand and there is a moment of lucidity. There is a desire to escape an unbearable situation. The word “it” in the first extract represents prostitution, shame, guilt, stigmatism, all the related violence, the customers, the street and exploitation.

▪ Creating a strategy to protect the family

In some cases, between the moment of realisation and actually leaving, a strategy is created in order to limit the consequences of departure, for example by moving the family away and explaining the situation to them. In the following account, L begins by taking a photo of his passport (she is already considering filing a complaint), then she saves money to help her family move and no longer receive threats. She uses her energy and intelligence to escape the trap. Despite this, her sister was subjected to violence because she left her procurer’s home. **The decisive moment arrives when she gains her mother’s support and approval to completely break ties with the network.**

“ One day I came back from work, he wanted to rape me. I said that I can’t. I was so tired. He was strong. He hit me, I have a scar, and I went to hospital. **When I got back, I took a photo of his passport. I wanted to give it to the police**, but I was afraid of... I have no papers. If I go to see the police, I don’t know what will happen to me. Secondly, I was afraid my family. **When I told my mother that I wanted to give him up to the police, she started to beg me, so that they wouldn’t have serious problems. This is how I started hiding money from work, to move my family to a different place. I save for years. One day, when he raped me, in July, 2012, I was so tired of everything, I sent the money to my family so they could move far away from home.** I went to my own place, I paid 600 euros for the guarantee, the rent of the room. And I continued to give him money. And I had a friend who I met in Lagos, before doing my passport. I saw her at the place where I worked. She was supposed to call me, but I was not allowed to receive calls from anybody in Europe. She never called. I told her everything I had been through. She told me about an organisation you can go to when you are fed up with prostitution. I was very tired. I went to France, I said nothing to him. He found my family, they raped my only sister, they hit everybody. I called him to beg him that I would give him money, otherwise he would kill them. I begged him to take my money. He said if you do not come within the next four hours, I will kill them. He started collecting money again. He did not know where I was staying. That is how I gave him all my money. I couldn’t pay my rent anymore. **When I went to the gynaecologist, they said I had a problem in the blood. Because of too much sex. God, this is how I lived my life because of him. All the money that I gave him, I did not have the strength to risk my life for him again. I had to take my decision and stop working as a prostitute. I was so ashamed, when the people asked me what I do for a living. I was so tired and frustrated, I was disgusted with myself. So I called my mother, I told her everything, and she said: if you must risk your life for him, stop prostituting yourself. I said ok, but before you go far away where he will not find you, in a little village. They change their number.** ” (14)

➞ **The relationship with the family is a decisive factor in the decision to leave**, and threats are a significant means of exerting pressure for the exploiter. Women chosen to leave for Europe have an obligation to succeed and are unable to run away, because refusing to give money to the procurer will cause problems for the family. They therefore find themselves trapped between promises, lies and an unbearable situation. **As long as they see no other solutions, they refuse to see the manipulation and continue to convince themselves that it is a sacrifice they consented to.** In cases such as the one described in the above

extract, when the victim is able to talk to her mother about prostitution, about her fear of dying, and when the bond between family members is sufficiently strong for them to create a common strategy to escape the trap and avoid retaliation, the decision can be made to leave the system of control.

f. Choosing oneself

▪ Self-esteem and the right to succeed

The individual's position in the family group, respect given by family members, unconditional love, a certain **level of ambition**, the ability to place dreams above the requests of others, and to exist for oneself, are described in the following account as decisive. It is reasonable to assume that a good level of social integration, as well as an active and successful life, prior to departure, can form **a more solid basis upon which to find a way out** :

The things that helped you the most, to move ahead in your life: what helped you change your life ?

“ My dream. Even when I was in Nigeria, when I was very little, I always said to my mother that I want to be a doctor. One of my neighbours was a doctor, I saw that he was rich, that he made lots of money (...). **I wanted a job that was not standard : doctor, engineer, lawyer.** I did not want to work in a factory. I never forgot that. My uncle, he had a strange situation, sometimes he was good, other times not so good, but he **never let go of his dream.** He is a person with a big heart. He is open. **When you do something which is not good, he tells you, but he does not judge you. He says that is not good for you ... He always says you can improve yourself.** He never told me to change, he said improve ! When you improve things, sometimes that's already a change (...). **Secondly is patience, concentration,** the first the dream. Even though this has happened to me, my dream to be a good person, **somebody good for herself,** for others, is still standing. But not doctor. When I saw this situation, I said : no it is finished, I cannot be a doctor. I gave that up. When I decided to pay, I concentrated on the things that I have done, that will guide me like that. **I will not give up** or go back to the story with the madam. I concentrated, I told myself that, and I continued along this path. **I said to myself : how shall I do it ?** I will follow this path. **I never said it was too hard.** Even when I was little, I wanted to be a person good for myself and for others. **I can help myself. That way if I can help myself, I can help others.** I never wanted to take the problems of others. Even if somebody calls me to say I am sick, how can I see that you are sick, I am in Europe! There are clinics and all that, and you call me in Europe to say that you are sick ! I say : tell the truth, what do you want ? To make me waste time ? Yes, I need to buy medicine : you call me for that, sorry I do not have, or I do, but for other things. This is why I say that I do not want to take the problems of others that are not true. ” (13)

▪ Religious faith

Among the personal factors involved, many of the women we met also mention their faith as a constant source of support, which enabled them to survive solitude and exploitation **by continuing to exist for God. It gave meaning to their existence and reassurance through a framework of values and community belonging.**

Who helped you find this peace ? “ Well listen, I'm very spiritual to begin with. That is my foundation. Because I cannot say it is the human who is talking. But **my foundation is God, it is him who guided me to the right people,** like M, like everybody. So, I ask him, I say : guide me father, guide me. It is that strength to believe which tells me that I will find a way out. Honestly, I am well, my head was too full of stuff before, but now my head is free. ” (7)

Religion also played another role by providing **psychological tools to withstand the fear of vengeful spirits** :

“ The pastor helped because he said: do not believe the juju, believe in God. You must stop the prostitution. ” (11)

In some cases, the church can also provide a place for **socialisation** and a network of **solidarity**, in order to create a new lifestyle and find support :

Are there other people who help you ?

“ No, there is nobody, except the people at the church I go to. French people. They are very good, nice people. ” (20)

It is always a **combination of factors specific to the individual and external factors (a change of circumstances, a striking event)** that leads to a change in her perception of the system she is a part of.

▪ Recognising oneself as a victim and asking the question: how much longer?

The moment of realisation also occurs when the person understands that what happened to her and what she is going through is not normal, and **recognises herself as a victim** of manipulation :

What are your feelings towards her now ?

“ **I see her as a devil, she abused me.** If you say that you have no work, she will beat you like a slave. **She uses you.** For me, she has no heart, or even if she has one, it does not work, it is broken, it is empty. I cannot imagine. For me, she is the number one devil who exists. ” (13)

A time comes when the victim of trafficking realises that the promises will never be kept, that her exploiters will never allow her to leave, that the debt will never be repaid, with endless fines and rent, that the husband will never go back to how he was, that the situation will not improve, **that nothing will ever change, unless she finds a solution by herself.**

“ You have to decide to stop. You have to fight. **How long will I keep living captive in prostitution ?** It is a captivity. Because you are being controlled by another person, all your life. **How long will I be controlled by somebody, somebody tells me what to do, when to go out, when to come in, who to talk to, who not to talk to ?** I have my life to live. When you go out, you see people working to offices for their daily job, they have freedom, they can think of future to have a better life. **Why would I only believe on working for somebody as a prostitute ? How long will I keep selling my body ?** ” (12)

“ We discover we have bondages, we are sick and tired of prostitution. We were never free. I was wondering: **how many years ... ? When will I start my life ?** ” (11)

“ I decided that going to the street is in the past, and I decided to keep it in the past because I don't really think about it, I think it is a bad experience for me **so I decided to take my mind of there, I kind of made a promise to myself that everything is fine, I don't want to go back,** I keep on praying God and I just decided to stay focus. It is really the kind of experience that you have **to make up your mind that this is what you want for yourself.** ” (10)

➞ The above accounts show that **for these individuals, it was above all their determination that allowed them to escape the situation** : a commitment to themselves to stop bearing the unbearable and live their own lives, whatever the price.

▪ Thirst for freedom and the courage to assume the consequences

“ It is complicated, the threats, yes, but... it is up to you to decide. If the person has just arrived it is different. But if you have been here for a while, I am sure that you have already been paying for a long time. Because it is not 45,000. **You take control of your life and decide that it is finished.** Then she will see that she too has started to understand things, there is somebody who is supporting that person. **No, you give courage to yourself, you decide deep inside yourself. It is not what you decide with your mouth, you have to decide within yourself. When you have decided with your heart, nothing will stop you, nothing will hold you back.** ” (3)

➞ B provides a reminder here that a decision that comes from within, made on the basis of free will – **a choice made on one’s own terms – is the real way out.** Assertion of the self as an individual in control of her own destiny (“you take control of your life”) and the desire to exist, make it possible to begin and continue the journey of freedom from sexual exploitation towards a more satisfying life.

“ Because when you do something that you don’t enjoy every day, every day, normally one day you have to stop. From Morocco to here: *prostitution, prostitution*. I don’t like life like that. **I need courage to make my decision or I will spend the all of my life over there.** ” (1)

How did it go with the people who put you on the street? Did they make trouble for you when you stopped ?

“ Yes, it is very difficult. **They killed my father, and they kidnapped my daughter and my mother a long time ago. All of my family is hidden.** Because I stopped paying money, I didn’t know how much I had already paid, how much is left, I didn’t want to do that all my life. **But it is my life. It’s my life.** I did not want to pay anymore, I wanted to live my life. ” (1)

➞ This situation illustrates just how painful it can be to make one’s own choice, to regain control of one’s own life, and to no longer give in to blackmail, whatever the cost.

To conclude this section and summarise the factors mentioned by women as being decisive in their move towards freedom, a combination of two types of factors can be observed:

- **An inner disposition to resist** psychological control, a certain critical view of the situation, an ability to establish contact with others, a life goal, a little bit of self-esteem and confidence, an image of oneself as an individual with her own existence and desires, etc.;
- **An external event:** a terrifying act of violence, the arrest or death of the procurer, a signal that undermines the procurer's discourse, promises of regularisation (such as a rejection from the OFPRA) or threats (when the person realises that "juju" is not as powerful as previously believed or that the police is more of a threat to the procurer than to herself), information regarding the condemnation of trafficking, which allows feelings of guilt to disperse and a switch in the balance of power, a romantic relationship, the news of pregnancy, etc.

Because the process of control is a vicious circle, in which initial weakness allows violence,

which further weakens the victim, **the dynamics of exit can only begin at a time when the victim's inner resolve allows her to glimpse the hope of an alternative**, which gives her the energy to find a way out... In other words, the moment of realisation occurs when the person's aspiration for a different life is given the potential to be achieved by favourable circumstances.

In these extracts, the women's will to achieve freedom and build their own lives appears to be a fundamental factor in the movement towards finding alternatives. While this will is absolutely necessary, it does not suffice alone. **What can determination alone achieve** in the face of the administrative machine, the language barrier, discrimination, the discretionary power of the prefect, the psychological consequences of violence suffered, and an economic system that has no room for people without qualifications, income, a home, support, or prospects? **What does the person need and what can really help her?** This is the question I put to the women interviewed.

2. How do women describe the process of emancipation from sexual exploitation and the movement towards an alternative of social inclusion ?

All of the women interviewed explain the different stages of their **progressive exit**, the various pieces of the jigsaw they picked up along the path to what they refer to as a “normal life”, and the challenges thrown up during this difficult journey, between the moment of realisation and the achievement of a relatively stable situation – **a journey littered with administrative obstacles standing in the way of their rights.**

a. A relationship of trust

One of the decisive factors for the majority of these women was the development of a special relationship with a social worker from Amicale du Nid, characterised by a **benevolent educational approach, an absence of judgement, and a positive, encouraging view of the person’s ability to find a way out.**

“ N is a person **who gives lots of courage.** I know it is her job, but not everybody helps people they do not know. It is very nice. For me, getting papers was very difficult. N did everything, the attestation, etc. I did not think it would go so well like that. She knows everything that happened. She helped me because she is very nice. **She wanted me to have a good life.** For me to be happy, peaceful. She knows everything bad that happened. It is her work, but she is very nice. ” (1)

➞ It is very difficult to build a relationship with victims of trafficking. They are conditioned to believe that non-profit organisations are part of the police (and they are culturally inclined to think that the police is corrupt and helps only the powerful) and to tell only ready-made stories. In addition, their experiences have taught them to be wary of others. **Providing social support involves learning to deal with stereotyped discourse and gaining the person’s trust by being patient and available, in order to enable her to provide the information needed to help her** and to allow herself to make sense of her experiences.

▪ Believing that it is possible

Before you thought you could not be free, and afterwards you thought that it was possible ? What happened in your mind ?

“ It was N ! The first day that I came, I wanted to stop, I wanted to do lots of things with my life, and she said yes. I asked her : how will I do it ? **She said that we can. I did not believe that it would happen. Normally it is to have the papers, the benefits. After I started to see that it was to change life positive, to do good, to be well.** ” (1)

➞ Providing social and educational support does not (only) mean mediating between the person and the administrative system : it means adopting a supportive and confidence-building approach, **believing in her and allowing her to believe in herself,** giving encouragement, and establishing a personal relationship that works towards the single aim of improving the person’s well-being.

“ I never believe at the beginning. Because I suffered a lot. For 10 years, there was no peace for me. I was never happy with my life, **I thought it is finished with me. They give me little hope.** They started helping me with my papers. I can never forget these people because of the way they did, I thought my life was over, and they give me help with many things... ” (5)

➤ Educational work also involves **getting beyond all the mistrust**, despair and violence suffered, to show that alternatives are possible, in terms of relationships with others and finding a place in society.

“ First of all, a place to sleep. Secondly, **the person must find somebody who will help her, bring her support. Thirdly, who will give her courage.** ” (3)

➤ The support of a trustworthy person, who provides the encouragement needed to fight, appears here to be **an essential condition for the journey** from exit to inclusion.

▪ Absence of judgement

So it is fear that made you turn a new page ?

“ Yes. Fear. **No, it is above all that I saw the trust, that there is more than that world.** I have been here for a long time. Everybody knows me. For me, with certain people outside the world of prostitution, not only the Bulgarians, sometimes I am ashamed to say I prostituted myself. ” (2)

➤ After years in an environment marked by violence, betrayal, abuse of power, judgement and shame, **finding a place where it is possible to be oneself, with the baggage of past traumas and experiences, is a huge relief for some people.**

“ Here, nobody says ‘whore’ to me. ” (4)

➤ The specialised nature of the organisation enables victims to talk with people who are not in a situation of prostitution, but who understand the underlying process and system, as well as the causes, consequences, and specific suffering involved. Being welcomed by trained professionals provides space and time that allows victims to **accept their experiences, talk about them, and work on them, without being judged.**

“ Since I met E, even when she comes on the street, the first time that I came here I told my story, the first thing that she said to me was ... I said: when will I stop, how can I do it ? **She said to me: you can do it. Why can't you do it ? You have your life in front of you, there are possibilities, we are going to do everything that we can, because prostitution is not...** You are going to do it for yourself and not for others. **She gave me strength, power, I told myself : yes, I can do it.** So all of the questions of how I will do it, for my child and all that, they quickly went away. **When the people don't look at you like... they look at you like a person.** When I was on the street, when the cars go by, you see how the women inside look at you. ” (13)

➤ Here, the contribution is “ power ”, in the sense of **inner power, creative force, self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to deconstruct internalised oppression, and to transform resistance to violence suffered into the strength to accomplish things.** V shows clearly that this process of “ empowerment ”¹⁶ is made possible by adopting a positive

¹⁶ ‘Empowerment’ refers to principles, such as the ability of individuals and communities to act to ensure their well-being or their right to take part in decisions that affect them, which guides social work and research with marginalised and impoverished sections of society. It advocates an active teaching method that “helps man become aware of his situation, of his condition as a person and Subject”, enables him to obtain “instruments that would allow him to make choices” and “politicize himself” (Freire, 1974). “The role of the educator,” stresses Freire, “is not only to teach the interlocutor something, but to research together with him the means of transforming the world in which he lives.”

approach towards the person, as an individual and equal, with her own story to tell, suffering, resources and prospects for the future.

▪ French language classes to end isolation

Do you have a message ?

“ When they come on the street like that, it will stress them, because the people are English speakers, they do not speak French well. Amicale du Nid can also tell them that when they come to Amicale du Nid there is French school, we can help you to speak better. **The French classes can help to speak about the situation on the street.** Explaining what happens, talking with others to exchange ideas: it helps. ” (15)

➞ An example of empowerment is **giving people the tools they need to manage alone** and transform their aspirations into actions and accomplishments. One of these tools is language learning, which helps them better understand and shape their environment, and assert themselves in relationships with others. The French language class also provides a safe and sociable environment in which they can rebuild their identity and interpersonal skills.

b. Sensible advice and support to access rights

In some cases, after years of not being recognised, the great hope of finding a way out and integrating into French society comes up against a series of **administrative obstacles that are extremely disheartening for victims who do not understand** why the police does not follow up on their complaints, why they still haven't received a card providing access to healthcare after 18 months, etc., which makes it necessary to provide significant social and educational support.

▪ Giving advice means providing encouragement to achieve new possibilities

The violence, betrayal and false information used to more effectively manipulate and use victims, make them suspicious of any guidance they receive. As seen in the above paragraph, being able to talk to supportive people working for a social welfare organisation (who are motivated solely by working effectively to achieve their mission), to clarify the complexity of the situation and come up with solutions that had not previously been considered, enables some women to find the energy they need to continue their struggle.

“ Advice is very important in life. **They gave me hope. Before, I was like a dead human being.** ” (5)

➞ **Just having someone to turn to, to share one's difficulties, doubts and questions, makes it possible to overcome the first obstacle without giving up.** Even if an answer is not found straight away, or even if one cannot be found, being accompanied on a visit to the hospital, for example, makes the person feel supported and, therefore, stronger.

▪ Information regarding rights and the French system

Being aware of one's rights alone does not suffice to have access to them, and for foreign people with no identity documents or, worse still, for people who have been declared using false names (in particular for asylum requests), who do not speak French well, a simple request for state medical aid (AME) can turn into **a real ordeal**: providing an address of residence, evidence of stays in France, completing forms... All of these challenges are easier to overcome when assisted by a professional.

“ It was Amicale du Nid who told me about my rights. In the group that I was in, it was always the same girls, on the street. We go out together during the daytime, it is the same community, people who I know. If I always go out with the same group, I don't know, I know nobody. **But now I know Amicale du Nid and I know that we can be free, that we have rights.** ” (15)

➞ Seeking help from professionals whose job is to provide access to rights also enables the person to **reduce her dependence on the group to which she belongs**, and through which all formalities were previously performed.

“ If you are not with an organisation Amicale du Nid, **I did not know what to do, I knew nothing, they give me advice.** It is difficult because, when you are French, you do not go to Nigeria to get the papers over there. You need somebody to help you. **We work a lot, talk, listen, see things to eat, for the school, for the pharmacy...** ” (1)

➞ Adapting to the unfamiliar environment of the French administrative system is made much easier with the mediation of a third-party organisation, which enables both parties to form an initial understanding and interact with each other.

“ In the end, I managed to find a way out thanks to E and Amicale du Nid, who helped me, gave me support. She said: if you want to, you can leave. **There is help available. I listened to her. We did all the procedures. I got my papers.** Now I have a job. ” (13)

➞ The main aim is to understand the operation, underlying logic and rules of the game, as part of a movement towards autonomy through access to social rights, healthcare, housing, culture and the job market.

▪ Filing a complaint and requesting asylum as a victim of trafficking

The act of filing a complaint represents the victim's will to place responsibility at the feet of the trafficker and seek redress for the harm caused. While it is a long, risky and psychologically demanding process for the victim, by acknowledging the harm inflicted, recognition of her status by the authorities can be a fundamental step in the journey towards emancipation and rebuilding her life.

“ It was yesterday, I went to the CNDA with the true story, I said: this story is not my story, I don't know anything about it, and before that, I went with my educator from Amicale du Nid to the police station, to make a complaint. I told the police about the lawyer I met at the airport, I recognized him on the pictures, they said they would not let him free, and my madam. After two day, I took them to my madam apartment. **He showed me many pictures, I saw my madam, I said yes, she is the one.** When I left my madam, there was this man calling me that I should go and pay, and if I don't pay her , something will happen to me. I

also told the policeman, they made some investigations. They saw the man. I guess they will call me now to tell me how everything is going. ”

What made you go to the police ?

“ **I am not afraid of her anymore, she can’t do anything**, she is afraid. Maybe later she will be arrested or go to jail, I don’t care, because I know there will be some other girls like me. I heard she brought some two young girls to France now, I think the girls work in M. ” (9)

For most victims, filing a complaint seems impossible due to the conflict of loyalty created by the ambiguity of the relationship, the fear of retaliation and the consequences of a denunciation within the community :

In relation to the subject that I talked about with you, human trafficking, do you feel like it has affected you, are there things that you would like to share so we can understand the situation better ?

“ Me, many problems with husband. This is why I never comfortable here, especially me alone and not good. Family in Bulgaria. He still interested in my work. He in prison, he says when he finish prison in Bulgaria, he come, he want me to die. **He is not happy that I file complaint. I want to change apartment, but it is very difficult.** ” (18)

File a complaint ?

“ It is difficult. **You need proof.** All of the girls are afraid of talking, because they are afraid for their family. And, **if you talk, you lose everybody.** There is a family solidarity of the debt. ” (16)

➡ The situation is problematic because of the social and moral condemnation that can be caused by denunciation, as well as the difficulties involved in exercising one’s rights with the police. If the complaint is recorded, in many cases, it is not followed up : the reasons given can include a lack of factual information relating to the perpetrator, the crime being committed abroad, or the procurer himself being located in another country. In many cases, **the police does not provide information about rights, does not provide an interpreter, is incredulous** and views the filing of a complaint as fraudulent use of the law to obtain regularisation via Article L316-1.

▪ Helping the person find her own solutions

Amicale du Nid views its approach to providing social support for adults as a **journey undertaken with and alongside the person**, which leaves enough room in the relationship for her to take her place as a subjective individual, distinct from the situation in which she finds herself, and **responsible for her own life**. The journey towards exit and inclusion is one of **self-determination** and is based on the person’s own resources, through the development of strategies to minimise risks and maximise the achievement of objectives.

In the situation presented here, T’s priority was to ensure her family’s safety, as a prerequisite for her leaving the network. However, with nobody to discuss it with, she did not know how to go about doing it. The discussions she had enabled her to see her goals and the ways to achieve them more clearly :

“ I had to send them away from Lagos, now they are living in other place. So that the man don’t find them again. **I made them move. Because Amicale du Nid give me good advices. I should do it this way. Because I was confused in my brain.** ” (5)

Appreciable factors highlighted by women were availability, attention to individual desires, the establishment of a relationship of trust, the opportunity to be involved in building a relationship of support, and quality information provided in response to specific requests :

“ If I have problems, I come. **She gave me advice, and I see that it was to answer my needs**, that it helped me a lot, it works very well. ” (1)

“ They helped a lot, especially with the papers. Today, when I need something, I call C. **My educator is C. I always stop to say hello, hello.** When I have also lots of marital violence with the father of my son who hurt me, I asked for help from C, to ask him what to do. I looked for a refuge, I could not find, an apartment, I could not find, so there you have it. Then, little by little, things go better, but I still need to do my papers, I need to make appointment at the prefecture, to ask for French nationality. There are so many things, I know many organisations, but I always go to see C. **C knows me, I can talk about certain things, he was there to support me** when I was hurt, I am always there. When I need something, I prefer to come here. I have a social worker, but **C, he knows where to guide me.** ” (2)

“ Maybe it is thanks to L too who helped me. Really he helped me. When I had a miscarriage, he really helped me. For my boyfriend in prison, letters and everything, C helps me. I came to get my letters here. When there was nothing, I cried. My little girl was hit by a car. For the lawyer who helped me, it was here. I don't really know what to do for him, because if I was alone with my sister, I don't know what to do, because I don't get along with my sister. **If I have a problem, I have to come here.** ” (21)

➔ Along with a reliable interlocutor, operating within a clear framework, a social welfare organisation which provides support to find alternatives to prostitution, **with which issues of sexuality and violence can be discussed** in total confidentiality, **with no value judgements, and a clear vision of the legal framework and the unacceptable nature of any violence suffered or inflicted on others**, seems to be the most important condition expressed by the women interviewed to find a way out, gain freedom from exploiters and build their own path. Recognising themselves as victims enables them to escape the guilt created by exploiters and place the responsibility back at their feet.

c. A home, safety and independence

Determination and support are necessary, but are not always sufficient, as L explains :

“ I wanted to leave from the start, but to go where? To leave, you have to know what will I eat? Where will I live ? ” (14)

▪ A concrete alternative guaranteeing physical and financial security

This is a fundamental and essential point of support for women leaving a situation of sexual exploitation, for fairly obvious reasons :

“ But as soon as you find a room, you have to pay, **and for that, and to buy clothes and food, you need to find at least 700 euros every month. Where will you find this money ?** If the person is looking for a studio, she will pay for the studio, the electricity, the food, it costs 900 euros. Where will the person find that money? They don't have a choice... Many do not have papers. It is the easiest way to make money, buy clothes, get out of misery, because if you stay locked up in your room, **you have**

nobody. Who will feed you ? You can die of hunger in your room. That is why many people are on the street. **The people who are on the street, they are not there for pleasure, they are there to find help, they need social workers who will help them...** ” (3)

➡ This account also recalls the importance of reaching out to facilitate a breakthrough, by combining the person’s desire for an alternative with a real possibility of creating one, which begins with **access to a living space and basic necessities**.

“ And also, if there were those who wanted to have the courage to stop, the idea of accommodation is very important. Because if you say **you stop working the street and you have nothing, no papers, no food, you cannot pay your rent, how will you live? There they give you vouchers every week, you can buy food, take the metro, all of that is encouraging. If in addition to talking with the girls, they feel reassured not to sleep outside, that they will be looked after, it will give them courage. It is not easy.** ” (15)

➡ As these extracts clearly show, many people continue to live in a situation of sexual exploitation because they see no alternatives. Without a residence or work permit, bank account, or skills recognised on the job market, and with no close support, it can seem **impossible to find a way out on one’s own**. This is all the more true when the person is locked in a **constant struggle for survival**, in which the only interlocutors are either people going through the same experience or exploiters (customers or procurers) : there is no time to rest, reconsider the situation and gain perspective.

▪ A personal space to reconsider life

Access to accommodation, which must not be funded by prostitution, where the person can simply exist without wondering what she will eat in the evening, or where she will sleep the next day, is a relief. It offers an **essential safety net and a chance to take a deep breath, gather her thoughts, reconnect with herself**, rediscover her inner resources, identity and aspirations, allow her desires to emerge, and build up the energy needed to realise them.

“First of all, the person needs to find **somewhere to sleep**. Without that, the person cannot think. There is nothing better than **having a steady place, to sleep and think**. Firstly, you have to **give her a steady place, somewhere to sleep, some food, clothes. After the rest will come, because if you have nothing, you cannot leave.**” (3)

“ After I came to Amicale du Nid, I said nothing, because I could trust nobody. After, I found a good person over there. **They gave me a place to stay, they gave me vouchers to eat**, I was so happy, everything I wanted, they gave me. **They gave me another meaning to life. I told everything to the police. Now I will face life differently.** The prefecture said that they cannot give me my papers, because the crime is in Italy, and they have no proof. I gave them the photo, the name, and the address. ” (14)

➡ It may be that finding a new meaning of life involves **transitioning from a state of hyper-vigilance and survival to one in which there is sufficient mental leeway to assess the positive and negative aspects of the situation**, come up with ways to deal with problems, and plan for the future.

▪ Regaining independence by breaking ties with the environment of exploitation

Independence involves material, economic and psychological factors, as well as **belonging to a community**. How can the person leave her only familiar environment if she has nobody else? It is only by becoming familiar with other environments and building other points of support that she can imagine life outside of her group of peers in the area of prostitution.

“ In the group that I was in, it was always the same girls, on the street. We go out together during the daytime, it is the same community, people who I know. **If I always go out with the same group, I don't know, I know nobody. But now I know Amicale du Nid and I know that we can be free, that we have rights.**”

(...) Now you have met many new friends, and the people who you were with, do you still see them ?

“ No, I have not seen them for a long time, that life is over... **My life has changed a lot. I have my children. When I stopped the street, I cut the bridges with everybody.** ” (15)

➞ A clean break with the environment of exploitation, a very important step in the exit process, which is made here by **changing telephone number**, is possible only if the person does not depend on others for a safe place to sleep :

“ At her house I met a man, very nice, and he asked me how I feel. What happened to you ? He said if you don't feel well like that, you should leave, you can go to L if you like, there are organisations there. **He paid for the train ticket for me.** I never saw him again. After, **I changed my telephone so I wouldn't receive any more calls.** ” (6)

➞ In this case, the break is made following a meeting with a person who offers a fresh perspective, makes **another mode of relationship possible**, and provides the material resources necessary (a train ticket) for her to **leave for a new environment**. It is this kind of support, even occasional, that makes escaping the network possible. **Where can the victim go if the door doesn't open ?**

d. A space to talk and be listened to

▪ Breaking the silence and a listening ear

“ For me, it is very happy talk with you, with N. Before never speak with nobody. **If it is hidden, it is no good.** Because before, never speak. Work, shop, home, never go out for talk. No interest in talking to lots of people. What I do for work. For me it is no good, very difficult. **I not talk many people: no men, no girlfriends.** At school, no. It is better to speak with you. With the judges and police also it is possible to speak directly.” (18)

➞ This account shows the difficulty of approaching the topics of prostitution (which is difficult both because it is related to sexuality and particularly because of the social stigma attached to it) and trafficking (which is difficult because of its complexity, the related psychological trauma and the ambiguous relationship with the procurer), as well as the need for specialised professionals to receive victims. The **system of coercion and silence** surrounding victims of trafficking, their conditioning to tell various versions of their stories and the **psychological consequences of violence** suffered must be taken into account in order to provide support for this **specific group of people**, for whom attentive listening is not always enough. Once the

relationship of trust is sufficiently robust and reassuring for the person not to feel awkward, it is sometimes necessary to demonstrate one's knowledge, and **dare to probe grey areas**, in order to allow the victim to go over her story and make sense of it.

“ Because before, I never talk. Never because not possible breathe. Like my heart is stuck. You understand. ” (4)

➤ As we have seen, the burden of secrets combined with the situation of trafficking and the inability to find a trustworthy interlocutor, contribute to causing the person to close up. **Allowing the victim to speak** about suffering experienced enables a therapeutic process to begin, by putting experiences into words and **putting them into perspective through verbalisation**.

“ I knew C, from Amicale. At the beginning, I did not open up to tell everything. I did not want to speak a lot right at the beginning. Then **I started to open little by little, I told my stories**. For me, I did not want to express myself, **I am not proud**. **I did nothing bad, I am a victim, but nobody knew me as a victim**. I was not lucky enough to know the social worker to help get me food. Some days I slept with men just to have somewhere warm to stay, to not pay for the hotel, because I could not pay for my hotel, and to buy clothes. Always like that. It was not very easy at all. ” (2)

➤ Talking about and describing experiences with a person who listens and understands helps the victim to bring clarity to the course of events, take ownership of her own story, say “ I ”, and **position herself as the subject**.

▪ Piecing together the thread of the story, making sense and gaining awareness

Through talking, the victim is able to understand what happened, to become aware of the abuse of psychological power, and to deconstruct false beliefs that used fear to ensure silence, maintain control and perpetuate the situation of exploitation. Beyond simply gathering the facts needed to regularise the victim's status (whether to file a complaint or asylum request), working through the life story forms part of and enriches the socio-educational relationship.

“ If you leave prostitution, you will live more than before, you will eat more than before, you will survive. Before, when I went on the street, I had to pay my rent. with that I did not have enough to eat three times a day. **You are just the slave of somebody**. **Since I stopped, I am OK. I have none of those Ayelala things, it is just sickness. I do not believe in it. I pretended to please them**. Some go crazy it is true. Live a happy life, be godly, and good to people. I do not believe in Ayelala, I believe in Nemesis. When you are good to people, good things happen to you. When you are bad, bad things happen to you. **Ayelala is false, they use her to deceive you, to make you afraid**. You must be sincere and devout, do not believe what they tell you. Believe in God. Know that nothing is impossible for God. Ayelala is false. I said to a friend, the same man brought her, she swore on so many things. **She also told everything, and now she is well. Ayelala does not kill, she does not walk, she does not eat, she does not speak, she is just invented by men**. ” (14)

What made you continue to pay, it was the fear that they catch your family. Once you realised that there was nothing...

“ He could do nothing to my family over there. Once he was arrested by the police, they can do nothing over there. Once they are arrested here, maybe they are transferred to the authorities in Nigeria. Actually it depends on the family. It was later that I realised that **with my family they could do nothing**. ” (17)

“ **Before I thought that it was like in Africa, with the police.** Here, in France, people explained to me that we have rights, that freedom is for everybody. You don’t have to be a slave for somebody and give your money to them. If you turn them in to the police, they can arrest them and put them to prison. I said: it’s true! I told myself I would use that against her. From that moment on I had the courage to tell her (...). **Before I believed that if I did not give the money they would kill me.**

What made you understand that it was not true ?

I stopped paying, but I am still alive. All of that, it is to make us scared. The marabouts, I told the others who are on the street, who are in the same situation that I experienced: all of that is false, it’s nothing, it is not true. ” (15)

⇒ Telling their stories also helps victims **better understand the procurer’s strategy of terror, accept their feelings of shame and guilt, and place responsibility at the feet of the organisers of sexual exploitation.** Doing so also helps victims delineate a “ before ” and “ after ”, and move on without denying their stories. Growing awareness actually enables victims to be more cautious of people whose intentions are unclear, and to take decisions with full self-knowledge.

▪ Regaining psychological faculties and autonomy

“ **I see things more clearly now. I do not want to go down dead ends anymore.** I have opened my eyes now. I am more mature.” (19)

⇒ It is only through this work of **formulating and understanding that victims can overcome their state of shock regarding past events,** and contemplate the future with more composure, by regaining self-confidence in their own ability to judge and make correct and positive choices for themselves.

“ I encountered that after my last separation, but I told myself: I will **leave myself some time to have what it is that I want, to know myself, who I am. I have been alone now for six years and I am well. I spend time for me. I understand what I want. I am getting to know myself. It is better that I do this, because now I know what I want. I know that I will not make the same mistake. I try to make my life mature little by little, with patience. That’s life, you have to adapt to everything, and everybody.** Now I am getting by with a new birth, it is now that I am being born to a new life... ” (19)

Was it OK with the psychologist ?

“ Yes, it was OK, but it did not go very well. I saw him two times after I stop. **Now I can explain, I see that there are many possibilities to change my life. But before, I am very sad, I could not stay, I was never happy.** If I went to the psychologist, I did not want to speak, otherwise I knew that it would make me even more sad, annoyed, angry. That is why I stopped. I know that he asked to help, but it turns in my head. I could not sleep. It turns my head. Now it is Amicale du Nid, it is better now. ” (1)

⇒ This extract illustrates how necessary, but also how **long and difficult the therapeutic work of providing psychological support is,** which should ideally be done in conjunction with psychiatrists/psychologists who are aware of issues related to sexual violence, as well as migration, exile and exclusion. How can victims find the strength needed for the hard journey towards achieving inclusion in French society and the workplace while still haunted by post-traumatic disorders ?

e. Another activity – a real job

The waiting time, lack of papers or a social role, and an uncertain future, are some of the major difficulties that can make people return to the street, because they believe that they are unable to do anything else, because they have been separated from other parts of themselves for too long, because we all need to exist within the society that surrounds us, and sometimes having the worst place in society can seem better than having no place at all.

▪ A place within society

“ Then they would say: what do I have to do to keep me busy at home? What do I have to do to make my mind not to go back again? First of all provide them a kind of activity to keep them busy. I have children but the time they are in the school **I need to be doing something to keep me busy, to take my mind out of my past**, so these activities : volunteer work, *benevolat*, how to call it, any kind of activities. **Working makes us, like me for example, happy that I have been giving something in my life.** Something to do other than going to a hotel room to meet a man to sleep with. Tell me to wash the cars, to clean anything, **I am doing with all my body with me, with my body being intact, I am not being forced.** ” (12)

➤ The last sentence in this extract clearly demonstrates the extent to which prostitution undermines a person's integrity, in contrast to the concept of work, which is seen here as anything besides prostitution: it is another way in which to exist within society, to rebuild self-belief in one's own value, in one's ability to contribute, to produce, and to create. Work meets **the need to accomplish something**, to find satisfaction, and makes it possible to exist in the world as an individual, as a person, and no longer as an object of enslavement or sexual pleasure.

▪ The “ Adaptation to Active Life ” workshop

“ It was when I arrived here, when I started working in the workshop in September 2013. They pay me a bit of money. Even though I have nothing left, **I am proud, I am happy. Making myself useful, like everybody, having work, even if it's €100, I don't care. I'm happy. I run in the mornings.** I run, I work a few hours, I talk with my colleagues, I come home, I sleep. I am so happy. Well, I think that the workshops, if there could be more, it would be much better. Most of my colleagues come to see me to talk with me, often. We all live near, not far from work. So we talk. They are happy. ” (7)

➤ This person was able to take part in an Adaptation to Active Life workshop run by Amicale du Nid. She describes the benefits, and how she feels valued and useful to have a place within an organisation, regular working hours, colleagues, an occupation, and a social life. **Work is an essential part of rebuilding a new life.** It provides an opportunity to create and be part of a social structure, which in many cases barely exists or is completely non-existent. Because of the attention it requires, work also brings a breath of fresh air in that it provides a break from unwanted thoughts, which can sometimes be very invasive.

▪ Social activities and collective actions

“ Here I found Amicale du Nid, they gave me their card, it was somebody that directed me. Then they showed me a lot of things, the market, the *bibliothèque* [library]... all the things to be happy. I had my life back. ” (5)

➡ Through this account, T shows the great extent to which simple everyday activities, which allow people to find a way back into normal society, can be healing. They make it possible to **leave behind the struggle for survival in order to begin to satisfy other needs, such as socialising and intellectual growth**, as well as to rebuild a happier existence by putting forgotten fragments of the self back together again.

f. The prospect of regularisation

▪ A future in France

“ All that I ask, I pray to God that they regularise my situation. Then no problems. **I want to continue my life in a new environment. Have a better life.** I am not looking to be rich. I just want to be stable. ” (7)

➡ For any person with an irregular situation in a country, it is difficult to calmly contemplate the future: how to find another form of income, other than prostitution, without the authorisation to work ?

Your experiences could make you eligible for subsidiary protection. One-year, renewable permits. It's a long procedure, but it's worth trying if you haven't already.

“ It gives me hope. I know that something better will come in the future. I cannot continue without hope. It makes me so frustrated.” (14)

➡ Despite the length of the asylum request procedure, and the stress of waiting for an uncertain result, the prospect of regularisation, and an opportunity to make plans for the future, can be reinvigorating for some people.

▪ Freedom

“ I see that with subsidiary protection, I am free. I am very, very free. It gives me a lot of hope. I have a chance to work well and study at school. I study well. Before it was not possible like that. **Before I was on the street, sometimes too cold, sometimes too hot, lots of problems with police, I go back with somebody I do not know, lots of things go bad. But now, I don't think about it, I think about what I am going to do: school, work, how I help my family. Before I am afraid of people who brought me to Europe. If I stay on street, somebody will hit me, rape me. Now I am not scared any more. It is freedom.** ” (1)

➡ For these women, a regular residence status means an end to fear (fear of exploiters, violence, the police, deportation, and a lack of rights) and the beginning of freedom, as well as the ability to make plans and contemplate other possible futures.

g. Plans in the country of destination

None of the women we interviewed expressed a desire to return to their country (at least in the short term), and all were committed to achieving their plans for integration in France.

■ Career plans

The women we met during these interviews were all very attached to a career plan, with or without prior training, based on their skills and/or aspirations. This plan is used as a basis to guide and give direction to social support.

“ My plan is to train to be a telephone operator. That is my plan. Possibility to learn. I have already started IT, language school. I would like an apartment. If I can, bring my daughter and help my family. **Work here in France: that is my big plan.** ” (1)

What would be your dream job ?

“ I don’t know. I am thinking, something with economics, something like aesthetics [beautician], I was thinking about it. **I can make hair. Maybe from there I can study again.** ” (10)

“ I work in a factory that makes wooden toys. Also, we had a progress meeting with the trainers: I still have problems with writing in French. I do not like the accents. There are mistakes. Since I no longer want to be a doctor, I don’t like biological things any more, I will not work in a hospital. The time when I really wanted to is gone. **Now I like working with my hands, being creative.** It comes from the time I was with the madam¹⁷. It was a punishment for me, when trousers were cut, she did not want me to buy, they had to be repaired, so I learned to sew. In Italy, Caritas gave me trousers, sometimes they were too big, so I did sewing. **She gave me nothing, so I made fans with cardboard, lamps with bottles...** ” (13)

“ Go to school. Hairdressing. I do not want to be unemployed. **I go to French class almost every day. I like using my time well. I improve my French.** It is good to negotiate prices at the hair salon. It depends on customers. Sometimes 50 euros, sometimes 20 euros. Sometimes, if I work well, she gives me 70 euros. But it’s OK. It is so much better than prostitution. I do not want to continue like that. I want to wake up in the morning and do my things, work. Any work. ” (14)

“ After the workshops, if I have the papers... **I would like to continue making things, because I like how we work and everything... But actually, when I think, I would like to train as a receptionist. I like meeting people.** ” (7)

➞ Job market inclusion provides an income and highlights the person’s abilities, while money earned through a conventional job has an altogether different value than that earned through prostitution.

■ Family-related and personal plans

By creating a good living environment for children in the present or future, bringing children to the destination country, building a family, writing a book, or helping others, people supported by the organisation find meaning in their actions once again, as well as autonomy, in that they now follow their own decisions, made through free will, and pursue their own goals.

¹⁷ This term is used to refer to the procurer.

“ First of all, I think for the first time I am happy, I am with my children, **I took the decision to never go back again to prostitute,** never again in my life, because I have grown up children, and **I have decided it is my time to take care of my children, to live my life and face the future.** ” (12)

“ I do not understand life. It is all mixed up. Is it possible the good day will come for me? A good person? Somebody who thinks well for me, who does not want to profit from my money, who thinks like me. If I am with somebody who thinks like me, then I am not selfish to think about myself. **Build a family, even if I have no work, who accepts me as I am.** I accept children, because I have always accepted the children of others. ” (19)

“ Yes, I have plans with this. **I write on lots of things. I really have to work hard to put them in order.** When I was there, in the brothel, I still wrote. Everything that happened to me, I wrote in my notebooks. ” (7)

One of the rewards of performing research is the feedback given by victims of trafficking on the support provided by social workers working for Amicale du Nid. Learning about what really helped them leave their situation of sexual exploitation, and move towards social and job-market inclusion in France, enables an appreciation of the organisation's utility and an assessment of the effectiveness of actions performed, through the eyes of the target group. Each victim's account demonstrates their individuality in a similar context of exploitation. For some people, meeting somebody as part of an outreach action was important, whether because of the fresh view it provided of their situation, the benevolent approach, the access to healthcare, or the legal information provided. **For the great majority of women we met during this research, it was the support provided by a person (social worker), who welcomed without judging, believed in the person's abilities, provided motivation with an optimistic attitude, gave specific advice**

on accessing rights, helped find accommodation, work and a regular situation, and helped make sense of the past and create plans for the future, which really made a difference in the journey towards exit.

To conclude this second section on the process of emancipation, we can observe that the journey from the situation of exploitation towards social and job-market inclusion only begins once **a strong individual will to make a change, as well as a firm decision to find a way out, emerges, in a context of support that underpins the individual's strategy.** It is a dynamic process that is gradually constructed, and throughout which various forms of leverage (from socio-educational support to accessing rights) enable the person to overcome the various obstacles encountered (from the system of control and exploitation, to barriers preventing access to rights).

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE RESEARCH-ACTION PROJECT

The particular methodology used for this research-action project seems to be validated by the word-for-word transcription of accounts given by the women interviewed, who agreed to share their experiences. The **added-value of this work lies in the force of what they have to say:**

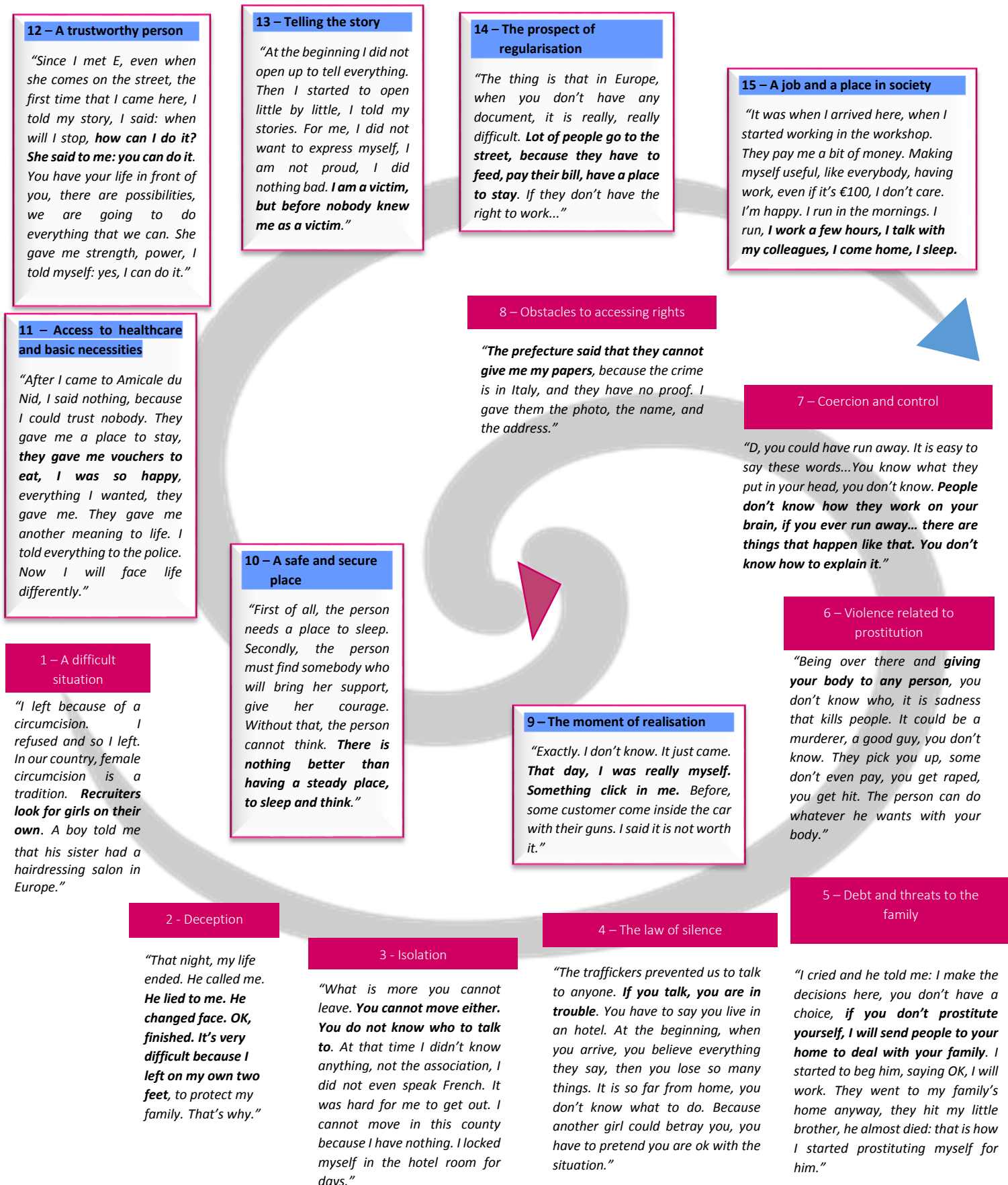
⇒ **for the women themselves:** they appreciated being given a positive listening space in which to tell their stories, and the opportunity to be involved in a project that will enable us to help others;

⇒ **for the organisation's social workers:** the views of the people supported increased understanding of how Amicale du Nid helped them, as well as the crucial importance of the reassuring, educational framework provided, thanks to the organisation's specialisation and knowledge of underlying mechanisms, which gave them the courage to talk about violence suffered, place responsibility at the feet of the traffickers, recognise themselves as victims and learn about their rights;

⇒ and **for society as a whole:** professionals who may be in contact with victims (doctors, police officers, judges, etc.), citizens (residents, witnesses, customers, etc.) and political decision-makers, who need to better understand the overall system of trafficking for sexual exploitation and be more familiar with the survival challenges that trap people in situations of prostitution.

How can these contributions be summarised? While creating a flow chart to summarise the findings of this study, we also worked on a poster designed for victims. The graphic artist, Floriane Leroux, illustrated her understanding of the issue **by representing the process of control as a gradually narrowing spiral**. The idea emerged to depict the dynamics of exit by **another process, alongside the first, in which each means of coercion, dependence, isolation and fear is contrasted with rights, autonomy, relationships and confidence**, in the form of two intertwined spirals. In my opinion, this image is an effective illustration of the **intricacies of the social, administrative and legal maze, and the complex system of coercion and dependency, which can seem impossible to escape**. Some people settle down in this system, creating strategies to minimise risk and maximise gain, until the day when an event, an act of violence too far, a chance meeting, or a fresh perspective on the situation creates **a crack of light in the system that allows a glimpse of a realistic alternative**.

DIAGRAM OF THE THB PROCESS THAT TRAPS VICTIMS IN SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (IN RED) AND THE DYNAMICS OF EMANCIPATION THAT OPEN UP OTHER ALTERNATIVES (IN BLUE)



The women that we met told us that **it is possible to leave a situation of trafficking for sexual exploitation**, but that it is very difficult, as shown by the number of people identified as victims of trafficking with whom communication, exchange and socio-educational support are struggling to be established. Only twenty one people, all of foreign nationality, participated in this study, but the assumption could be made that most of the mechanisms highlighted here can contribute to understanding the situation of all victims, including French victims, who should not be forgotten.

Whatever the context in which the meeting with a person in a situation of sexual exploitation takes place, **a few features of the trafficking process should be borne in mind:**

- **Most victims tell of being trapped at a time of great vulnerability:** whether or not they have an initial desire to migrate, a person, or organisation took advantage of a moment when they were particularly vulnerable and without prospects, to seduce them with the dream of a better future, and make them feel bound by a very restrictive commitment.
- **The system of constraints used by the network can combine visible, concrete, tangible means of domination** (physical violence, surveillance by telephone, confiscation of documents) **and other invisible, discreet, subtle means** (a double game of solidarity and exploitation, dependence linked to accommodation, instrumentalisation of fear to isolate and ensure silence, blackmail).
- **The victim feels imprisoned by the situation of sexual exploitation**, trapped in a system of coercion and dependency, in which the violence she suffers (related to prostitution and exploitation) destroys her self-esteem, as well as her belief in the future and her ability to take action.

All of these obstacles form a solid system of control, **a vicious circle that imprisons the person** in a fatalistic vision where, lacking self-belief, **she puts up with and progressively gets used to the system of exploitation**. This is why it is important to recognise the person as a **subjective individual**, with her own abilities and personal resources, because, as we have seen, **a real movement towards freedom is not possible without an individual moment of realisation**, a change in perception of her ability to take action, and the existence of alternatives. The only way to help begin this process is to **reach out to the person**, be receptive to her needs, view her as an individual human being who should be able to access her fundamental human rights, **inform** her about laws related to trafficking, and **show that other options exist**.

A firm desire to find a way out and a decision to regain freedom can only be realised when underpinned by solid **points of support:**

- The person can free herself from dependency on the network if she has **accommodation**, sufficient **means of subsistence**, and assistance with accessing rights, in particular rights to healthcare and psychological treatment.
- **Support from a specialised professional**, with specific training, who can welcome the person with a caring and non-judgemental approach, listen **to her story**, and **help her recognise herself as a victim who is not responsible for her situation**, in order to undo the system of control preventing her from moving forward, and to **together think about the best strategy** for inclusion in society and the job market, while providing the best possible information about available resources.

- **Regularisation of the person's administrative status**, in order to allow her to develop a social inclusion plan, **work legally**, and build her independence through a legal and fulfilling occupation, as an individual citizen.

In order for the organisation's actions to achieve the mission of opening access to rights, it is necessary to **understand the person's experience, identify obstacles and challenges, provide support to untangle the knots and find the thread of her story, and help her to defend herself against the oppression and discrimination she is subjected to**. This is why both processes – imprisonment in the situation of trafficking and the opening up of alternatives – seemed to me to be so closely tied. Selection of relevant elements led to the observation **that, for each obstacle encountered** (in particular strategies to maintain the victim in a system of control and exploitation), **corresponding leverage can be acted upon** (in particular socio-educational support tools and access to rights).

Inspired by the model established by the French non-profit organisation Collectif Féministe Contre le Viol (Feminist Collective Against Rape) on abusive systems,¹⁸ it is necessary to understand the strategy of the exploiter in order to counter it, **with a means of emancipation to combat each means of enslavement**:

- traps, deception and manipulation can be combatted by social workers with **correct information on the law and workings of institutions, a transparent working environment and clear intentions**;
- violence, isolation, forced dependency and silence, and the use of terror can be combatted through **the legal framework and the possibility of filing a complaint, guidance towards partners and group activities, in order to create new prospects, attentive listening and confidentiality, as well as advice on acquiring the means required to achieve autonomy, security and safety**;
- internalised guilt, low self-esteem, objectification and psychological control can be combatted by **reconstructing the person's story, in order to help her recognise herself as a victim, rebuilding her self-esteem, improving her self-image, involving her in activities, and respecting her choices**.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Amicale du Nid hopes that the draft law aimed at strengthening the fight against this system will provide the basis for a new system of values, as well as a framework for a new social norm, in which **the human body is not viewed as merchandise to be rented or sold**, and buying the use of other people's bodies means undermining their human integrity and denying their status as free human beings with equal dignity. **The way in which we, as citizens, view the prostitution of these people must change in order for their situation to change**. By revealing the violence that is involved, this study contributes in its own way to raising awareness and promoting action against the system of prostitution maintained by our society:

“ Because out there, you don't know who you give your body to. **Your body does not belong to you.** ” (3)

¹⁸ For further information: <http://www.cfcv.asso.fr/public/files/DP%20CFCV%20V5.pdf>

The accounts given by the victims of sexual exploitation who participated in this study show that **dependence on their exploiter is maintained by a public policy framework** which does not currently provide the necessary conditions for them to leave situations of trafficking, access their rights, and achieve inclusion in French society.

Despite the gradual development of awareness of the issue of trafficking within the legal system, the implementation of means of identification, protection and support remain largely insufficient. These insufficiencies are used by networks to increase control over their victims. This study shows that the moment of realisation which begins the process of dismantling the system of control occurs when the person is in a position to imagine an alternative life. However, an irregular administrative status and lack of alternative accommodation solutions prevent this from happening. The law makes access to economic and social rights dependent on the right of residence, which depends on collaboration with the police (as per Article L316-1 of the Code for Entry and Residence of Foreigners in France and the Right of Asylum (CESEDA). However, it can be extremely difficult for victims to denounce a person who is providing them with accommodation. In order to file a complaint, they need to leave the relationship with the procurer, and in order to do that, they need a regular administrative status and accommodation. The CNCDH¹⁹ recommends ensuring that all victims of trafficking can effectively access justice and their economic and social rights, regardless of their administrative status, and their will or ability to provide effective cooperation with the police.

More specifically, it is France's responsibility to identify, **protect and assist victims of trafficking**, and in order to do this it must:

- enable **effective access to suitable, safe and secure accommodation or housing**;
- enable effective access to healthcare and psychological treatment;
- enable **effective access to residence and work**, education and French language training;
- enable access to resources allowing decent living conditions;
- provide the material and financial means necessary for **specialised organisations** to perform their public service mission;
- provide training for the various social actors likely to interact, take care of and guide victims.

The women themselves clearly express their needs: accommodation, support and regularisation.

“ First of all, a place to sleep. Secondly, the **person must find somebody who will help her, bring her support. Thirdly, who will give her courage.** Without that, the person cannot think. ” (3)

“ You, you know about all of our problems, problems of trafficking victims, so you know about our situations. So why can't you say to the French government : since you do not want prostitution, you should just **regularise** our situations. I just want an ordinary, decent life, a peaceful life. Really, yes, put that in your report. They should think about regularising our situations and help us **take training. We are women after all.** ” (7)

¹⁹ French National Consultative Commission for Human Rights, which, in 2010, published a study available at the following address: <http://www.cncdh.fr/fr/publications/la-traite-et-exploitation-des-etres-humains-en-france>

It is also France's responsibility to enable victims to **access justice**, and in order to do this it must :

- **provide information on rights** (asylum requests, filing of complaints, legal aid, claims for compensation) ;
- provide training for police officers to receive and record complaints filed, including when the person is foreign, in a precarious administrative situation, or in a situation of prostitution, and provide the victim with a copy of the report ;
- provide training on the crime of trafficking for police officers ;
- abolish the offence of soliciting (which strengthens victims' mistrust of the authorities) and exonerate victims of crimes committed while in a situation of exploitation ;
- ensure the confidentiality of declarations ;
- avoid confronting victims with the perpetrator and inform victims on request when the perpetrator is freed at the end of the sentence.

More generally speaking, the fight against trafficking requires a thorough review of **European migration policies**: the more restrictive they are regarding entry, the more they encourage migrants to take irregular and dangerous routes, and **the less welcoming they are, the more they weaken the situation of people with an irregular administrative status within the country, and increase their marginalisation and vulnerability to traffickers and exploiters, in particular procurers**. We will end with the words of Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons at the United Nations (following a tenure at the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Commission), speaking before the General Assembly on the 31st of March 2015 :

1. “ [...] increasingly restrictive and exclusionary immigration policies, including criminalization and detention of irregular migrants, insufficient channels for regular migration and family reunification, and lack of regular access to the labour market for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, while rarely achieving their purpose, further contribute to an increase in the exploitation of migrants, including through trafficking (A/HRC/26/37/Add.2, par. 46).
2. Social inclusion options for victims of trafficking, such as access to housing, social protection, health care, education and employment, are vital in countries of destination, transit and origin. In most cases, the capacity of countries to offer viable long-term social inclusion options for victims, in particular those returning to their country of origin, is limited owing to factors such as poverty, unemployment and weak social structures. On the other hand, in countries of destination social inclusion is hampered by a number of factors, including restrictive migration policies and poor labour market regulations. As a result, in many countries trafficked persons, even after being identified as such and having undertaken a rehabilitation and reintegration process, are not allowed to work or regularize their residence status; rather, they are repatriated at the end of criminal proceedings. In the absence of viable social inclusion options for victims of trafficking, it will be difficult to break the cycle of trafficking and re-trafficking.
3. Comprehensive assistance and support to victims and potential victims of trafficking are crucial for an effective fight against trafficking in persons on the one hand, and are instrumental to accessing justice and effective remedies on the other hand. Not all trafficked and exploited persons will be able or willing to report their exploiters or participate in legal proceedings against them. All victims should, however, be enabled to do so if they wish. Currently, assistance and support to exploited and trafficked persons are most commonly dependent on three main factors: a person's immigration/residence status; the initiation of criminal proceedings for the crime of trafficking; and cooperation with criminal justice actors. As a result, assistance, support and ultimately access to remedies remain out of reach for a large number of trafficked and exploited persons who are afraid of being deported or detained, and/or who distrust the authorities and are afraid of losing the possibility of pursuing their migration project. In addition, there are indications and concerns that

the current set-up of most assistance and support mechanisms might result in discrimination against victims who are not willing or able to cooperate with law enforcement. ”

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